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Editor's Note

The six essays featured in this volume collectively demonstrate the amazing depth and breadth of work being done by undergraduate scholars in the Department of English at McGill. From seventeenth-century Spanish plays to nineteenth-century epic satires, from twentieth-century Canadian and Irish poetry to contemporary North American queer theatre, from English Renaissance drama to postsecular Two-Spirit performance and French and Danish avant-garde dance, the works under consideration in these essays signal the wide range of artistic practices and cultural phenomena that are being marshalled into relevant social, political, and theoretical conversations through the kinds of close, careful analyses continuously being performed by the Department of English's undergraduate student body. In this volume we have collected the cream of the crop of this year's work, a diverse selection of writings that are sure to appeal to anyone with an interest in literature, in cultural studies and critical theory, or in drama, theatre, dance, and performance studies. Enjoy.

Scott Lydon
Coordinating Editor

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New Immaterialities
The Body and Post-Human Performance
 By Carolyn Bailey



"Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point. [...] It is an event that disappears in the very act of materializing."

— Merz B. Segel, *At the Vanishing Point* (1968)

The relationship between contemporary dance and technology has opened up interesting questions surrounding the body's role in performance and the choreographic process at the vanishing point of corporeal immediacy. Through technological intervention, the body is no longer called upon for its material presence or gestural ability, but rather as an afterthought to the construction of images. Moving towards a more post-human subjectivity, choreography's role is both opened up and challenged by using materials that no longer require bodily movement as the performance's locus.

The use of technology to create virtual and immersive environments in dance performances works to change how the body is objectified by working against how the body is conceived and theorized in relation to movement. What does a post-human choreography look like, and how can it address the role of materials, objects and processes that work on the body itself? Three particular case studies offer exceptional opportunity to explore and critique the dematerialization of the human body through technological apparatus. *The Artificial Nature Project* (2013) by Mette Ingvarsen, Mette Cunningham's *Beach Birds for Camera* (1991), and *Enfant* (2011) by Boris Charmatz share a common thread of anxiety about the relationship between movement and stasis, especially in relation to the absent presence of the human body. While Ingvarsen's choreographic proposition works with a more literal approach to the ephemeral, the physicality of both Cunningham's and Charmatz's choreography also play with the consequences of nature's infringement on mediating bodily movement through either technological apparatuses or pushing the threshold of the body itself. *The Artificial Nature Project* suspends itself as a performance of the incorporeal, where a materiality other than human flesh comes to the forefront. While Ingvarsen unites both non-human

and human performance, the choreography itself hinges on the interactive play of materials, objects, and forces. Creating an atmosphere rather than a vocabulary of movement, Ingvarsson alters perception in order to question the supremacy of the human body in disciplining the viewer's attention. While using technology and the idea of material trace in order to activate what Erin Manning refers to as "an environment for movement experimentation", *The Artificial Nature Project* responds on the concept of environmental dance (Manning 93). Viewers are implicated directly in the events unfolding onstage and their "engagement with the spacetime of the event" alters "the atmosphere of the space" (94). While the materials themselves don't function as objects, they are given more primacy within the choreographic system than any significant gestures from the dancers themselves.

In reframing performance through technology, Ingvarsson's choreographic proposition thwarts what José Gil refers to as the "necessistic potency" of the dancer's body by deeming it significant or singular visibility (22). *The Artificial Nature Project* challenges the significance of the body's presence in contemporary dance, creating a "poetics that is not centered around the identity and personality of the performer but rather focused on the expressivity of materials and what materials are able to perform" (Ingvarsson 1). Ingvarsson cites nature's artificiality in relation to its transformative ability when landscapes can be altered to fit the body's performative objectives, stating her project is "based around similar questions—working with the way matter can become a driving force and start to proliferate, to arrange itself" (1). In this sense, Ingvarsson is moving the choreography towards a more abstract sense of signification, where "forces" become more important than "presence". As Phillip Zarelli notes, problematic assumptions arise when the idea of "presence" becomes the driving force behind evaluating the effectiveness of a stage performance:

From the stage actor's perspective, the "strong concept of presence" is the territory marked by psychosocial processes of embodiment, attunement, awareness and perception in which the actor's body/mind relationship to the enactment of a score makes available a certain degree, quality or heightened intensity of relationship that is "irreproducible" and attracts and sustains the spectators' attention (122).

While working more towards a material or atmospheric understanding of choreography, *The Artificial Nature Project* denies any agency coming directly from the bodies of the dancers themselves. In this sense, the role of matter takes precedence over kinetic exertion and complicates the role of the choreographic score in defining the trajectory of the performance. Any scripting of movement is contingent on its ability to generate chaos and further distance the possibility of following a set of prescribed outcomes on the part of the dancer, thus rendering the idea of human "presence" as secondary. While Zarelli further points out that strong "presence" does not automatically arise from a precise rendering of a performance score, and precision itself is not enough to make a performance arresting or infuse

it with virtuosity (146), there is still an assumption that gesture of any kind is predicated on seamlessly following a prescribed series of movements.

As they are no longer the choreographic focal point, any kind of embodied transfiguration being achieved by the performers no longer constitutes the "essence" of the performance. Ingvarsson has explicitly stated her intention to use the body more as a conduit than as a distinct, autonomous entity in *The Artificial Nature Project*, with most of the emphasis being put on matter over physicality:

A body understood in these terms is not a body of human flesh, but rather an organization of elements that all operate in order to make a situation function. By making a choreography for materials, operated partly by humans, partly by machines and partly by the minds of the spectators, the notions of human beings being at the center of all action, activity and agency is put in question (Ingvarsson 1-2).

Thus, within the confines of *The Artificial Nature Project* any question of how dance intercedes with technology becomes further complicated with the relation of autonomy and intimacy. Is a post-human choreograph by autonomous in the sense that it becomes freed from desire, outside influence and any evocation of external human authority by dematerializing the body to such an extent? With this proposition, Ingvarsson seems to be suggesting that what is seen as a constraint can also be enabling when restricting the role of human agency.

Alternately, a more post-human understanding of the body's role onstage is further established by the lack of archival trace. Contingent on what Rebecca Schneider refers to as "the positioning of performance in archival culture", image-driven performance is defined by its notion of material trace and the ability to produce concrete documentation of a performance, an issue which she refers to as "necessarily imbricated, chiasmically, within the live body" (Schneider 65). If the criteria for live performance hinges on reading, interpreting and legibly recording the gesture and presence of bodies, any move away from a phenomenological approach to choreography either complicates or completely negates the archival process. Because of this, *The Artificial Nature Project* functions as a more post-human exploration of movement rather than a dance performance, as it refuses to operate as its own material trace. Yet while Ingvarsson's privileging of ephemeral forces or matter over corporeality refutes much of what Schneider refers to as the "logic of the archive", it paradoxically serves as pure performance, as it functions as "a creation subsequent to a disappearance understood as loss, 'destruction,' and 'darkness'" (Schneider 66-67).

In contrast, the performance of Merce Cunningham's *Beach Birds for Camera* (1991), adapted for film acts as a never-ending archival loop, albeit one that directly embodies the incipient tension between human agency and technological intervention. While Cunningham was prone to using the physicality of his dancers as a means of expressing spatial temporality over any overtly symbolic or conceptual framing of movement, the performance itself comes across as a bare form of

kinesthetic repetition rather than an exercise in duration captured on film. His use of the body as a canvas of flesh subject only to the pull of time and gravity codifies it as something inherently beyond legibility. The virtual aspect of Cunningham's choreographic performance is activated by the desire for it to function more as a kind of living *tabula rasa*. With *Beach Birds for Camera*, Cunningham may best adopted a more fluid rethinking of kinesthetic movement, yet the performance itself reads more as a post-human choreography than as an ode to man's synchronous link with nature.

While the film adheres to what Hal Foster refers to as the "archival impulse" in the sense that it simultaneously serves as a cultural artifact and forms a cornerstone in the register of Cunningham's oeuvre, the transformation of materiality taking place ascribes something foreign and incomprehensible to the bodies on screen, rupturing its legibility and sense of order. It is a cinematic subversion that involves two kinds of bodies; not only that of the performer, but also the spectator themselves. While Cunningham's intention was not to awe the stage and screen couplet, Foster notes that "the relation of appropriation art to the image-specter is not so simple: it can be critical of the screen, even hostile to it, and fascinated by it, almost enraptured of it" (Foster 146). In this sense, any mediation of dance through a cinematic apparatus denies the immediacy and intention of human agency achieved by capturing detail. There is an almost inhuman viewpoint achieved, one that echoes the effect of verité.

Due to the fact that it operates within several different registers of mediation (score, apparatus, sound), *Beach Birds for Camera* does not operate as pure performance. Rather, there is an almost topological folding of the dancer's body through the camera's free-floating angles. Cunningham's choreography is as much for the camera as it is for the performers, and the way the camera frames their movements recomposes the relation of the dancer's bodies to their surroundings. In fact, the phenomenological aspects of their existence on screen are only given concrete weight through the disorientation. There is no banal view of what is transpiring onstage, but instead a more peripheral tracking takes place in order to absorb the full spectrum of movement. Through apparatusic mediation, the motor becomes a choreographic simulacrum, more a cinematic instance of appropriation. In his essay "Acinema," Jean-François Lyotard gives an example of the *tableau vivant*, which he approves of as "the near simulation of fantasy in all its paradoxical intensity." Through representing unmovable bodies standing in paralytic stasis, the *tableau vivant* veers on a frenzy of activity/immobility that gives it an erotic and phantasmic edge, producing a "Sadéian problematic" of the posing of an object, as Marquis de Sade with his victims, to generate a response of intense emotion, "so that the pleasure will burst forth in its irreversible sterility." The *tableau vivant* has the potential to negotiate the "paradox of immobilization" by mediating agitation with paralysis through representation of the object (Lyotard 354-67). There is something fundamentally absurd in the dialectic between stasis

and mobility in *Beach Birds for Camera*, which causes the performance to lack coherency within the intended framework of representation. This chimeric-like effect renders the bodies enacting Cunningham's choreography into something sterile, something beyond human or animal. By negotiating an alternate configuration of cinematic pleasure that deviates from the hegemony of the cultural archive only in order to reiterate it, *Beach Birds for Camera* takes itself beyond the limits of what is human.

Completing the constellation of post-human movement propositions, Boris Charmatz's *Infants* (2011) utilizes the temporal threshold of childhood to transgress choreographic convention. Pushing itself past the limits of what is considered to be appropriate representationally, *Infants* employs child performers in a controversial manner that further negates the idea of human agency being central to performance. Using the children's bodies as living choreographic objects, Charmatz infuses the darkened stage with a macabre sense of post-human, affective catastrophe. Positioning the objectification of their bodies as inherent, the violence hinted at onstage doubles as the affective violence wrought on the spectators while the movements of the adult dancers gesture daringly at child abuse and pedophilia. The dual identification experienced when watching these sadomasochistic dynamics play out onstage is further complicated by providing a clear confrontation of adult-child power dynamics and the inherent fragility in negotiating the complexities of protection and harm, not only in a more literal, physical sense but also in an emotional sense. Hegemonic norms of how bodies at differing stages of development are to be ordered and treated are disrupted, leading to a perversion of both spectatorship and participation.

In *Anti-Orpheus*, their critique of psychoanalytic ideology, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceive of the Oedipus complex and the venue of Greek tragedy as a substitution for the cinematic apparatus, noting that incest has the potential to become the "excessive force" that functions as a sterilizing mechanism. Much in the same way that Lyotard's conception of the *tableau vivant* of cinema can be applied to the filmed performance of *Beach Birds for Camera*, the more concrete synthesis of the role desire plays in manufacturing "perverse" modes of viewing can be used to extrapolate much of *Infants*'s darkness. Charmatz puts forward a proposition of uniform terror arising from an excess of kinesthetic care, and there's an indeterminate amount of force coming out of both human-to-human and human/machine intention. The giant crane-like machine that hoists two dancers before abruptly depositing them on the floor of the stage during the initial part of the performance works well to underscore the proximity of Charmatz's choreography, where these mechanical interventions function as machines of desire for physical harm. For Deleuze and Guattari, perversion occurs as a result of an excess of libidinal desire. This notion of "excess" generated through the untrammeled libido elucidates the problems with limiting the idea of perversion to one singular meaning or dialectic. Images, produced by the "desiring machines" of

the technological or cinematic apparatus, step into our unconscious mind, gaze beyond their surface signification and their ability to be understood and ruled by the viewer with multiple layers of insinuations. However, these "machines of desire" are repressed by a kind of revelation towards reading *Enfant* with a post-psychoanalytic Freudian literacy, further displacing the dancer's autonomous agency into something beyond the threshold of humanity, so that the stage "ceases to be what it is - a factory, a workshop - to become a theatre, a scene and its reality ... the classical theatre of representation" (Deleuze and Guattari 55-57).

The most troubling implications about watching *Enfant* is an almost incontinent wish on the part of the spectator to see a more concrete actualization of its sinister implications of Charmatz's handling of the children, a desire that transgresses the imagined limits of perversion, to gaze, to objectify, to fully experience the affects contained in the circulation of images. There is an almost compulsive need to both indulge and exploit these images of physical excess for political purposes. *Enfant*, in a sense, acts as both a threat and a diversion from the hegemonic norms of society, and thus is easily pathologized by its resistance to those standards. Deleuze and Guattari point out, however, that perversion cannot be linked to a simple act of transgressing convention or superficial defiance of the nuclear family or dominant cultural paradigms such as psychoanalysis or compulsory heteronormativity (55-57).

By working against the limits of what can be taxonomically categorized as "human", all three performances—Ingvarsen's *The Artificial Nature Project*, Cunningham's *Beach Birds for Camera*, and Charmatz's *Enfant*—have a shared commonality of truly calling upon the human body for its ability to be dematerialized, deconstructed and re-composed in the production of images. While the question of the post-human subject within dance performance is not limited to either the use of technology or to bodily dematerialization, all three choreographies propose new potentialities for embodied performance, where gesture is no longer the penultimate expression of a choreographic score, or even choreographic intention. In this sense, we can see what Brian Massumi refers to as the danger of movement lacking qualitative transformation: "There is "displacement," but no transformation; it is as if the body simply leaps from one definition to the next" (3). Here is the vanishing point again: a disavowal of the immediacy of the the performing body, one that moves towards a true post-human choreography.

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Right-Now Reason
 Time, Damnation, and Free Will in the
 Don Juan Tradition
by Joseph Kidney



Of all his wine-swilling, brawl-fighting, wench-swiving, wif-flinging, covens, no poet can be said to embody the heady age of the Restoration better than the Earl of Rochester. But for all his projected joviality, Rochester's way of life and his deep distrust of anything conventional stems from a philosophical belief in nothingness as the pre-existing condition and inevitable end of all life and matter. This conception of life as a brief appearance of animated form after and before two great voids is reflected in the way Rochester experiences time: as a substantial present in between the unknowable and effectively non-existent past and future. With this belief, Rochester is able to dismiss ideas of morality, constancy, remorse, hope, and knowledge, all of which require faculties of either reflection or prediction. But Rochester's own inability to live up to his own standard of pure hedonism, an inability evoked nowhere better than in his deathbed conversion, prevents us from using his life and work as a means of examining the real implications of his philosophy. Such an examination is only made possible by considering the figure of Don Juan, who is the dramatic manifestation of the kind of hedonistic philosophy espoused by Rochester. Although Rochester might be the embodiment of his age, Don Juan, as Kierkegaard rightly points out, is the very embodiment of the present instant, in all its blind and impulsive movement forward. But although Don Juan's status as time present incarnate allows us to see the libertine philosophy of action in action, it has made it difficult for dramatists to explain the beginning and end of Don Juan himself. I will consider three versions of Don Juan from Rochester's own century (Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla*, Molière's *Don Juan*, and Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine*), and three from the following three centuries (Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni*, Byron's *Don Juan*, and the "Don Juan in Hell" segment of Shaw's *Man and Superman*) to show how Don Juan's hedonistic supremacy, made possible by his embodiment of the present, forces his dramatists to begin his story in *medias res* and to end it with a *deus ex machina*. Only Byron insists on giving his Juan an origin story, and that is

only possible because his version of Don Juan is a parody. By making his Don Juan "begin with the beginning" (1:50), Byron humanizes his protagonist to the extent that, like Rochester, his broader awareness of time disqualifies him from the naive innocence of the authentic Don Juan figure.

Before establishing the nature of Rochester's philosophical beliefs, it is important to address the problem of taking a poet of such theatrical flourish at face value. In other words, there is every reason to remain skeptical about the sincerity of his skepticism. Indeed, Burnet records him saying about his poems that "his lies in these lies came often in as ornaments that could not be spared without spoiling the beauty of the Poem" (31), meaning that an attempt to delimit Rochester's system of belief through his poetry must acknowledge that any direct intellectual pronouncement in the poems may have more to do with Rochester's taste than his conviction. But whether by reading Rochester's poems we get at real Rochester seems to be a concern burdened with misguided expectations, for though an individual can maintain a stable and original identity while engaging in so much dissimulating and self-deception. When Paul Davis writes that "the philosophical premises of libertarians—its emphasis on the materiality of human being, its rejection of occultantist theories of spiritual essence—logically entailed a view of self as actor, adopting a succession of discrete roles" (Wilcox xxix), he is very apt, excepting the idea of "discrete roles," in that these various theatrical projections do not bleed and blend into one another. The closest thing to a real Rochester, or what is signified by his name, is the mythic character that was written through the combination of his actions, his poetry, and the public imagination all of which surely influenced each other. I will therefore accept the poems as separate but equally valid expressions of the same theatrical character, deeming their inconsistencies and orientations as part and parcel of a philosophical system governed less by rational integrity than a sort of sensually flexible intellect.

Rochester's particular beliefs about the way that an individual should live are only understandable in the broader context of his belief in life as a brief and uninvited lapse in the nothingness that precedes and follows it. He addresses "punitive nothing" (8) in "Upon Nothing," saying "Something, the general attribute of all, / Severed from thee, its sole original, / Into thy boundless self must (undistinguished fall)" (7-9). Even in the same poem, he examines how his awareness of the original and inevitable nothingness circumscribes the meaningful range of philosophic investigation, as he says that "Ic, or is not, the two great ends of fate" (31) and questions of "true and false" (32), "when reduced to thee, are less waste and best" (36). Moreover, nothing, or the "Great negative," helps the "wise" (28) (as would that for Rochester always implies denotation) to "point their blind philosophies" (30). But while Rochester suggests that all philosophical investigation should be reduced safely to nothing, his treatment of nothing as an interactive presence in the world makes it ironically not so much a void that contains his entire intellectual program as a solid and substantial component of his

philosophical worldview. Rochester hints at this solidification of nothing when he says how it masquerades as "stately something" (42) in the minds of politicians. But in this poem from which the first-person pronoun is unusually absent, Rochester does not explicitly state how this belief in nothing, as perhaps his version of Fawcett's nameless *Alkamfasser*, might inform his own way of living or moral code. Indeed, he ends the poem by saying how all must "in three ever end" (51) ascribing the eternal quality of ever to nothingness, while writing elsewhere in a translation of Seneca's *Tristia* that "Impartial death confounds body and soul," (12) thereby divesting the soul of any posthumous resilience and precluding any notion of salvation or resurrection. While in some ways resembling the Epicurean rebuttal of Aristotle's *horror vacui*, Rochester's attempted refutation of Christian theology carries a greater moral danger. His belief in nothingness as the prevailing condition of the world is more a dismissal of other principles than any real assertion of his own. The moral implications and consequences that follow can only be made clear by examining the way in which this worldview influences a fundamentally liberative conception of time.

The idea of life as a phenomenon bracketed by nothingness is reflected in the way that Rochester experiences time and in his preference for a philosophy of action over one of contemplation. He sees time as a compressed version of the life that is a material interim in between two voids, as within that life the present instant is the only knowable portion of time in between the forgotten past and the unforeseeable future, the regrets and consequences of which do not impinge upon the immediate moment. He writes in "Love and Life" that "What ever it is to come it not / How can it then be mine? / The present moment's all my lot" (6-8) emphasizing that anything that he cannot possess does not exist, while suggesting that whatever exists exists only for him in posterity. No matter how powerful a man becomes, his power is only applicable to the present moment, meaning that all people in the context of the vast majority of time are effectively impotent. Consequently, Rochester tries to contravene this impotence by asserting the exclusive existence of the present moment. He espounds a philosophy of action that is born out of his decision for the man who thinks "he's the image of the infinite, / Comparing his short life, void of all rest, / To the eternal and the ever blest," ("Satire Against Reason" 77-9) implying a direct link between his belief in the exclusive claim of nothingness to eternity and his decision that "thoughts are given for action's government, / Where action ceases, thought's impertinent" (94-5). Rochester's belief that reason should be involved not in the question of *should I*, but rather *how will I*, is what he calls "right reason" (99), but it might as well be called *right-now reason* because it is a direct extension of the compressed nihilistic conception of life that forms Rochester's hedonistic consideration of experienced time.

Against the background of this continuous present Rochester seeks to find a means of achieving progress in a temporal condition that is static. He writes in "Against Constancy,"

Let differ facts on whom kind chance
Some easy heart hath thrown,
Since they no higher can advance,
Be kind to one alone. (5-8)

He suggests that he is unlike the dull fools because he can (and advances) through the conquest and disposal of multiple women. But this is challenged in the poem's final lines when he writes, "As each kind night returns; / 'Till change mistress till I'm dead, / And este change me to worms" (17-20). The undercut interplay between the ideas of *return* and *change* challenges the speaker's claim to higher advancement. Rochester implies that the change involved in sleeping with a succession of women is a daily change made monotonous through repetition so that the only real and singular change occurs when life is changed into death, or something is reversed back to nothingness. In Rochester's terms, death might be seen as the only real end to that present moment that he calls "all my lot" ("Love and Life" 8), and life itself therefore is an embodied moment. But while Rochester believes the present is the only portion of time that man can control, he is also aware of the debilitating vicissitudes to which life's sequence of instants is subject. He ends "Love and Life" by wailing "If I by miracle can be / This livelong minute true to thee / 'Till all that Heaven allows" (13-5). In this sense, the heroic conception of time as consisting only of time present is as much an exhortation to action as it is an excuse for impotence and lack of self-government. This is the kind of contradiction that one encounters throughout the works of Rochester. Such contradictions suggest that Rochester does not give total evidence to the very ideas he propounds elsewhere. But because there is something fundamentally at stake about the ideal libertine, or the perfect embodiment of the present moment whose life resembles the continuous unfeeling thrusting of a clock's second hand, Rochester the human being tends to complicate and subtract from Rochester's projected quintessential libertine. His occasional lapses into reflection and human feeling, not to mention his eventual hand-lick and phlegmatic distended conviction, disqualify him from the very standard by which he mocks others. This means, rather innocently, that his philosophy of action is limited to the words with which it is articulated. To understand the full moral and literary implications of what Rochester might call the ideal libertine, it is necessary to look beyond the man himself, and examine a longer fictional tradition that both predates and outlives him.

Where Rochester falls short, dramatic versions of the libertine can be perfectly inhuman and serve as better examples of the embodiment of the present moment. There is no better example than Don Juan, a figure who has continued to excite the Western imagination for at least four hundred years. Perhaps one of the most interesting things about the construction of Don Juan, interesting since of the libertine ideals propounded by Rochester, is the way that Don Juan's neglect of any time beyond the present influences the dramatic structure of the works in which he is featured. This is because the works themselves must begin and end and observe phenomena of time that their protagonist does not. Kierkegaard,

in *Either/Or*, writes of Don Juan that "his life is the sum of repellant moments which have no coherence, his life as moment is the sum of the moments, as the sum of the moments is the moment" (78); or, in other words, anything apart from the present tense is alien to him. It is only natural, therefore, that the proper formation of the Don Juan figure cannot be explained, nor can his ending be anything but an intervention, rather than a rational conclusion. It follows that, traditionally, the Don Juan legend, as written originally by Tasso de Molina, and then in Molière's, Shadwell's, and Da Ponte's version, must begin *in medias res* and end with a *deus ex machina*. In Molière's version, Spacarelle asks his master, "Did you come into being just like that? Didn't your father have to get your mother with child to make you?" (62); and we might see resemblances to Don Juan in Milton's Sam, the equally villainous antithesis of *Paradise Lost*, who pronounces "We know no time when we were not as now; / Know none before us, self-begot, self-raisd" (3.850-01). Don Juan, just as proud, can have no conceivable creation because any educational process would require reflection and improvement, activities that are incompatible with the figure who is the living, breathing assertion of *I am! I am!*

While knowledge accumulates, pleasure is the property of an instant. Don Juan's ignorance of the full spectrum of time only enhances his ability to indulge in the immediate (shall) of his fancy. His dramatists circumvent the impossibility of his origin story by beginning *in medias res* and by characterizing him as an individual who is always beginning an endeavor, rather than one who reflects on the past or looks too far forward into the future. The representative image of his driving force is Da Ponte's Don Giovanni at the banquet yelling out "Next course!" (13), and although each play's starting point is carefully constructed for the sake of the larger dramatic arc, any point in Don Juan's life could serve as a play's beginning because he is always starting something. Whether it is Molière's Don Juan, who says, "Come let us start on our new amorous adventure" (44), or Shadwell's who says, "I will go on, / Till I have surfeited on all delights" (4.42-3), the Don Juan figure is always driven by both the imminence and impossibility of satisfaction. Occasionally he resembles a child in his facility to shift his attention towards a new endeavor, as when Don Giovanni is distracted from the subject of one project and remarks, "(suddenly) Be still, I smell woman" (Da Ponte 108); or when he loses Donna Elvira, saying, "Thank God, she's gone. Oh look, look at these jolly young things!" (110). In both cases a crude sensory input, whether smell or sight, is enough to change the whole course of his action. But his disconnection from the past is precisely what gives him such vigour and allows him to confound Zeluca, saying, "Your life will begin anew" (Da Ponte 112), because his own life is always beginning anew and the easiest way to convince another to believe it is to believe it oneself. That disconnection also gives him a certain brand of luxury in the fantastical endings that are thrust upon him by the demand fortribution in spite of his clear superiority over all other mortal characters in his world, as Leporida tells Don Giovanni, "Master—we're dead" (112), only for Don Giovanni to say, "Go

on, I tell you" (132), or as Shadwell's Don John defies the Statue by saying, "In this instant, I would dare thy power" (5.2.116). The *deus ex machina* of the Statu represents both the past and the future, which are incompatible with the notion of the Don Juan figure, as the Statue embodies a former crime that has once violently yank Don Juan into the afterlife. It is entirely fitting that Shadwell's Don John defies this cooperative engagement by the past and the future by asserting life is nothing but instants.

Along with a sort of propulsive dissatisfaction, the state of the Don Juan figure as an embodiment of the appetitive instant also qualifies him for a potent ethical innocence. While Don Juan may resemble Rochester's ideal of the man who seizes what he naturally desires, his blind obedience to that natural demand, the imperative to action that it imposes upon him makes it possible to consider him as a figure of involuntary infamy. In a way, this makes him seem less ill-governed at the cost of becoming morally defensible. Shadwell's Don John, in an intentionally famous manner, states, "If we be bad, 'tis nature's fault that makes us" (3.2.111-2), and one of his companions says, "All our actions are necessary, none command their own wills" (3.1.74-5). These statements are deliberately off-putting because Shadwell was trying to denounce libertinism, rather than enjoy it, while it was still in vogue. Libertinism (which is both his and his play's) He clones the figure of Don John in his companions Don Antonio and Don Lopez in order to make them seem like representatives of a dangerous and widespread trend. In doing so, he makes Don John unexceptional and therefore less of a real Don Juan figure. Shadwell makes his libertines' rapes and perversities seem like bids for trendiness rather than manifestations of an inward and undeniable force. They are "fain to commit a rape to pass away the time" (Shadw. 1.1.299-300), rather than be driven to horrid actions from appetitive impetus and an ignorance of time's passage. Shadwell is only able to make Don Juan morally condemnable by turning him into someone else: a mere imitable sound-alike.

While Shadwell's libertines espoused a doctrine of blind obedience to nature, the way in which they speak before they act makes it seem as though they are following their words rather than their immediate impulse. Notice that Da Ponte's and Tasso's plays begin with Don Juan in the middle of a conquest, Molière begins with Spangarelle speaking for Don Juan, but only Shadwell's Don Juan begins his play by speaking for himself. Rightly, Spangarelle says that "it's deeds that count, not words" (Molière 57), and a more legitimate Don Juan like Molière's proffers himself through a crime. For him, the persuasiveness of the urge is its own justification, and when it comes to making a natural statement of belief, all he can say is, "I believe that two and two make four" (Molière 61). Indeed, there is no question of whether an action is morally justifiable to an individual like Rochester's earl, whose entire rational faculty is dedicated to the question of *how well I'm leaving no room for should?* Molière's Don Juan states the compromised freedom of his volition rather succinctly when he says, "I freely admit that a new object has drawn

Don Elvira's image quite out of my heart" (36), as he is only free in the matter of acknowledging the commanding force within him. In this, his free will seems more like a ceremonial surrender, an admission after the fact, perhaps because he enjoys the erotic acquisitions to which his inborn nature leads him, although this enjoyment only means that he condones the sin without fully committing it (in deliberation as in deed), and perhaps this is in own fault, but surely one of a lesser nature. We give leniency to crimes committed by those who are not psychologically in full control of themselves, and Don Juan's escapades might erode be seen as involuntary reflexes of a body not so much governed as commanded by its irrepressible passions. Tasso's Don Juan says to his companion Carattino, "I'm dying with love for her. I must enjoy her tonight" (14), and it is this direct compulsion to action, that characterizes Don Juan rather than any thought out and articulated doctrine. Ignorant of the time past and the time to come, his great active forces are the result of a willing submission to an inner drive; as he says in Molière's version, "so we stumble on" (37). There is, again, something childish in the impetuosity of Don Juan, and few of his exploits are significantly different from the first physical appearance of Don Juan in Byron's poem, as the narrator recalls how "little Juan over me these downy snails, / A pail of hisnerard's water unawares" (1.191-2). The Don Juan figure spends the rest of his life re-enacting this event in one form or another, as he goes about emptying fluids from his container, unaware of the grief he may be bringing to others. At the risk of joining the ranks of those deceived by Don Juan, it is perhaps possible to give him general credence when he says, in Tasso, to Blatrico, "Forgive my error and ignorance," (32) as he is less a figure of malice than one of spectacular accident.

Of course, this is not to clear Don Juan of total responsibility for his actions, even simply because he seems to endorse his transgressions, compulsive as they may be. But perhaps this is beside the point, since Don Juan prokes himself on being "the man whose greatest pleasure is to play a woman for a fool and abscond with her honor" (Tasso 24). In the true spirit of Rochester, it would be fitting to see whether Don Juan is admirable on his own terms, as Rochester ends his "Satire on Reason and Mankind" by saying that "all the subject matter of debate, / Is only who's a knave of the first rate?" (172-3). Don Juan's obsession with quantity has much to do with an attempted indulgence in the range of earthly pleasures. Shadwell's Don Juan even says, "I hate to commit the same dull sin over and over again, as if I were married to it. Variety makes all things pleasant" (3.2.546-8), and Spangarelle tells his master, "Your heart is the greatest normal that ever was. It likes to be always on the move" (Molière 56). Of course, there is no question of present-time incarnate dwelling on anything at all, but Don Juan's kind of variety, the consequence of staying from moment to moment inconstantly, recalls Rochester's lines quoted earlier, "As each kind night returns / I'll change a mistress (ill I'm dead," and the idea of how the same change perpetually returning turns into repetition. Leposello informs Elvira, "you neither are, nor were, nor will be the

first or the last." (Da Ponte 116) because for Don Giovanni there descriptive meaningless and each woman is merely another. Shadwell, for all his lack of a nice, captures this quality of the Don Juan figure quite effectively; as Don Antonio asks John which woman he wants and he replies, "'Tis all one. I am not in knots in lust, and to such a one a bellyful's a bellyful, and there's an end on't" (4.2.113). The relegation of sexual conquest to the metaphor of ingestion fitfully into the routine banality of meals and the sort of limited variety one experiences before eating the same thing for lunch as one might for breakfast.

While Don Juan's dramatists may be aware of this paradox of unvarying variety, Don Juan himself seems hopelessly unaware. In Molière's version, he asks Spangrue about Charlotte, "Did you ever see anything so charming? Does she think she's quite as attractive as the others?" (49), and this bizarre appraisal of her both superlative and equal to another woman demonstrates the absurdity of Don Juan's mind. He is so focused on the immediate moment that he lacks a comparative faculty. Of course, if the present moment is the only moment ever to have existed, then it is surely the best of all moments. The same can be said about the next moment, and the next, and all that follow. This means that each woman he meets that Leporello records for Don Giovanni may serve as a means of beauty to others, it also serves as a sort of external memory or chronicle. This suggests that Don Giovanni cannot remember his previous conquests, and that the quest of conquests is less for his enjoyment than for the reputation conferred on him by others, like Donna Elvira, to whom the list is shown. Still, Don Juan is invariably inconstant to all women, and this inconstancy of unconditional change is reflected in his obduracy, as he says, "I haven't changed in the least. My opinions are the same as they always were" (Molière 85). For an audience familiar with the legend, each conquest is like a punchline, expected and enjoyed because of its obduracy to the pattern. He rarely surprises or because we expect him to succeed, and when he is finally retributively damned, it seems unfair, because the very eagerness of our expectations condones the spectacle for the sake of our own enjoyment.

What, then, is the logical ending for time present incarnate? Rochester's deathbed conversion, if it is to be taken in earnest, would require both a reflective faculty with which to repent and a forward-looking fear of damnation to prompt the reflection in the first place. The amantive and impulsive nature of Don Juan is reminiscent of the consummation of Macbeth's evolution into total tyrant with his vow, "The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand" (4.1.153-4), but again, the same lack of deliberation that separated Don Juan (not Shadwell's Don John) must also separate him from Macbeth's bloody resolution. Equally, Macbeth's utter despair of time's inconstancy and his realization that no matter how many people he murders and no matter he will always be an utter sinner to time's will is a very mortal concern, but one that could not act on Don Juan in the same way. As Jacopo says of Shadwell's Don John, "All times and places are

like to him" (2.1.176), because he is the embodiment of time-being and is parricidal in superiority over mankind. If all time is the same for Don Juan, no moment indicates any closer proximity to an end than any other and therefore no imitation of the end can compel him to reform.

The original Don Juan, Tirso's, makes his unawareness of time's flow clear in his recurring motto "Pleury of time for that" (7), with the word *pleury* implying more than enough or excess. The word reappears when Leporello hopes that he will be afforded a scrap fallen off the table of Don Giovanni's impending sexual feast, as he says at Zerlina's wedding, "There should be something for me too in this pleury" (110), as though *pleury* were enough to satisfy Don Giovanni's insatiability and leave extra for Leporello's scavenging. Don Juan's view that there is a plenitude of time precludes any urgency to repent, and the ability to do anything and everything results in a sort of optional paralysis, because if something can be done at any moment as pressingly as any other there is no extra incentive to ever do it and it never gets done. This harkens back to the paradox discussed above, of continuous variation being static in its consistency of change, or to the paradox of the preacher: that there is a time for everything, yet nothing new under the sun.

The divine, or demonic, intervention of the static seems absent in itself, but insofar as the story needs to conclude, insofar as the audience needs to get home, and insofar as the anti-natural moral standards of the day must be allowed victory over a natural force that is apolitical and therefore more enduring than them, the *deus ex machina* is as good as any other way to enact a defeat of Don Juan. The justification that is given for this retribution, however, is unconvincing. In Tirso, Don Juan protests that Isabella successfully resisted his assault, but the static problems, "Your attention condemns you" (51). But, bad as the effects of Don Juan's actions may be, it cannot be said that he intends harm. Indeed, the same ignorance of time that makes Don Giovanni, in the words of Leporello, "a man who knows no gratitude" (Da Ponte 106) makes him equally unable to repent, and even less able to intend harm or good for others. His self-absorption may be a fault, but his disregard for consequences disqualifies him from any real charge of malice, as he says in Molière, "Don't let us bother about all the ills that might happen. Let us think rather of how we can enjoy ourselves" (46), and again, in Tirso, "Bring her out, woo her, write to her, seduce her, and the consequences be damned!" (23). We are reminded again of Rochester's complete surrender to the vicissitudes of his natural impulse, when Shadwell's Don John says to Leonora, "I loved you as long as I could for the heart and blood of me, and there's an end to it" (2.1.105-6).

Don Juan, though wildly inconsiderate, cannot be said in any meaningful sense to be evil, or deserving of unconditional damnation. Indeed, the versions in which he is damned because of his inability to repent, like Da Ponte's, Molière's, and Shadwell's, are more sensible developments of Tirso's original Don Juan, who wants to "send for a priest" (51) at the last second. In those three versions, Don Juan's refusal to repent makes his damnation seem, in a way, self-willed, as a final

affirmation of the vitality with which he tries to control his descent. Unlike, both his hopelessness at the indifferent continuation of time, Don Juan and every opportunity, the exploitative potential of the present moment to which is inexorably connected. In *Tasso*, he proclaims, "Let Octavio try to kill me / I die?" (39), and much of his attitude is reflected in Octavio's defiance of Don Diego: "But now your blood is frozen. Is it what matters, not was" (*Tasso*). But Don Juan's resistance to his downfall, no matter how he fights against an ultimately to be seen as nothing but a gesture, meaningless in the context of dominant truncation of his career. It seems jarring because Don Juan feels such a comedy crushed by a prosaic morality, rather than being any sort of tragic war defined by its unflagging orientation towards death. Only in the opening chiasm Mozart's portentous overture are we prepared for what otherwise seems like after-thought of moral recovery. But even those dark and ponderous clouds in themselves too quickly to the irresistible joviality of Don Giovanni to maintain their dramatic authority. No matter how this supernatural ending comes, we always tend to agree with Byron that Don Juan is "sent to the devil somewhat in time" (1.8).

Had as it may be to write an ending for the Don Juan figure that is ongoing, it seems impossible to write a convincing origin story. Because Byron hints that his version "begin with the beginning" (1.50), he has no option but to tell his Don Juan parable. Somewhere between infancy and manhood Don Juan has somehow undergone some sort of educational process, but the figure of Don Juan so defined by an incapability to learn, a life of repentance without knowledge, and a social heedlessness of consequence, that we must think he emerged from oddities fully grown. Byron knows this and encounters great difficulty in detailing the education of even a parodic Don Juan. He says that even Juan's turns are "by destiny / His natural span" (1.39-7), suggesting that even Byron is unable to begin with the beginning, and that something within his hero precludes the beginning of a larger tradition, as it means that we come to Byron's poem with a whole range of expectations and prejudices that interact with our reading while it is happening. This, however, can lead us to delay our realization of the fact that Byron Don Juan is really an impostor. Byron states that "sovereign... than all, / Is first as passionate love—it stands above" (1.1009-10), and that "life yields nothing (truth and uncharacteristically satisfying) sexual experience, then, the standard to set by Juan, her "innocent determination" (1.642) and "her plan" (1.657). Byron says that Juan responds with "a grateful kiss" (1.891). Both the idea of female sexual affection and gratitude are absent in the context of the Don Juan tradition and Juan's passive reception serves as the model for all of his later romantic exploits.

Even Byron recognizes the inexplicability of Don Juan's formation. He seems to pull back at the last minute, as he writes, "And then—God knows what next—I can't go on; / I'm almost sorry that I ever begun" (1.919-20), after having earlier written, "He might be taught, by love and her together— / I really don't know what, nor fails either" (1.647-8). The omission is as much an attempt to titillate the reader as it is a capitulation of sorts, as Byron tries and fails to pay homage to the Don Juan tradition in spite of already having broken from it definitively. Of course, this is all part of Byron's big joke, as most epic poems and all other versions of Don Juan begin in *medias res*. But, as discussed above, the peculiar nature of Don Juan as a figure totally unable to learn because of his ignorance of any time outside the present necessitates the sudden beginning that interrupts a larger story that is already occurring.

In closing, I would like to consider one dramatic episode that recurs throughout the Don Juan tradition in hopes that it will be able to shed light on the question of whether free will is involved in Don Juan's damnation. The episode in question is that of the shipwreck, which is invariably portrayed as being both arbitrary and a prefiguration of damnation. Don Juan, in George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, describes his life as having been governed by blind inertia, as he says, "I have done a thousand wonderful things unconsciously by merely willing to live and following the line of least resistance" (169), but then asks, "which ship goes off on the rocks or to the bottom? the drifting ship or the ship with a pilot on board?" (169). In a typically Shavian substitution of analysis for drama, Shaw reveals the moral conundrum of Christian salvation that is reflected in the Don Juan tradition that we are inherently sinful and, excepting a strenuous overpowering of our own nature, inevitably damned from conception, or, in other words, punished for being who we are by the authority that made us so. Shaw's invocation of nautical language when discussing damnation is fitting in the context of the Don Juan tradition. Byron likens the shipwreck in the second canto to a forceful damnation, the kind that the defiant Don Giovanni is dragged to, as he writes, "the sea gawd around her like a bell, / And suck'd with her the whirling wave, / Like one who grapples with his enemy" (Byron 2.413-5). During the storm that sinks the ship in Byron's poem, he writes "there was one / That begg'd Pedrillo for an absolution, / Who told him to be damn'd—in his confusion," (2.150-2) suggesting the possibility of accidental or arbitrary damnation. In Shaw's, the shipwreck seems apocalyptic, as the Captain yells, "The heavens are all on fire. These unburn'd prodigies amaze me" (3.111-2), and the Master says he sees "horrid apparitions! Devils stand and attend the fire and will not suffer us to quench it. We are lost" (3.121-30). In Sganarelle's cautionary speech to Don Juan he says at one point, "The sea is subject to storms. Storms are dangerous to ships. Ships need a good pilot. A good pilot is prudent" and ends: "QE: E, you'll be damned forever" (Molière 87). But Sganarelle should know, as well as anyone, that any form of education for Don Juan is precluded by his inability to learn, and, recalling Shaw's question of

"which ship goes on finest on the rocks," Don Juan's trouble is less that he is a pilot of his own ship than that his ship has no pilot at all. Byron draws attention to this total lack of human volition involved in the shipwreck when he writes, "The winds and waves had heard them, and from thence, / Without their will, they ris'd them away; / For they were forced" (2.313-5).

For every mock-damnation that Don Juan endures in each shipwreck scene he is always rescued from the brink of death by a saviour figure, whom he fulfills wrongs. In Shadwell's play, it is the Hermit who feels obliged in "charity to court" (3.2.36) those who are "shipwrecked and in distress" (3.2.37), but that charity comes offended by Don Juan's request (in place of gratitude) for "a whore, a young, lusty whore" (3.2.63). The hermit is understandably appalled that Don Juan has "so lately escaped the wrath of heaven thus to provoke it" (3.2.70-5), and perhaps Shadwell, by insisting Don Juan has "free will to good" (3.2.78), sets this scene at Don Juan rejecting his one chance at salvation because next time his damnation will be real. In Tinsø's original, in Molière's adaptation, and in Byron's parody, Don Juan finds himself imperiled after the wreck only to be rescued: 1) by a young woman, Tinsø's Don Juan says to Tisbet, "If the sea gives me death, give me life" (13), and she later claims, "I nursed him back to health" (30). Like Tisbet, Molière's Charlotte and Byron's Haidée bring, if (in Charlotte's case) only by sexual appeal, Don Juan back to life. In this sense, they provide, if not salvation, at the very least a deferral of Don Juan's inevitable damnation. In their simplicity and their youth, they are reminiscent of Tinsø's Gretchen, being as they are manifestations of Goethe's redemptive *Erge-Weibchen*, but rather than earning damnation like Faust by attaining perfect satisfaction, Don Juan's inability to be satisfied is the very thing that causes him to reject the repose of a monogamous life with any of the female redemptive figures. The most important word in Don Juan's production of "so we remember on" (Molière 37) is not so much *slumber* as it is *cut*, as it is driven on and on, as insistently as the time he embodies and as blind as sleep in spite of all offers of calm and stability, no matter their appeal.

I have only dwelt on the prevalence of the shipwreck motif at such length because of its pertinence in the question of Don Juan's relevance to the human imagination. As a preliminary damnation it is perhaps intended to scare Don Juan into his own reformation, but because of his inborn forward-looking nature the fear is almost immediately forgotten. By the time he is finally damned, he has at least two damnations, the first by water and the second by fire. If this second is familiar, it is because, according to the Bible, man was effectively wiped out from the flood, and then, because of God's covenant, the second great day of judgment will come, not by water, but by fire:

Whereby the world that then was, being overbowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3-7 KJB)

The image of Don Juan, washing up on shore, and immediately continuing his course sends the same signal as Noah, surviving the flood, and making the glorious discovery of delectable things will continue as they were in spite of the purge. As Don Juan emerges out to greet "An invisible flame is burning me" (Molière 91), we might see an image of the apocalypse, when, with water having failed to cure humanity of vice, fire is employed as a means of destroying vice at the cost of obliterating all life. Don Juan, as he is all nature and all impulse, is punished by his creator for the very nature with which that same creator endowed him. To see the compression of biblical history, reemerged and foretold, as a recurring component of Don Juan narrows, is to realize the conflicted nature of the Christian imagination as it struggles to cope with impulses that are god-given but forbidden, resulting in the unending obligation to both shame and gratitude. This is perhaps why writers treat *Don Juan*, because it is a way of trying to make a tragedy out of comedy, a way of trying to call Don Juan an aberration rather than a representative of humanity, it might be thought a great moral triumph for an audience to see Don Juan excitedly indulge in his nature, and then cheer and clap his position. It might be a great moral triumph, that is, if only it were not belied by an undeniable sympathy and an uncomfortable premonition of what could be repeated at the end of each life and the end of time itself.

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Queer Spirituality in Performance

Opening Spaces of Queer and Religious Feeling

By Hannah Rackow



My interest in the roles of religion and spirituality in works of queer theatre was first catalyzed by the recognition of my perception of an antithetical relationship between queer sexualities and religious identity or feeling in contemporary North America. Much of queer leftist politics in North America, at least those I am privy to, seem to take a clear oppositional stance to religion, or more specifically to the Christian Right. As Ann Pellegrini states in "Testimonial Sexuality": "I have been struck by the way queer studies, in its Anglo-American mode, proceeds through a secular imaginary within which, religion, if it is to appear at all, must be made to appear as the arch-conservative enemy of progress (Pellegrini 207)." This is not only true of queer studies, in my experience, but also of queer politics and activism. At a time when major lines of discourse against homosexuality and any non-heteronormative sexualities involves religious language of sin and immorality, particularly in North American political discourse, Christian fundamentalists and LGBTQ+ activists seem increasingly polarized from each other. However, what we see within the works of a number of queer theatre artists is in fact a more nuanced and complex connection to religion, religious feeling and spirituality than the dominant Anglo-American discourse might lead us to believe. While wars of values are being fought at the level of national politics, these queer dramatists are working religious and queer themes into their theatre pieces and exploring the interrelations of religion and (queer) sexuality and gender. It is also important to note, as Pellegrini does, that the Christian versus Queer dichotomy, generalized into a Religion versus Queer debate, effectively ignores or glosses over non-Christian queer people's—and often people of colour's—relations to their own religious background and cosmology, in effect producing "a 'what' generality of queer and feminist studies" (Pellegrini 208).

The political debates between the Christian Right and the LGBTQ+ positive left in politics in North America cannot be entirely blamed for the polarization of religion and queer sexuality. Another reason for the lack of religious discussion

in leftist queer politics, I propose, is the Anglo-American/Western paradigm religion and spirituality are assumed to be the realm of the spirit or soul, via sexuality exists entirely in a physical or bodily realm, dichotomies that are implicit Christian in provance. As Paul J. Gornell explains in his introduction to *Conversion: Coming Out of Christian Erotophobia*, "the history of Christianity includes a pervasive bias against sexual pleasure." (21). Gornell identifies bias as coming from a deep erotophobia (fear of the erotic) in Christian life which is "largely based on the dualism in the Christian tradition that divorces body and highlights the soul (or mind) and results in the reification of the self it becomes a machine, a cage for the soul, a thing" (22). At the same time, both sexuality and religion seek ecstatic experience. In the works of the queer dualism discussed here, the dichotomy is questioned, challenged, and deconstructed.

The works under consideration in this paper include Michel Marc Bouchard's *L'Élie*, Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* and *The Rez Sisters*, as well as Tim Miller's *My Queer Body*. Each of these theoretical works engages with very disparate religious and spiritual canons and with varying religious and spiritual feelings. Between Bouchard's Québecois Catholicism, Highway's In and Outlaw cosmology (inspired by the legacy of Christian colonialism imposed on indigenous peoples in North America) and, finally, Tim Miller's Jewish-Christian imagery and style, this paper can hardly hope to establish any sort of definitive understanding of the relationship between queer identities and each religion or spiritual system described above. Instead, this paper will seek to affirm the existence of variegated and innumerate relationships between queer identities and distinct religious and spiritual systems and identities as articulated in the works cited above. It will do so by highlighting instances within these various works in which religious figures and tropes are queried, by acknowledging places where a queer history/genealogy is established, and by examining where the dichotomies between body and spirit and between queerness and religion are challenged.

Defining the Terms

In my discussion of these theatre artists and their works, I am using several terms that need at least a modicum of definition for the context of this paper. Firstly, I am using the term queer to denote any sexuality or gender identity that is non-heteronormative and does not conform to a female-male gender binary. While "queer" can signify more than simply a gender or sexual identity, within the scope of this paper it is used largely in this sense. The term LGBTQI* (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex) may also be used interchangeably with queer in order to avoid tiresome repetition, and also in recognition that "queer" and LGBTQI* are both commonly used among queer/LGBTQI* activists, scholars, artists, etc. The use of both terms within this paper also recognizes the wealth and diversity of identifications within queer/LGBTQI* community and discourse.

I am also using the terms religious and spiritual in conjunction and inter-

changeable. This is done in order to acknowledge the variety of ways and places in which religious and/or spiritual systems and feelings and/or affect are created and perpetuated: from religious institutions (Churches, Shamanistic traditions, and many more) to personal spiritual feelings, including ecstasy, shame, guilt, fervor, connection, community, belonging, etc.

The term genealogy is also often used throughout this paper and it bears explaining, as it is not used in its most common sense. Most often, genealogy refers to "the study and tracing of lines of descent" (Oxford English Dictionary Online), with the general understanding that these lines of descent are biological. In this study, however, I am using the term "queer genealogy" to signify the tracing and recognition of a queer ancestry and history, of a past, present and future for queer/LGBTQI* communities, persons, and families.

Tomson Highway: *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*

As mentioned in the introduction, the assumption of an oppositional relationship between queer identities and religion/spirituality marginalizes queer non-Christian and people of colour's religious and spiritual backgrounds and lived experiences. This is especially clear when it comes to the concept of the 'berdache' in a number of First Nations communities. 'Berdache' is a term often used by anthropologists and ethnographers, such as Walter L. Williams in his book *The Spirit and the Flesh*, to identify a third gender role that exists in many Native American cultures. Usually 'berdache' refers to males who take on feminine social roles, consisting what is often called the third gender, while women in these First Nations communities who take on masculine roles are often referred to as living a fourth gender (14). Each indigenous language community with a 'berdache' tradition has their own word for the role. In Cree, this word is *ayekweew* and I can be translated as "neither man nor woman" or "man and woman" (85). This term will be used in this paper, instead of 'berdache', except in instances of direct quotation, as it is the Cree word and thus relates more directly to a discussion of the works of Cree dramatist Tomson Highway.

According to Sabine Lang in *Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People*, the "cultural construction of more than two genders [...] has come to be termed gender variance in recent anthropological writings" (103). Interestingly, Lang goes on to provide a definition of gender variance which specifies "the opportunity to change gender roles and identities over the course of their lifetimes" (103), a specification which will be useful in a close reading of gender and sexuality in Tomson Highway's works. These traditions of gender variance were repressed, at least in Maritime Native communities, by the twentieth century (Lang 108-109). A more recent development has been the reclamation of the idea of the third and fourth genders, and identification with the term 'two-spirit' by gay and lesbian Native Americans, as well as a positioning of the *ayekweew* tradition as "immediate predecessors" to gay and lesbian First Nation people (101). Although two-spirit identity is related

to and drawn from the *ayekkwew* tradition, Lang explains that within the *ayekkwew*, Two-Spirit people are not necessarily gender variant, although they can be, and usually have a homosexual identity (111). While sexual object choice is of a secondary concern for the identity of *ayekkwew*, as Susan Bellingham explains, "this is not necessarily so for Two-Spirit people, for whom sexual object does may be central" (114). Despite this difference, as a distinctly First Nations queer identity, people who identify as Two-Spirit also draw on the spiritual importance of *ayekkwew* in Cree culture. Indeed, it is even in the name: Two-Spirit. In its distinctly queer cultures with an *ayekkwew* tradition, the *ayekkwew* was more than simply third gender identity: *ayekkwew* had a special spiritual role in a community; they were shamans, or advisors to shamans, and they were seen as mediators between men and women, as well as between the physical and the spiritual (S'Elan 3, 35). In fact, as Williams points out, the spiritual importance of the *ayekkwew* was directly related to their gender variance.

The holiness of the *ayekkwew* has to do with the Indian views that everything that exists is a reflection of the spiritual. If a person is different from the average individual, this means that the spirits must have taken particular care in creating the person (32).

Contemporary Two-Spirit people are emphasizing this spiritual and community aspect as a central part of identity, beyond simply sexual object choice (113).

As a Two-Spirit Cree dramatist himself, Tomson Highway's plays are deeply preoccupied with the intersections of gender, sexuality and spirituality and as embrace a reworking of sexuality, gender fluidity, and spirituality. His character Nanabush, the Cree/Cajibwa Trickster, is perhaps the most potent example of this preoccupation. In Highway's companion plays *The Red Sisters* and *Dry Lip Oughta Move to Kapatustasing*, the figure of the Trickster, Nanabush, and his physical and the spiritual, the masculine and the feminine. Like the recent reclamation and reworking of Two-Spirit identity, Highway's Nanabush in these plays recalls an important aspect of Native American spirituality. In his "Nec on Nanabush" at the beginning of both *Dry Lips* and *The Red Sisters*, Highway explains:

Some say Nanabush left this continent when the white man came. We believe s/he/he is still here among us—albeit a little the worse for wear and tear—having assumed other guises. Without the continued presence of extraordinary figures, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever (13).

This statement suggests that the Trickster, Nanabush, is a very central and important figure in Cree spirituality, which is in turn at the core of Cree ethics and Highway's repeated characterization of the Trickster in his plays emphasizes this.

While spiritually important, Nanabush is also a highly physical and sexual

being, particularly in her female guise in *Dry Lips*. Physicality is a central feature of the Trickster figure in much of Native American mythology according to Bellingham who cites her/his "scatological Trickster humour" (118), and Highway's Nanabush surely conforms to this. In our first encounter with Nanabush in *The Red Sisters* s/he takes on the guise of a scragal, and is "shitting all over the place" (Highway 19). In *Dry Lips*, this kind of physical humour abounds, from the opening scene featuring Nanabush/Gazelle kissing Zachary's naked bum (18), to Nanabush dressed in beard and heels "sitting on a toilet having a good shit" (117). Beyond classic Trickster scatological humour, however, Highway's Nanabush is also a sexual and gender fluid being. Throughout *Dry Lips*, Nanabush appears in female form as, variously, Gazelle, Natawaw, Patsy Pegahmagabow, and Black Lady Halked. In each of these guises, Nanabush is wearing a different prosthetic body part: immense rubber breasts for Gazelle (15), a large fake bum as Patsy (38), and a prosthetic pregnant belly for Black Lady Halked (52). Each of these body parts emphasizes a certain sexuality, which Nanabush plays up when she performs her striptease as Gazelle (87). At the same time, however, they also reference gay male drag (Bellingham 118) and by extension the performativity of gender, a commonly discussed concept in queer studies.

Similarly to the *ayekkwew* tradition, Highway's Nanabush functions as a mediator between the men and the women of the fictional Wasaychigan Hill Reserve. In *Dry Lips*, Nanabush is the only onstage representation of the women of this community, and takes on the roles of specific women, while in *The Red Sisters*, Nanabush is played by a male actor/dancer, and is our only onstage representation of a man. In both plays, the men and women only visibly interact with the other sex through the Trickster. The fact that Nanabush is female in the first play, *The Red Sisters*, and male in the second play, is keeping with the ability of the Trickster to change guises at will, also suggests an affinity with the *ayekkwew* tradition of being able to change gender roles over a lifetime (Lang 103). Highway's emphasis on gender-fluidity and gender performance, as well as on the affinities between his Cree Trickster, Nanabush, and the role of *ayekkwew* people in Cree societies (before they were repressed by the Church) work to create a close and positive link between Cree spirituality and Two-Spirit identity, and the affirmation of a Two-Spirit genealogy and place in First Nations communities.

In his plays, Highway is hardly suggesting the existence of a solely harmonious relationship between queer identity and religious identity. By queering the figure of the white male Christian God through drag and physical humour, as when he describes Nanabush as "dressed in an old man's white beard and wig, but also wearing sexy, elegant, women's high-heeled pumps" (Highway 117), Bellingham suggests that Highway is enacting "resistance to one of the most blatantly heteronormative, patriarchal, heterocentric and ethnocentric institutions of the colonial regime" (118). The repression of Cree/Native Natawaw's two-spirit desire (Highway 104) and the rape of Patsy Pegahmagabow and the simultaneous silencing of

Crewe's attempt to stop the rape (99, 100), which suggest the violence and heterosexist attitudes instilled in the community by Christian colonialism, emphasize conflict between Two-Spirit/queer identities/Cree spirituality/religion and Christianity.

The Narabush we encounter in Highway's companion plays affirms the ritual importance of Two-Spirit people in Cree/Ojibway culture by taking on the roles and practices of ayekweew and by exhibiting aspects of queer sexuality and gender fluidity. At the same time, the character of Narabush also brings the plot back into the spiritual, refusing to allow space for a Christian division between body and soul, and even queering and physicalizing (maybe even sexualizing) the all-male Christian God. Considering the fact that many Two-Spirit people still encounter "silencing and hostility, if not outright violence, within their own communities" (Billingham 115), this affirmation of a relationship between queer souls and Cree/Ojibway spirituality, as well as the queering of the figure of the Chant God, demonstrate an effort by Tomson Highway to challenge a Christian/queer opposition, one imposed by Christian colonization. By situating the queer, in this case the Two-Spirit(s), within a Cree/Ojibway history and cosmology (Highway—like many Two-Spirit people today—is affirming the legitimacy of a queer Cree/Ojibway genealogy and spirituality).

Michel Marc Bouchard: *Lilies*

Similarly to Highway, Michel Marc Bouchard's *Lilies* takes hold of a saint figure in religion and claims him for a queer genealogy. However, unlike Highway Bouchard is not drawing on a non-Christian religion or reclaiming a lost and alternative deity. His queer figure from Catholic mythology is Saint Sebastian, for Sebastian is often named "the gay saint," and has been celebrated and represented by LGBTQ artists. In a short essay, Ed Madden describes a collaborative art show in South Carolina conceived around the figure of Saint Sebastian as a gay icon and a precursor to the South Carolina Pride Festival. He describes the saint as "proud of soldiers and athletes, plague saint, gay icon" (24). The artists collaborating in this project addressed the same-sex eroticism of Saint Sebastian's martyrdom as well as the undercurrents of sexual taboos and shame (24). Where in 197 Bouchard's play also presents us with an eroticized reading of the saint's story in his play, Simon, newly released from jail, confronts a boy from his rebel days, St. Blodden, now a Bishop working in the service of the Catholic Church. With a help of a cast of ghostly characters from the past, Simon subjects Bishop Blodden to a revisiting of their experience at rehearsal putting on the play *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* and Simon's love story with another boy, Count Valier de Tilly. Set in 1912 and 1952 in Catholic small town Quebec—long before the Que Revolution—Bouchard's story of Saint Sebastian offers a vision of a 1912 Catholic Church with more nuance than is often admitted and reveals spaces where criticism is possible, but also where it is reviled and repressed.

In the opening moments of the play, Boulevard provides the audience/reader with an argument to which the rest of the play responds. Bishop Blodden replies in response to Simon's recalling of the ghosts of the past: "All these people are dead. You're being macabre, Mr. Doucet! This is ancient history. As recalled as the Countess de Tilly was at the time. This is absurd!" (12). This speech, although allegedly in response to Simon's retelling of the past, also prepares us for the play's treatment of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian. The subject is questioning, "How important should the past be to us?" Pushed a little further, the question is also "Should it matter for LGBTQ+ people to have a sense of self in history, a sense of queer genealogy? Where might that genealogy be found or formed?" In response to these questions, *Lilies* provides a story of two young boys who explore same-sex eroticism and love from within a Catholic setting. As the boys rehearse the play, Simon playing Saint Sebastian, and Count Valier de Tilly playing Sene, his servant, their teacher Father Saint-Michel instructs Count Valier de Tilly to throw himself onto Simon "like Mary Magdalene upon Jesus, like Laertes upon Our Lord" (17). Unsatisfied with the outcome, he urges:

"I realize such signs of affection are not very common in Catholic, but Saint Sebastian is your love, and he is asking you to kill him. Just imagine, the person you love most in the world asking you such a favor [corrects himself] ... such a sacrifice. It's a moment of ultimate love" (18).

In this single impassioned speech, Father Saint-Michel, a man of the Church, is acknowledging both that Catholicism is often deeply conservative and, to use Gorelli's expression, homophobic, but also that it is not always so and need not be so. His insistence that this scene be performed with " fervor," and his lamentation of the clergy's limited taste for violent and ugly martyrdoms serve to remind us and the boys he is teaching of the passion, love and beauty which he sees and seeks out in Catholic hagiography (17). As soon as Father Saint-Michel and another student exit the stage, leaving Valier and Simon alone together, the two boys use the context of the play within a play to eroticize their own personal relationship, as Valier proceeds to press himself to Simon's body, much as he had been instructed to do for the purposes of the play (17). This is a rare case of Catholic education providing a legitimizing context for same-sex desire.

Ultimately, however, *Lilies* does not suggest nor provide an easy harmony of queer desire and Catholic religion. Simon and Valier's love story does not have a happy ending. Despite the suggestion of a recognized same-sex desire within the Catholic canon, we quickly realize that, although this one queer space exists, it is hardly the norm. In Simon and Valier's societal reality, queer desire is harshly repressed by the Catholic Church and Catholic belief. When young Blodden finds out about Simon and Valier's desire for each other and their "experimentation" together, as Valier calls it, he condemns their "sickness" and threatens that they will go to hell (20, 21). The reader/audience is shown the violent repression of

same-sex desire when Timothee, Simon's father, whips him with a belt after finding out about his sexual activities with Valier (28). While Bouchard makes a strong claim for the recognition of a queer self and a queer genealogy in Saint-Sébastien hagiography, he also admits to the immense and overwhelming repression of it in masculinity within the Catholic Church. The ending of *L'Amour* admits that Christian religious beliefs and queer sexualities/genders are often still in conflict, notably especially in the 1910's and 1930's in semi-rural Québec, where the play is set.

Tim Miller: *My Queer Body*

Tim Miller's *My Queer Body* is rife with spiritual images, biblical themes, white feeling and even religious technique. Miller does not draw on a specific religious language like *Lightness* and *Demichiel*, but he does use biblical stories and spiritual language like "gay boy's alternative creation myth" (79). Already within the first page of his monodrama he is positioning his performance as a "creation myth" as well as a queer story. From the beginning, his work is neither one nor the other exclusively, but functionally both spiritual and queer.

Miller created *My Queer Body* [...] in the period when [his] own fractious femininity culture wars, the "NEA 4" controversy, was at its peak" (89). He goes on to locate protestors gathered outside his performance in the 1990's shouting "I support God and Adam and Steve, not Adam and Steve! Sohomites burn in Hell!" (82). From the least to maybe more accurately, from one side—of the "culture wars" between queer activists and the Christian right, Miller's reclamation and queering of religious technique, language and symbols in his performance is deeply potent and challenging.

At the very beginning of his performance, Miller begins to "emanate" body parts by walking through the audience and touching audience members' faces, feet, chests, etc. Once he has "gathered" enough body parts, he announces, "We have created a body! The body is here!" (86). Immediately, Miller is tearing down any divide that might have existed between body and spirit. He does so using language and a performance of remembrance of mediums, those who claim to be able to communicate with spirits, in a dose so common "the body" in a very tactile manner. In this instance, the body is recognized or presented to the audience as both visceral and spiritual. This body, which is not from the individual—and real—parts of different people around the room, is in fact one of those parts, a communal body to be felt as a presence, rather than physically seen or touched. During this "summoning of the body," Miller does not let his audience think from sexuality, indeed he discourages the naming of any and all body parts, especially that below the belt (86).

As the performance continues, Miller's style becomes more and more direct, bold, and passionate. Indeed, standing before the audience, his performance recalls the strong preaching style found at Pentecostal and Baptist churches. At times, he seems almost possessed, and his storytelling reaches high volumes. His performance has an edge to it which seems carefully calibrated to whip the audience into a spiritual, and also queer, if is a story about a queer coming of age, after all: fecundity of feeling. Also similar to *Repent*

Pentecostal preachers, his performance requires audience participation and the performer's connection to the audience. It requires the audience to shout out, similarly to the antiphonal call and response in Church, it requires the audience to feel. Part way through his performance, Miller pauses in his storytelling and moves into the audience. At this point he is totally naked, and he proceeds to sit on someone's lap (108). This act of encouragement of a personal, creative connection to faith is typical of evangelist Christian faith, and yet here Miller is queering this "personal connection" by making it a very physical human connection to be made. Rather than a Godly connection, Miller's performance emphasizes the witty, witty, complicated, humanity of connection (Miller and Roman 169). In a co-authored article, Miller and David Boxman defend the concept of "preaching to the converted" of which queer theatre has often been accused. They liken preacher and congregation to performer and audience, and the experience and affects of queer theatre as important to community building, much as other religious services create a community (175).

It is not solely the form of Miller's performance that emphasizes the religious and spiritual, but also the content. Throughout the performance, Miller returns again and again to religious language and symbols in his queer spiritual journey. As he begins to tell the story of his first time in bed with a boy, he says "I lie in the bed. The bed I was conceived on. The bed on which I would be born once again" (90), and later "We slept together on THE BED. And I was conceived again" (100). His combination of sexual awakening with spiritual discovery of self, reminiscent of "Dona Again" Christian discourse, suggests that the exploration of the queer self can be a deeply spiritual and physical experience, without allowing for a distinction between these terms. Miller's spiritual queer journey in *My Queer Body* takes on biblical proportions when he is cast out into the desert by a Devil's voice (104). Miller must then wander the desert in order to overcome his loss, bitterness and sadness, and understand his way forward.

Even though Miller's performance is deeply religious in form and content, he is also acknowledging the reality of the polarization between queer politics and the Christian Right, which, despite one's best efforts to challenge and break down, is sometimes intractable. He is emphasizing that the effort to break down dichotomies is a struggle when he says, "Only in it... when I am about to kiss a boy I have been flirting with on Santa Monica Boulevard do I have to imagine an invisible god above me is going to show a rock and smash my head in" (106). The struggle only makes his synthesis of queer and spiritual, as well as body and soul, more pressing. His ultimate statement, near the end of the performance, reclaims and synthesizes (without apology) his queer spirituality and sexuality, body and soul:

Now, I feel the blessing of being closer than they told us was possible. The fakers led us, I am not ashamed of nakedness and I will not be cast out of Paradise by Jesse Helms or some fucking junky arranged with a flaming sword in front of some garden. This is one sex between two queer men's bodies in the time of trial on the planet earth at the very end of the second millennium (121)

The message here is not one of conflation. Miller is both affirming a space for queer spirituality and at the same time relating to compromised queerness and reality as available with sexually repressive religious norms. The distinction here is between first into a spiritual space and creating a spiritual space, and Miller, especially in the three corps, is performing the latter. The space that emerges is queer, erotic, and spiritual.

Performative Identities

Plays and theatrical works can be useful forms for the expression of queer and spiritual identities. As Pellegrini explains in "Testimonial Sexuality," performance can "underscore the vital role of practice, or performance, for both religious and sexual 'identities'" (94). I would also add to this the practice of the performativity of gender identities. In another essay, "Feeling Secular," Pellegrini suggests that "queer performances [...] may actually function as codes of neural enchantment, supplying forms of affective experience resistant to the flattening effects of secular rationality" (215).¹² Surely we experience this in *Tan Miller's* performance, which is overflowing with queer spiritual feeling. As Michel Marc Bouchard's characters explain,

FATHER SAINT-MICHEL: One can do anything in the theatre, you know. One can reinvent life. One can be in love, jealous, insane, tyrannical or possessed. One can even lie and cheat. One can kill without feeling any remorse. One can die of love, or hate, or passion...
VALLIER: One can conquer the unconquerable! (177)

Theatre, as a place where "one can do anything," allows for a space in which different sexualities, genders, religions, and spiritualities can all exist, interact, synthesize, something we see in all of the theatrical works under discussion. The question is whether what happens on stage is without consequence, as *Father Saint-Michel* suggests. Are there no tangible results coming out of the gender reclamation and explorations of queer/LGBTQ¹³ and religious/spiritual identities and spaces in these theatre pieces? Or are the spaces created for queer spiritualities and queer personalities in religious canon impactful and important beyond the world of the stage?

Conclusions and Limitations

In their plays and performances, dramatists Thomson Highway, Marc Bouchard, and Tim Miller all unite themes of queer/LGBTQ¹⁴ identity of religious/spiritual identities. Highway and Bouchard both "queer" (in order to fight, the queer overtones of specific figures from Cree and Catholic religions respectively, thus affirming queer genealogies and a historical space for queer spirituality. Miller, meanwhile, queers religious forms and describes his journey with inextricably spiritually queer language and imagery. All three strive not to dismantle the body/spirit divide and challenge the Religion/Queer dichotomy of their works.

While Highway, Bouchard and Miller each, in their own ways, attempt to create a legitimate space for queer identity within spiritual spaces and religious histories, and while they attempt to understand a spirituality and religion within a queer history, they are also challenging the idea of spiritual and religious uniformity. They are affirming that those legitimate queer spaces are as diverse and variable as the term queer itself, and that the queer and the spiritual are overlapping and inextricably intertwined. These affirmations are not without their challenges. On the topic of *Dry Lips Coughs* Move to Kaposkasing, Billingham suggests that

The violent silencing of the one member of the community [Creature Natwaye] who has expressed a (formerly repressed) homosexual desire, at the very moment of Joey's big confession of miscegenism, reminds us of the continuing difficulty, if not impossibility of speaking too spirited doctrine (127).

Despite the presence of a gender-fluid, gender-modulating, drag-evoking Nambush, there is no real recognition in the Wasatchian Hill Reserve community, by the end of these companion plays, of the validity or spiritual importance of Two Spirit people. Neither does Nambush reconcile the men and women's seemingly separate communities to each other. Neither do we find in Bouchard's *Lies* an overcoming of Catholic repression of same-sex desire. Miller's performance is perhaps the most firmly and positively unifying of spiritual and queer feelings and experiences. He explains, understands, and admits the conflicts between the Church and queer/LGBTQ¹⁵ people. From his recollection as a little boy of being off his Church clothes and "reclaiming my body from the church and store" (92), to his encounters with the brutality and violence of the police as a gay activist (101, 102), to watching friends and lovers die of AIDS during the Reagan and Bush presidencies (106), Miller's performance hardly shies away from these struggles. And yet, his adoption of a preaching style, his relentless queering of religious tropes, and his emphatic spiritualization of his queer journey all refuse to leave the relationship in destructive conflict and propose instead a positive future for queer spirituality.

Unfortunately, the scope of this paper only allows for the examination of so many plays. The works discussed here were chosen because of their explicit religious text and content. However, this selection is hardly representative of queer theatrical works and religious/spirituality, as much of the dramatic tradition are male-identified and gay, or Two-Spirit in Highway's case. While there is diversity of experience between these playwrights, clearly there are only three voices out of a possible many. This paper is not attempting to make any conclusions or assumptions about any one religious system or identity and its relation to queerness. Instead it is trying to begin to address the variety of ways in which queer artists can and have explored the intertextualness between religious and spiritual feelings and queer identities. There is much more to be explored within the realms of performance, queer/LGBTQ¹⁶ and spiritual/religious identities from an exploration of female and non-cis-gender identifying artists' relations and treatments of these themes, to a consideration of a larger diversity of religious/spiritual backgrounds and lived experiences, to a more in-depth discussion of one religious/spiritual context, or even a more focused exploration of the performativity of gender, sexuality, and religious/spiritual identities.

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The Problem of Queer Justice
Genre and Judicial Motifs in the
Queer Problem Play
by Ben Hanff



portrayal of hollow and formal conceptions of justice and equality, and their insistence upon morally unresolved endings suggest an interrelation between the presentation of morally bankrupt institutions of justice and the empowerment of audience to act as jury on morally open-ended issues. The third section will contrast the queer problem play with Dustin Lance Black's *8*, a play that suggests a radical alteration in the poetics of queer drama, its positive appraisal of judicial and social institutions, as well as its morally unambiguous treatment of same-sex marriage represent a return to the didactic "thesis play" in which the play's clear stance frisks upon the audience the "right" answer to its judgmental quandary.

The Problem Play: The Audience as Jury, Judge, or Accused

Since this essay will examine genre from a historical perspective, it is important to note that definitions and realizations of a genre shift from era to era. Although diversity exists within a genre, especially across space and time, what is constant are the common elements that tie the plays in question into that genre. As Mark Williams Roche argues, "[a] genre will be realized differently in each period, yet every realization will contain certain universal features that transcend the history of its epoch" (4). Generic categories need not be mutually exclusive because a single work can be recognized as participating in multiple genres at once. The overarching characteristic of all problem plays is the notion of judgment in the face of contentious moral issues; the unsatisfying endings of these plays demand judgment from audiences, who sit as implicit juries. The problem play showcases the fact that theatre, like law, is a "social activity that shapes, directs, and normalizes the thoughts and behaviour of others. [Like] legal interpretation, [theatrical interpretation] affects its 'audience': it does things with them and to them. Hence performance always brings with it special responsibilities to the audience," including that of judgment (Bolton and Levinson 17). Nonetheless, the nature of audience judgment in the problem play genre varies. I will distinguish between three variations of problem plays: the thesis play, Henrik Ibsen's problem plays, and those of William Shakespeare.

Growing out of the genre of the well-made play, the naturalistic thesis play became a highly popular dramatic form in the 19th century with playwrights like Pierre. The playwright's development or defense of a particular idea or thesis characterizes the thesis play. In *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1895), Paula Ray, whom Pincro implies is a former prostitute, falls in love with and marries the widowed Mr. Tanqueray. Though Paula views the marriage as a new beginning, it turns out that "the future is only the past again, entered through another gate" (190). The exposure of Paula's past leads her to a breakdown, and she says to her husband, "[y]ou'll see me then at last, with other people's eyes; you'll see me as your daughter does now, as all wholesome folks see women like me" (Pincro 191). In this instance, marriage cannot solve the problems of social judgment on sexual behavior. The only way for Paula to escape her past is through suicide. Paula's

D*rag Queens on Trial: A Courtroom Melodrama* (1985) by Sly Galt, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993) by Tony Kushner, *Take Me Out* (2002) by Richard Greenberg, and *8* (2011) by Dustin Lance Black suggest an interplay between the attempt of legal and judicial systems to regulate sexual morality and behaviour, and the dramatic genre of the problem play in which judgment is a perennial motif. The works by Gilbert, Kushner, or Greenberg each present judicial systems and liberal institutions as facets of hegemonic power and the prevailing socio-sexual structure, enjoining the audience's ultimate arbiter of justice, judgment, and morality. In contrast, *8* presents a more optimistic appraisal of the potential for judicial systems to act as queer-friendly social fixtures. This faith in the American judicial system, paired with the play's outright biguous endorsement of same-sex marriage, suggests a divergence in the poetics of queer problem plays in which moral implicacy and homo-liberalism discount the possibility of an open-ended audience debate and replace the complex and ambiguity that empowers an audience as jury.

In order to illustrate this shift in the presentation of judicial systems as the actualization of the dramatic genre of the problem play in queer drama, this essay will proceed in three distinct sections. The first section will argue that the central tenet of the problem play is its focus on audience judgment. In contrast, the threefold distinction within the problem play genre between didactic thesis plays such as Sir Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, the more complex works of the early 20th century, and Shakespeare's problem plays, is how will illustrate the diversity of the genre's treatment of complex issues, especially within the prevailing socio-sexual framework, and its placement of responsibility upon the audience to act as both judge and jury in these matters. The second section of this essay will analyze the nature of judicial systems and their relation to queer individuals and movements in *Drag Queens on Trial*, *Angels in America*, and *Take Me Out*. These plays' conflation of social and legal circumstances, the

daughter-in-law, Ibsen, says in the last lines of the play, "I helped to kill her. I'd only been merciful" (Pinaro 195). Despite this admission, the prevailing socio-sexual system that the play presents—that in which sex is acceptable only within the framework of monogamous marriage—goes unchallenged. This indicates the partnership of the thesis play:

[...] the thesis play) dialectically present[ed] social problems for the sake of promoting a particular reform or upholding convention. A favourite "problem" of New Dramatists such as Jones and Pinaro was the issue of whether a "fallen woman" could be allowed back into respectable society, and the answer was always "no." (Dietrich 16)

George Bernard Shaw argued that thesis plays do not constitute true problem plays, for their conclusions are foregone, their unhappy endings resulting not for "character and event" but, instead, from a mechanical imposition of social conventions and ideology external to the play (Dietrich 16). Thesis plays' uneasy co-existence with regards to a given social institution or structure forecloses the role of audience judgment.

The role of the audience and the nature of audience judgment shifted in the works of Ibsen. In *The Quinseence of Ibsenism* (1891), Shaw argues that Ibsen's plays demonstrate to audiences that there are no easy or final solutions to the problems that life poses, particularly in the tension between the individual and the social environment in which he or she lives. Shaw said of Ibsen and his problem plays,

Ibsen substituted a terrible art of sharpshoot[ing] at the audience, tripping them, facing with them, aiming always at the sorest spot in their consciences [...] the new school will trip the spectator into forming a merely false judgment, and then convict him of it in the next act, often to his grievous mortification [...] in the theatre of Ibsen we are not flattered spectators sitting an idle hour with an ingenious and amusing entertainment; we are 'guilty creatures sitting at a play,' and the technique of pastime is no more applicable than at a murder trial. (Shaw 62)

Ibsen's problem plays construct their own form of social tribunal in which the audience comes to judge and be judged. Virtually identical in plot to *The Doctor's Tanqueray*, the titular character of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890) is driven to suicide when a judge sexually blackmails her; upon her death he infamously exclaims, "at good God! People don't do such things" (304). By characterizing Hedda's act as highly questionable at several points, yet leaving the play's ending open-ended, Ibsen empowers the audience to question the social regulation of social mores and the ways in which we judge one another.

Scholar Frederick S. Boas retroactively applied the designation of problem play to a number of works by Shakespeare that cannot easily be classified as comedies or tragedies, but which he saw as sharing traits with the plays of Ibsen. Shaw. While Shakespeare's comedies invariably end in marriage and his tragedies in death, the Bard's problem plays defy easy categorization insofar as they must

do not simply conform to such models, but leave the audience with unresolved feelings about issues that defy clear-cut resolution (St. 5). This is apparent in *Measure for Measure* (1613-04), in which Duke Vincentio departs the city of Vienna, leaving the government in the hands of a strict judge, Angelo. The Duke wishes for the unpopular laws of Vienna regarding sexual conduct to be more stringently enforced but does not want the people of Vienna to blame him for their enforcement. As a result, the overly zealous Angelo condemns the young Claudio to death for sexual practices outside of marriage; the grounds of the charge are dubious, for Claudio is engaged to the woman with whom he had sex. Meanwhile, Angelo secretly engages in iniquitous behaviour far worse than that of Claudio. When Duke Vincentio discovers these sexual intrigues, he initially sentences the characters involved to either prison or death. However, after hearing a plea for mercy, the Duke reverses his original rulings; the accused parties are sentenced to marriage. Soxy Magdelana argues that in *Measure for Measure*,

The sexuality that runs through the play is almost entirely negative, the source of disease and indignity. [...] Marriage is the public and measured answer to a private and immoderate sin, a way of harnessing Vienna's sexual appetites to strengthen, rather than weaken, the society. (327)

Perhaps Magelana is too quick in claiming that marriage is a useful tool for harnessing sexual energy. A contradictory interpretation is that although marriage is presented to solve Vienna's social ills, its actual effects may not be quite so positive. For example, rather than punishing the corrupt Angelo for any of his crimes, the Duke creates Angelo off to the woman of whom he had formerly taken advantage and Licio to the prostitute that he impregnated. The Duke's own proposal of marriage to Isabella does not even evoke a response from the nun, nor does she speak for the rest of the play. *Measure for Measure* optimizes the Shakespearean tendency to reduce socially 'just' resolution to problems of sexual immorality to two legal options: death or marriage. Rather than trumpeting the merits of marriage, *Measure for Measure* problematizes the limited options available in the regulation of sexual mores.

Judicial Systems and Queer Problem Plays

Despite the fact that the problem plays that developed in the early 20th century largely nested homosexuality negatively, the gay theatre that developed in the latter half of the twentieth century appropriated this older form. As Neil Bartlett argues, "gay writers themselves are producing what are in effect problem plays [...] focused on popular and painful issues" (306). This appropriation may be attributable to the formidable vehicle that the problem play offers for queer individuals seeking to undermine the hegemonic socio-sexual structure. The queer problem plays *One Queen on Trial*, *Angels in America*, and *Tales Me Out* confront social and institutional venues of judgment and portray bold queer judicial institutions that

perpetuate conceptions of justice constructed to exclude queer characters. The presentation of a hollow, hegemonic judicial system creates a vacuum in which the audience is compelled to fill in the moral gap. Judicial process is a particularly appropriate thematic vehicle for queer problem plays that question the socio-legal framework because the judiciary has the power to enforce its verdicts; a judging can determine whether a play's end designates it a tragedy or a comedy, while characters die or marry.

Drag Queens on Trial presents both legal and social courtrooms. The concept of the social courtroom connotes judgment by establishe peers or community, rebelling the foundation of the problem play genre insofar as it is a *de facto* courtroom. The play consists of three trial sequences flanked by the drag queens return to the social courtroom of their dressing room. Within the dressing room, the drag queens relay stories of judgment in their lives in addition to judging one another, especially for their sexual practices; the drag queens go back and forth into this courtroom to the legal courtroom in which they are institutionally judged. This illusory distinction between the legal and social courtrooms suggests that the world's a court. As for the legal courtroom, it is already over-steered, under its inhuman institutional structures and processes. In the court, the drag queen rotate through the roles of prosecutor, judge, clerk, surprise witness, and defendant. The judge in each trial sequence disappears and returns as a surprise witness who then falsely testifies against the defendant. This doubling between the judge and the surprise witness—whom the prosecutor sometimes bribes—dramatizes dissonance between the formal appearance of justice and its underlying workings, which are bent upon the destruction of queer identities. In one sequence that the judge disappears, the drag queen Judy fills with his empty chair, not realizing the judge is just that: an empty symbol of justice. The illusory distinction between legal and social courtrooms highlights the problematic and omnipresent nature of judgment.

Angels in America takes a different approach to courtrooms. About courts, justice, and the legal profession are omnipresent in Kushner's work; it only part of a legal building that the audience is privy to is its gritty subtext of washrooms. In articulating his idealistic vision of the justice system, Louis Linson, the gay "word processor" at the Federal Appeals Court, says:

It's the judge in his or her chambers, weighing, balaing news, pondering the evidence, ranging freely over categories: good, evil, innocent, guilty, the judge in his chamber of contemplation, not the judge on the bench with the gavel. The shaping of the law, not its execution [...] the balancing of the scales. (Kushner 43)

Yet it becomes clear that the existing judicial system does not fulfill Louis' vision of impartiality, independence, and cognitive purity. The judges seem to be little more than empty robes, captives of conservative political forces and the *Marshall* clerks who control the appointment process and write their opinions for them.

The prevention of judicial independence, a cornerstone of American democracy, along with the Republican monopoly on the actualization of justice, underlines the impetus behind Kushner's call for a reformed American polity and society. The symbolic root of this institutional decomposition is the character of Roy Cohn, who is based on the actual historical figure who was active in the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAAC), a political tribunal that actively sought unpolitical and sexual deviants within the American government from the 1930s to the 1970s. HUAAC's targeting of homosexuals is particularly ironic, given that Cohn's death from AIDS-related complications led many to question his sexual orientation. Kushner's Cohn states that the proudest achievement of his career is the trial of Ethel Rosenberg. Although there was not enough evidence to jail her as a communist, he was on the phone every day with the judge, broaching principles of impartiality and judicial independence, which led to her exoneration. If anything, Roy Cohn has only increased his grasp on the Justice Department and the U.S. court system, which serve as launching pads for the neoliberal social agenda associated with Ronald Reagan. *Angels in America* prods audiences to judge the judges alongside the social and legal order of the United States.

Take Me Out, the Drag Queens on Trial, blurs the line between social and institutional forms of judgment by highlighting the somewhat illusory divide between public and private realms. Most of the play takes place in the locker room of a professional baseball team after the play's main character, Darren Lemming, a mixed-race baseball player at the peak of his career, publicly comes out as gay. The media realm and the baseball diamond constitute public social and institutional courtrooms. When Darren reveals his sexual orientation during a media conference, the team plays along, performing tolerance for the cameras in this very public realm. Yet soon after, behind closed doors, Darren is mistreated by his teammates, prompting him to say, "I'm sensing a difference between the public and the private realms" (Greenberg 9). The locker room becomes a private social court in which baseball's public rules do not apply. This divide between public and private is representative of the prevailing liberal constitutional democracy, in which rules of equality apply only to public actors while having little power in the private realm (Bazerman 5). This liberal constitutional motif extends beyond the functioning of the team in the public realm and into the game of baseball itself. Mason, Darren's accountant, says,

Baseball is a perfect metaphor for hope in a democratic society. It has to do with the rules of play, it has to do with the mode of enforcement of those rules [...] the game's noble equality, equality, that is, of opportunity. Everyone is given the same chance. [...] And then, to ensure that everything remains fair, justices are ranged around the park to witness and assess the play. And if the justice errs, an appeal can be made. It's invariably turned down, but that's part of what makes the metaphor so right. Because even in the most well meant of systems, error is inevitable. Even within the forest of paradigms.

Mason articulates a "formal" equality in which each player receives the same done at the plate, and in which the mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure fairness do not make corrections unless an egregious and highly visible violation of the rules has occurred. Umpires, the judges of the baseball diamond, are so much concerned with substantively equal outcomes as with the appearance of fairness through the formality of equal opportunity at bat. By stressing equality of opportunity, the baseball league can ignore equality of condition.

The judicial structure in *Drag Queens on Trial* seems specifically designed to prevent queer characters from obtaining justice. The possible trial pleas of "guilty or 'not guilty'" create a semantic no-win scenario either the queer character pleads guilty and are condemned or pleads innocent and betray their identities. The drag queens attempt to escape this predicament by blaming being a drag queen on factors outside of their control. They put forward an incoherent essentialist plea, stating, "I hate my 'not guilty' plea on my god green train" (Gilbert 14). The drag queens are forced to defend their gender limbo on the grounds of specific transmuting events in their lives, such as being born on a sled. In so doing the plead innocent due to a lack of means, not the mindful will to commit the act. Nevertheless, delivering those stories does not help the drag queens escape the justice system's insistence on objective truth and consistency. After the prosecution berates Marlene for fabricating the story of her upbringing, she responds, "yes, I made up those lies about my past, but only because my past could not be my past, because I am too fascinating and romantic a human being to have ever had a normal upbringing" (Gilbert 17). The prosecutor replies, "I'm not here in a court of law there is only truth and lies" (Gilbert 17). Although Marlene was not born a woman, nor on a sled, it is still her chosen identity. When Mafer dresses as a woman, she is a woman, though such a statement would not pass court test of perjury. This tension between essentialism and non-essentialism plays out in the drag queens' complaint about the male voice that announces at beginning and end of each courtroom sequence. The voice excoerates himself claiming that he is pre-recorded and simply following the script, thereby distancing himself as blameless for making up the three drag queens — Mailer, Job, and Lana — endure the preposterous trial. The voice's plea is implausible, given that he responds actively to what the drag queens say. Nonetheless, in a conventional sense, the voice's argument that he has no choice is unhelpful insofar as he is following Gilbert's script. In fact, the stage directions specify that the voice be silent, which explains why no actor played the voice in the play's 1985 production (Gilbert 1). The voice's essentialist plea raises the question of whether society can wait for objective truth in all cases. An answer is provided during Lana's trial, as she performs a dramatic coup by pleading guilty and shedding the subjective plea of extenuating circumstances. But an admission of guilt is not enough to halt the justice system's onslaught of her identity; the surprise witness shows up to

testify, humiliates, and dehumanizes Lana, and says that she is dead. Here, traditional hegemonic conceptions of truth and justice, as well as the mind's operation of judicial institutions, work to camouflage a malicious hatred of drag queens and their identities.

Similarly, in *Angels in America*, the actualization of justice and rights seem to be controlled by hegemonic forces at odds with LGBT subjects. A former drag queen, Belize, says of conservatives,

these people don't begin to know what, ontologically, freedom is or human rights, like they see those bourgeois property-based rights-of-Man type rights but that's not enlightenment, not democracy, not what's implicit, what's potential within the idea, not the idea with blood in it. That's just liberality, the worst kind of the always, really bourgeois tolerance. [...] And underneath all the tolerance is intense, passionate hatred. (Kushner 96)

The rulings that Joe, a closeted Mormon clerk, makes that exclude LGBT individuals from equal treatment under the law expose the limits of the right-wing's hollow version of equality. Initially, Joe believes that right-wing forces have empowered America. He exclaims, "America has rediscovered itself. Its sacred position as a moral nation [...] the truth restored. Law restored" (Kushner 32). Yet, after sexually experimenting with men, Joe responds to Louis' criticism of his verdicts by declaring that judicial systems are imperfect: "it's law, not justice, it's power, not the merit of its exercise, it's not an expression of the ideal" (Kushner 242). This confession traces apart the presupposition that justice and judicial process are one and the same; legal systems are not living up to the ideals in which Louis or Joe had previously believed. The institutional trappings and principles of judicial process are a facade behind which hidden forces act independently of lofty notions of fairness. In this instance, the formal apparatus of justice serves only to legitimize the right-wing faction's attacks on queer lifestyle.

The reason that the baseball league in *Take Me Out* is more concerned with the appearance of addressing homophobia than the reality of it is because the league is solely motivated by self-interest. Although the non-player pitcher, Shane, breathes private rules—such as the convention that new players introduce themselves to older players, in order to avoid talking to Darren—it is only after Shane publicizes his prejudice in an interview that the league takes rule violation seriously and suspends him. However, after then publishing a superficial apology written by his teammate Kippy, Shane is quickly welcomed back onto the team. This incident demonstrates that the team's first priority is success. Similarly, Darren's coming out is well received partially because he is integral to the team. When Darren says that it would not be right to allow Shane's re-entrance, the team's manager, Skipper, retorts, "[a]ll sorts of things aren't right [...] Is it right, for instance, for somebody to land one of the finest contracts in baseball history and only then reveal his interesting little personal quirk? Is that 'right'? I ask you" (Greenberg 62).

Slipster then reveals that none of the other team members are sticking up for Darren and that they have no problem with Shane rejoining the team. The team and its leadership are indifferent to the question of morality or fairness when the team needs players like Shane in order to succeed. Justice and fairness are enforced only for the sake of appearance and are ultimately subordinate to the overall success of the individualistic team, an apt metaphor for American society.

Drag Queens on Trial's ending suggests a departure from melodrama as a joining of forces with the problem play genre. In her impassioned plea to the audience, Lana says, "[t]o who are you, who is anyone to judge? [...] to live on the edge of morality, society, of the world itself and if I must die for it, so be it" (Gilbert 45). The courtroom's response of spontaneous, taped applause emphasizes that Lana's statement is a dramatized cliché (Gilbert 45). The play ends with closing statements by the prosecution and defence attorneys, whose role is played by all three characters speaking in turn. The prosecution demands death sentences—even a burning at the stake—from the audience-jury, saying this necessary in order to protect society's white picket fences and nuclear families. The defence, on the other hand, says, "[t]o condemn these men is to condemn ourselves, brave, alive, and dangerous in ourselves," wrongly referring to the drag queen as essentially men (Gilbert 46). The attorneys' direct address to the audience ignites the convergence of the problem play genre with the courtroom melodrama. The trial sequence then ends without an authoritative ruling, as is characteristic of its problem play, and judgement is reserved for the audience. Prior Brooks testifies melodramatically:

The logic of the excluded middle: right versus wrong, not a series of the nuances by which two polar positions imply one another and move toward each other dialectically. [...] we do not see compromise or gradual development, but rather polarization and the complete ordering of evil or its utter conversion. (Reiche 251)

Brooks's conception of melodrama does not seem to apply beyond the courtier sequences. Gilbert's play ends ambiguously as the drag queens draw attention to the audience. Maffei says, "they're not our problem. They should be able to take the theatre by themselves"; then, in unison, the drag queens sing the last line of the play: "[g]et ready for the judgment day" (Gilbert 49). In the process of opening the audience's role as an implicit jury, the convention of audience judgment simultaneously acclaimed and discredited: the audience has been convinced, but also asked to reach a verdict.

In contrast, the ending of *Angels in America* places a conventional issue in the hands of an audience-jury through the disquieting collision of judicial and religious motifs, epitomized by Roy Cohn's assertion that "lawyers are the high priests of America" (Kushner 221). In some stagings, the angels appear their final scene dressed in judicial robes, creating the apparatus or elevation of a celestial courtroom (Fure 2). In this light, the medical punning of [the

corral] character, constitutes a legal pardoning in the *Angels* alternate reality. This action averts the play from tragedy and into a vague call to arms for a new world order. Prior tells the angels that they should sue God: "[s]ue the bastard for selling out. How dare He!" (Kushner 264). In hell, Cohn takes up the defence of God, planning to return to his old immoral practices of bribery and lying. Cohn will try to withhold justice from heaven and earth, but outside of the Republicanized courtroom, it seems that the angels might have a fair legal fight ahead of them. In the epilogue, the characters' discussion about making a leap into the unknown mirrors the freedom that Kushner gives the audience to judge how best to reform the United States. David Savrin refutes this interpretation, arguing that the play's end is not as ambivalent as it appears. He accuses Kushner of embracing only a slight reform of American hegemonic values: "Angels seek forth a liberal pluralist vision of America in which all, not in spite but because of their diversity, will be welcomed into the new Jerusalem [...] Kushner has resurrected a vision of America as both promised land and land of infantile promise" (Savrin 125). Even if one accepts Savrin's argument that Kushner unconsciously favours revamping the liberal state instead of obliterating it, *Angels in America* does not definitively reject other socio-political options. As Hannah, Joe's mother, says, "[y]ou can't live in the world without an idea of the world, but it's lying that makes ideas. You can't wait for a theory, but you have to have a theory" (Kushner 278). Ultimately, Kushner's problem play is a centrist work that questions the socio-political status quo and tacitly endorses major renovations to the pre-existing structure, but still leaves it to the audience to discover a new theory.

Despite the baseball league's indifference to justice in *Take Me Out*, the play invites the audience to locate responsibility for the play's events. The play begins with Kippy, Darren's closest friend on the team, trying to assign blame in order to make sense of the events that occurred between Darren and Shane. Kippy initially blames Darren, then backtracks and searches for an alternative explanation, jokingly blaming the snake in the Garden of Eden. The scene in which Darren attackily flings himself onto Shane in the shower, which Shane characterizes as rape, suggests that the play does not endorse unconditional support for Darren. His actions have consequences, for it is in the resulting, aggravated moment that Shane kills the team's star player, Davey, with a murderous pitch. Shane even claims that he was merely executing an order that Darren had implicitly given when he told Davey to "drop dead" (Greenberg 94). Kippy says:

After Shane killed Davey with the pitch, the question arose: under whose jurisdiction does this event fall? [...] there was some sense that this was not accident, this was murder. (Greenberg 95)

The characters should be in a police station, but the stage directions remain vague as to their location. Ostensibly, it is just a normal room. Once again, justice and the legal system are noticeably absent, and Shane is expelled from the baseball

league. Kippy then comments, "[t]hrough with pitching the way it is these days," (Greenberg 108). This trailing off suggests he does not believe that Shane's position will be permanent. Shane is subsequently arrested for shooting milk bottles at a convenience store while killing Davey in the course of a private game approach does not violate ethical principles, shooting private merchandise in public (as Darren writes to leave baseball) but is constrained by financial necessity, which in events of the play have not affected Mason's love for the sport. The baseball season ends, and Mason says in the last line of the play, "[w]hat will we do tonight?" (Greenberg 116). The characters are trapped, either by choice or necessity, within a social structure that desperately requires amendment. The central dilemma of this problem play is the inverse of Kushner's. While Kushner focuses on how to revitalize the American play, Greenberg focuses on the reconstitution of queerness with the residual homophobia that exists in a changing American society that is only nominally accepted homosexuality.

8 and the Shifting Queer Problem Play

8 presents a divergence and a potentially seismic shift in the performance poetics of queer courtrooms insofar as it involves a substantial change in the relationship between judicial systems and queer individuals and community, as well as in the role of the audience in casting judgment. 8 portrays the closing segment of *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* (2013), the federal trial that led to the overturning of Proposition 8, an amendment eliminating rights of same-sex couples to marry in California.¹ The play is written in the style of verbatim theatre re-enactment using transcripts from the trial, journalists' records, and media interviews with plaintiffs, defendants, and proponents involved. Because Perry v. Schwarzenegger was not broadcast on television, the play attempts to bring the events of the trial into the national debate on marriage equality. The play also introduces some of the plaintiffs and their children as a means of showcasing the human effect of its normal-seeming family.

Unlike the plays previously discussed, 8 presents a judicial system through which LGBT subjects can attain their rights and justice. In the first scene of the play, before the trial sequence begins, Kevs and Sandy ask their children, Spence and Elliot, if they want their family to become involved with the judicial review of Proposition 8. Gay characters are no longer brought before legal tribunals to have their sexual values attacked, nor is the justice system mysteriously absent in claiming rights to gay individuals. Instead, these individuals enter the justice system on their own free will. The attorneys, Olson and Boise, use legal precedent from *In re: Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) to support their case for same-sex marriage and to show that homosexuals are a minority that requires protection under the law.² Olson says, "[w]e are talking about a group of individuals who meet every one of the standards for suspect classification. They are a minority. There wasn't any dispute about it. It's an immutable characteristic." 8 characterizes the court as a potential champion

of LGBT rights that is able to override the majoritarian social courtroom of the ballot box in order to protect minority rights. Departing from earlier queer plays in which legal courtrooms blindly allow and enforce discriminatory laws, 8 presents a court that involves itself in policy-making matters to correct what it views as injustice against queers.

Unlike *Once Queens on Trial*, 8 does not depict the dichotomies of "guilty" or "not guilty" and truth or falsehood as part of a legal structure that is meant to deny LGBT subjects legal rights. The trial format and structure that champions big and truth disadvantages the proponents of Proposition 8. Witnesses defending the ban on same-sex marriage cannot structure their arguments in any coherent fashion that conforms to the hard logic and search for facts required by the court.

BOISE: Have any of the scholars that you've said you relied on said that permitting same-sex marriage will cause a reduction in heterosexual marriage? That's a "yes," "no," or "I don't know."

BLANKENHORN: Well, I know the answer. That—I cannot answer you correctly if the only words I'm allowed to choose from is "yes" or "no." I can give my answer in a very brief sentence.

JUDGE WALKER: If you know the answer, why don't you share it with us?

BLANKENHORN:—Well, I would be happy to, but he's only permitting me to give "yes" and "no."—And—I cannot do that and be accurate.

WALKER: He is giving you three choices: "yes," "no," "I don't know."
(Black)

The play highlights the lack of empirical evidence and clear argumentation on the part of proponents of Proposition 8. Black characterizes judicial institutions as capable of revealing faulty logic, as attorneys successfully expose the fact that even the defense's witness, Blankenhorn, supports same-sex marriage. Boise reads the writings of Blankenhorn to the court, "we would be more"—emphatic "more"—"American on the day we permitted same-sex marriage than we were on the day before." (Black). In a monologue, Boise attributes Blankenhorn's disclosure of his personal views in favour of same-sex marriage to the stewardship of the court, saying that although it is easy to lie for the cameras,

When they come into court and they have to support and defend their opinions under oath and cross-examination, those opinions just melt away. There simply wasn't any evidence. There weren't any empirical studies. It's made up. It's just science. And it's easy to say that on television, but the witness stand is a lovely place to be. And when you come into court, you can't do that. And that's what we did. We put fear and prejudice on trial. (Black)

8 puts the legal courtroom on a pedestal for its ability to override the democratic forces of political judgment that are prejudicial. The play includes clips of television advertisements that were aired supporting Proposition 8 before its ratification by voters. These ads constituted a scare campaign that cannot be considered an

example of fair public discourse. In *8*, judicial processes and structures are also tenuous for LGBT subjects seeking to establish their rights.

Though *8* is a work of verbatim (theatre that is partially based on transcripts from the trial, Black does not sacrifice artistic intent) in the spoken words of the play, Black's choice to include or exclude those elements as well as his writing of scenes outside of the trial context allow him artistic license in crafting the story of the play. In fact, *8* contains several elements of the problem play genre, including an emphasis on audience judgment and the presentation of a concrete moral issue for the community. Near the end of the play, a reporter asks,

On August 4, 2010, Federal Judge Walker ruled unequivocally that California's gay marriage ban, Proposition 8, is unconstitutional. It was the beginning of what promises to be a longer struggle, and one destined for this country's highest court. (Black)

The play then ends with the two gay couples explaining why they want Proposition 8 to be reversed: they want to be married like other Americans, bequeathed equal rights and protections, and able to enjoy their own nuclear family units. The salient message in favour of same-sex marriage illustrates the existing disconnect between the theoretical potential and political promise of queer theory and the actual experience and desire of LGBT subjects. Unlike the works of Gilbert Kushner, and Greenberg, which broadly critique American social and legal structures, *8* is part of an assimilationist, equal-rights agenda. According to Sara West

Homosexuality names the quest for acceptance, legitimacy, and formal equality through a pragmatic program animated by individual economic interests, a privatized sexual politics, and a restricted notion of national public life. A ruse of parity and inclusion, homobisexuality allows for LGBT representation without a significant or meaningful redistribution of material and cultural resources or a transformation in the structures of power. (Warner 2)

8 has openly attempted to characterize itself as a mainstream play. Its *Studio* version includes performances from well-known actors including George Clooney, Brad Pitt, and Martin Sheen. Black's presentation of "normal" celebratory LGBT families implies that the play is trying to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, and, in particular, to a straight audience. These elements suggest a shift in the genre of the queer problem play away from the presentation of complex and unresolved issues towards simplification due to the impulse to assimilate. *8*'s forgoe resolution of supporting marriage equality shifts the nature of audience judgment appealing to the new socio-sexual consensus, echoing the thesis play of *Parto*.

Divergence or Shift?

In *Drug Queens on Trial*, *Angels in America*, and *Take Me Out*, troubled endings paired with the presentation of hollow judicial systems that serve as

tools of hegemonic power give the audience the role of ultimate arbiter of justice, judgment, and morality. On the other hand, *8* presents a more optimistic appraisal of the potential of judicial systems to act as queer-friendly social forces. *8*'s faith in judicial institutions and the play's unambiguous enforcement of same-sex marriage suggest a potential shift in the poetics of queer problem plays away from the moral ambiguity and complexity that empowers an audience as jury and towards a moral simplicity, realism, and "homo-liberalism" meant to foreclose audience debate. As previously mentioned, Shakespeare's comedies always ended in marriage and his tragedies in death. Gilbert, Kushner, and Greenberg's works all subvert that duality and decline to give audiences such definitive endings. *8*, which is directed in the American polity and the U.S. Supreme Court, requests the forging of a new path in queer dramaturgy: the creation of (traditional theatrical) comedies that can end in marriage.

It is possible that *8* is an anomaly, or that queer playwrights will return to analogous problem plays in due course. Moreover, the renovations that are currently being made to the socio-sexual system do not necessarily equally benefit the groups that fall underneath the category of "queer." It is possible that only gay white males encountered in their cocoon of homo-liberalism are dislodging moral integrity in drama. Regardless, I hesitate to declare that the queer problem play is a thing of the past. *Drug Queens on Trial*, *Angels in America*, and *Take Me Out* are the product of a specific socio-sexual system in which the hegemony of heterosexuality places queers on the margins of society, politics, and the economy. Judicial rulings that disadvantaged gays are a reflection of that, just as *United States v. Windsor* and *Hollingsworth v. Perry* signify the increasing assimilation and protection of LGBT individuals within contemporary society. Many American LGBT rights groups remain singularly focused on obtaining marriage equality in all fifty states and across the world because they perceive this as one of the final steps towards integration and assimilation. Interestingly, Shaw forecasts this situation to be argued, "a drama with a social question for the motive cannot outlive the solution of that question" (qtd. in Stryker 65). When the struggle is between man and a purely legal institution, "nothing can prolong [the drama's] life beyond that of the institution" (Stryker 65). The problem play can not outlast the problem.

Endnotes

1. In June 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its verdict in *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (formerly *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*). The Court upheld the Ninth Circuit appeal that altered the original ruling. Proposition 8.
2. *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) reversed *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) in which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of state bans on sodomy.

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**"I tell and finger it like braille":
Poetic Creation and the Narrativization
of Historical Artefacts**
by Christy Frost

How the crystal is developed



Holding an ivory swan carved by a member of an extinct species, the speaker in Al Purdy's poem "Lament for the Doroists" states that 500 years / the ivory thought / is still warm" (73-75). Purdy's speaker begins a lament for an extinct people by describing the only part of their culture that he holds in his hand: a material artifact. Similarly, the speakers of Robert Kroetsch's "Stone Hammer Poem" and Seamus Heaney's "Harvest Bow" create meaning about the past by contemplating historical objects. All three speakers act as if explicitly either poets or artists. Kroetsch's speaker describes how he "sings [his poems]" (148-149). Heaney's speaker aligns his written poem with his inherited "harvest bow," and Purdy's speaker implies that he is a hand or a writer which calls his poem a "lament." Through these speakers who are also artist figures, the three poets explore the ways in which artists create a transgenerational history of which the poets themselves are a part. In dramatically different poetic styles and lyric voices, the poets depict the movement of material things through time, and they question how their own poetry will connect with future readers. He examines the extinct Doroists' "ivory swans" (2), Purdy imagines how material objects allow individuals to convey their thoughts to future generations. Heaney, Purdy seeks to establish continuity between himself and an extinct people by aligning himself with the Doroist carver—whose thoughts Purdy believes he accesses through the swans—Purdy suggests that his own thought will be legible and "warm" (75) in his poetry even if his "twentieth century people" (63) are how become extinct. In contrast, Kroetsch's disjointed and non-linear poem emphasizes the highly artificial and deterministic nature of any attempt to construct clear causal narrative that connects past and present. By drawing parallels between his writing and the shaping of the stone hammer, Kroetsch questions how he can control his authorial role given him over his poetry's meaning. Rather than wrap up his thoughts as his art's source and centre of meaning, Kroetsch imagines himself as just another shaper or carver of a source material that is

a million
years older than
the hand that
chipped stone. (32-35)

In "The Harvest Bow," Heaney suggests that rather than establishing causal links between past and present, narrative art can weave together strands of the past in order to transform and preserve them for the future. Unlike Kroetsch, Heaney does not completely undermine the poet's ability to create his art's meaning but rather allows the harvest bow's movement through time to highlight how the "readers" of objects also determine their meaning. By engaging with material objects, the three poets attempt to define their own poetic practices and to understand the way objects—and by extension their poems—either change or remain stable as they move through time.

All three poets accept the idea that human history is inseparable from the history of material culture. The things people make or appropriate for work or pleasure move through time with their owners and connect one generation to the next. Hannah Arendt draws attention to what she calls "the thing-character" (93) of the world, that is, the world's materiality that allows people to create enduring cultural objects that last longer than a single human's lifetime. She points out that such cultural objects "guarantee the permanence and durability without which a world would not be possible at all" (94). For Arendt, objects allow people to establish continuity between the past and the present and they prevent each generation from having to create a new society from scratch.

Jonathan Harris suggests that as things move through time, "the many shaping hands introduce into an object multiple traces of different times, rendering the supposedly singular thing plural, both physically and temporally" (20). While this pluralization does not negate the object's contribution to a transgenerational social world—indeed, the object's ability to accumulate temporal traces can help it create an enduring social world—it complicates the idea that things provide a stable source of continuity between different times. While Harris does not deny that the social separateness of things from human beings allows the things to function as Arendt describes—as able to provide the social and cultural world with "permanence and durability"—Harris nevertheless maintains that objects change even as they create continuity between generations. Similarly, studies in material culture draw attention to the ways in which things change not simply by moving through time but also by being used. Carl Knappett notes that in certain cases things do not stand apart from humans and that "all tools entail some degree of psychological and social connection with their users" (18). For an object that has passed through multiple people's hands throughout history, this idea implies that some of the multiple traces of different times ("Harris 20") inscribed on the thing are remnants of the thing's "psychological and social connection with [its] users" (Knappett 18).

Thus, the three poets must negotiate the tension between accepting that "the

thing-character" of the world can create enduring public space and reaching into each generation changes the very things it relies on for its connection to the past. By interacting with objects, the poets gain a sense of themselves in relation to its past users and makers who shaped the artefacts. Moreover, by understanding how material artefacts condition their relationships with the past, they imagine how it things they make will endure and create a cultural world that will exist for future generations. When constructing a historical narrative around a material object, the poets must take into account an artefact's paradoxical nature, both stable and constantly changing. By creatively filling in the gaps in the objects' histories, the poets demonstrate that they are not simply passive readers of the objects' histories but also artistic creators in their own right. Furthermore, in all three poems, the writers in some way align their own poetry with the material objects they describe by identifying their poetry with historical artefacts, the three writers use their re-visualization of these artefacts to articulate their beliefs about the nature of their own art and its ability to connect with future readers.

In his book *Uttermost Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, Harris suggests that we can understand historical artefacts as palimpsests. In its original sense, palimpsest is "a writing surface on which the original text has been effaced partially, erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed" (OED), but the word can also be used to describe a thing likened to such a writing surface, especially in having been reused or altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form; a multilayered record" (OED). As material artefacts move through time, they become a kind of writing surface in which traces of different moments in time are inscribed. Harris's idea that "the many shaping hands introduce into an object multiple traces of different times" (20) suggests that many different marks can be inscribed on an object without ceasing each other out. While the traces on the palimpsest's surface can exist in layers, they also overlap and interact. When examining or "reading" a single artifact, it is often the "reader" who chooses how to understand the traces' interaction. Understanding an object as a palimpsest helps reconcile Aron's idea that objects establish tangible links between generations—creating the thing-character of its world—with Harris's claim that every generation changes the material object that pass through its hands. A palimpsest is simultaneously an enduring material fact that helps create a permanent social world and a radically mutable surface on which multiple people can inscribe different meanings.

In their poems, Heaney, Purdy, and Kroeetsch all register an awareness of the ways in which a material object can function as a palimpsest that is "partly both physically and temporally" (Harris 20). In "The Harvest Bow," Heaney draws attention to the way that the harvest bow is "temporally" plural by depicting how at different moments. In the present the speaker has the bow "mashed up at our deal dresser" (27), yet he also describes his father "plai[ng] the harvest bow" (3) and wearing the "harvest bow in [his] lipel" (16). Moreover, by comparing

his bow to a "drawn snare" (28), Heaney points out the object's own ability to capture traces of the past. Heaney's speaker also demonstrates how he can read the traces on the harvest bow when he "finger[s] it like braille" (11). Similarly, as Purdy seeks a way to tell the story of an extinct people, he emphasizes an object's ability to contain "traces of different times." In his poem, however, Purdy ignores the traces that have been inscribed on the object since the time of the Dorsets and focuses only on how the oldest traces can help him understand the Dorsets' life. "Stone Hammer Poem" presents the most thorough understanding of the palimpsestic nature of historical artefacts. At various points Kroeetsch layers different moments from the stone hammer's history; he moves from describing how

the stone maul
was found
in the field
my grandfather
thought
was his (23-43)

in section four to stating "it is a stone / old as the last / Ice Age" (46-48) in section five. Like the speaker of Heaney's poem, Kroeetsch's speaker wishes to read the traces of the past left on the object in order to know "what happened" (72). Kroeetsch's speaker, however, makes that desire ambivalent by wishing to "know (we know) / WHAT HAPPENED" (75-76), which suggests that while he wants to know factual details about the past, he also recognizes that "not know[ing]" gives him greater creative freedom in his reading of the palimpsest's stone.

A palimpsest, because it "implies voids, illegibilities, and erasures" (Harris 28), allows all three poets to take an active, creative role in "reading" and thereby writing the history of things. Monika Madernik observes that when writing about history, "the only room for speculation is in the areas of indeterminacy" (3), and it is precisely in the grey areas of the objects' pasts that the poets can most easily assert their own voices. Because their objects' histories contain more "voids" (28), Purdy and Kroeetsch have greater freedom than Heaney to exercise their own poetic imaginations. For Heaney, some of the "illegibilities" in his object's past seem not to be factual gaps that he can fill in with imagined details but rather things that were "unread" (12) in the past that he now wishes to verbalize. Harris states that "the very idea of the palimpsest involves an element of the preposterous: it disregards temporal sequence by conjoining upon one writing surface the inscriptions of past and present" (186). In these three poems, the palimpsestic "voids, illegibilities, and erasures," along with the absence of a visible "temporal sequence" among the traces on the surface of the material objects, leave room for the poets to create their own narratives concerning the objects' histories. While all three poets are in some way readers of the material objects, they seem more interested in asserting themselves as active writers than remaining passive readers. By including the words

"lament" and "poem" in their poems' titles, Purdy and Kroeetsch draw attention to the fact that their poems are not simply factual depictions of objects but also creative works of art. The titles suggest that the poets want readers to focus attention on the poems themselves as on the objects they depict.

One way in which the poets actively respond to the "illogibilities" and "voids" in their objects' histories is by creating narratives. Floderik claims that "the human brain is constructed in such a way that it captures many complex relationships in the form of narrative structures, metaphors or analogies" (1). "[Narratives], she says, "are based on cause- and effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events" (2). While all three poets do attempt to understand the relationship between the different temporal traces on the objects through some kind of narrative form, the poets are not all equally invested in illuminating causal links. Because they are creating narratives about the past, however, the question of how the past became or caused the present provides at least a minor subject to each poem.

At first glance, Purdy's poem seems very concerned with cause and effect. By contemplating the "carved ivory swans / all that remains of the Dorsetgen" (2-3) as well as the "voids" present in the Dorsetts' history, Purdy's speaker seems to search for the cause of the Dorsetts' extinction. Near the middle of his poem he imagines the Dorsetts themselves asking his own question: "what's wrong? What happened?" (26). The speaker acknowledges that he cannot know the true cause of the Dorsetts' extinction; he first advances the theory that "they couldn't cope with little roen / who came from the west with dogs" (18-19) and then immediately undercuts his own tone of certainty by adding "or else in a warm climate, get / the sea's wear lack to cold waters" (20-21). As the poem progresses, Purdy's speaker does not seem overly disturbed by his inability to determine the final cause of the Dorsetts' extinction, and he allows himself the freedom to imagine the story of the last living Dorset. When he describes the last Dorset and compares "her" to the last living Dorset. When he describes the last Dorset and compares "her" to his name was Kudluk / and watch him sitting there" (51-52), he signals to the reader that he is aware that his account is fictional. He also believes, however, that his poem in some way allows the reader to "watch" the past. Purdy's speaker responds creatively to his lack of knowledge by fashioning a narrative about the death of Kudluk, who, after carrying a swan for his dead granddaughter "in an of hunger" (69), simply waits in the "beginning darkness" (68) until "after a while wind / blows down the tent and snow / begins to cover him" (72).

Purdy's speaker, though, does not seem able to resolve the larger question of cause and effect that lies at the heart of his poem: the question of how to think about an extinct people in relation to "twentieth-century people" (3), when the Dorsetts cannot be the ancestors of anyone currently alive. Just as Purdy's speaker does not imagine any human interacting with the "ivory swans" between the Dorsetts' time and his own. When he states that "they have not imagined us in their future / how could we imagine them in the past" (34-35), he

expresses doubt about the ability of the imagination to bridge the gap between the Dorsetts and himself. At the beginning of his poem, Purdy's speaker presents the Dorsetts as radically different from "twentieth century people / apartment dwellers" (30-31). Later, when Purdy's speaker imagines the Dorsetts as the "last great zed" (42) and "twentieth century people" as "a mammal the size of a mouse" (35), he draws on evolutionary imagery to portray the Dorsetts as a species unable to evolve into the present. Rather than establishing "cause-and-effect relationships" that are applied to sequences of events," Purdy's poem calls into question the possibility of establishing any relationship with the extinct Dorset race.

In Kroeetsch's poem, the speaker is similarly unable or unwilling to construct a causal sequence. Instead, he presents a non-linear narrative that imagines history as a series of unconnected accidents. The numbered sections give the poem the illusion of linearity but do not deliver a straightforward chronological development. Robert Lecker suggests that "any account of Kroeetsch's aesthetic must consider [the] play of possible meanings"; it must balance the impulse to find coherence with the knowledge that such coherence can never be found" (124). With its numbered sections and its references to the past of the speaker's family, Kroeetsch's poem tantalizes the reader by seeming to promise coherence without quite delivering it. With its "play of possible meanings," the poem eruditely insists on many illogibilities and voids as the palimpsest of object itself. The separation of the different moments in the stone's history into discrete sections suggests that Kroeetsch's speaker shares Purdy's speaker's inability to imagine direct connections between the past and the present. While relating the stone's history, the speaker draws attention to moments when the stone is lost and found accidentally: he states that the stone was "found in a wheatfield / lost" (19-20) and he imagines that "a boy playing / lost it in / the prairie wood" (25-29). Later he describes how "his stone man / was found, / In the field" (38-40) and still later how his "grandfather / lost the stone man" (108-109). The repeated emphasis on losing and finding makes the stone seem to pop in and out of existence as it moves through time, re-emerging only to disappear again. The speaker suggests that he cannot tell a story about the stone that delivers "coherence" (Lecker: 124) because the stone's history has too many voids.

Lecker also explores Kroeetsch's preoccupation with the "relationship between language and being" (127) and the ways in which a narrative can both create and deplete a world. Lecker points out that for Kroeetsch, the author often "becomes a kind of god who can create a world from nothing by giving it voice and form; yet that kind of god, Kroeetsch knows, is at once a fool, the offspring of a deterministic world view which argues that experience can be ordered through narrative design" (127). In "Stone Hammer Poem," Kroeetsch's speaker does in some way play the role of narrative god as he confidently describes the movement of a piece of land through a series of owners—

...the Indian who
gave it to the Queen
(for a price) who
gave it to the CFR
(for a price) which
gave it to my grandfather
(for a price) who
gave it to my father (92-99)

—yet Kroeetsch also rejects a “deterministic” narrative of history by highlighting the sheer randomness of the stone’s movement through time.

While Heaney’s narrative does not explicitly map out relations of cause and effect, Heaney’s speaker is nevertheless interested in understanding his relationship to the past and to his father. Unlike the speaker of Kroeetsch’s poem, Heaney’s speaker seems to hope that “experience can be ordered through narrative design” (Locker 127). Heaney’s poem can be seen as the process of the speaker ordering strands of his past into something he can keep. Heaney’s “plait[ing]” (1) suggests of complex rhymes and half-rhymes mimics his father’s act of “plait[ing] the harvest bow” (1). The poem’s title further suggests that Heaney’s speaker wishes to align his own poem about the past with his father’s art. Coventry Patmore also has that “the end of art is peace?” (25), which Heaney’s speaker quotes at the beginning of the last stanza, comments in different ways on his approach to preserving his childhood memories. On one level, this line suggests that he is making up his father’s death—his father whose hands “harked to their gift and worked still but inert” (9). The Patmore quotation also highlights the speaker’s belief that *creative* narrative art can help him make peace with his past. The speaker’s added comment that they “could be the motto of this frail device / that I have pinned up on my ideal dresser” (26-27) underscores this belief, however. The speaker pleads himself a remove from this idea of art making peace possible; he has pinned up the motto, but he does not claim the motto wholly for himself.

Despite his ambivalence to the idea that art can create peace, Heaney’s speaker seems to present the harvest bow as a model for how to relate to the past. When he describes his father making the bow, he states that it is made “in what that does not rust / but brightens as it tightens twice by twist” (3-4); this attempt to transform the original corn into a kind of “burnished” (30) wood that “brightens” and will not “rust.” Moreover, it is by “spying into its golden loops” (13) that the speaker narrates a story about a childhood afternoon he spent with his father. The speaker does not imagine the past as a causal link that is clearly separate from the present but rather as something that can be worked into a new form usable for the future. Through the material object of the bow, the speaker seems to see the past as something that must be transformed into art before he can experience “peace” (25). He appears to suggest that if he does not gain peace through *art*, his past and his father’s life could somehow in retrospect disturb his present. Heaney imagines that writing poetry is a way of gaining control over the world

part’s disruptive power.

By writing in the voices of speakers who are also poets, Purdy, Kroeetsch, and Heaney all work through issues regarding their own poetry. These three poets at last partially reject the idea that they can establish clear causal links between the past and the present in their narrativization of historical artifacts. This rejection of linear cause and effect is reflected in the lyric form of these three poems. A lyric poem typically does not rely on linear narrative and is “uttered by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought and feeling” (Abrams 201). Moreover, Heather Dubrow points out that “lyric has traditionally been seen as an unmediated expression of the subjective and of subjectivity itself” (26). By choosing to write in lyric form, the poets signal that their contemplations of historical artifacts are somehow also explorations of their own subjectivities. These poets consider whether objects—and by extension poetry—can allow them to communicate their thoughts to future generations. Furthermore, the poets position themselves in relation to past makers of artifacts in order to define their own authorial roles. Interestingly, they do not place their writing or their roles as poet-makers in the context of a literary tradition but rather in the context of past material culture. All three poets seek to establish continuity with past makers and users of artifacts as they attempt to articulate their own poetic values. The poets’ own interactions with the objects and their descriptions of others’ interactions with material things, insofar as they suggest that their poems are also in some way material objects, become ways for the poets to think about and define their poetry’s functions.

For example, even though Purdy claims he cannot understand how to “imagine [the Dorsets] in the past” (35), he highlights similarities between himself and the Dorset Carver. Purdy aligns his poetic practice with the carver’s art when, immediately after he says, “let’s say his name was Kudlak / and watch him sitting there” (51-52), he describes how Kudlak carves the swans by “taking them out of his mind / the places in his mind / where pictures are” (53-57). Purdy’s visually-oriented injunction to “watch” his created scene suggests that Purdy also sees his art as the act of creating images from the “places in his mind / where pictures are.” Moreover, when he describes the carver “select[ing] a sharp stone tool / to gouge a parallel pattern of lines” (58-59), the “parallel pattern of lines” calls to mind the lines of a poem. When Purdy imagines the Dorset

transmitting
his body’s weight
from brain to arm and right hand
and one of his thoughts
turns to ivory (52-60)

Purdy articulates the artistic process as one that can preserve thoughts in a lasting and fixed form. Furthermore, his statement that “after 600 years / the ivory thought / is still warm” (71-75) implies that a person’s thoughts have an indepen-

den) life that can be preserved in objects external to the mind. Purdy feels he can access the Dorsets through their "ivory thought[s]" (74). For Purdy, an often a possible solution to the problem of how to establish continuity between the Dorsets and the "twentieth-century people" (30) and how to "imagine them into past" (75).

By aligning his own act of writing poetry with the Dorset's carving, Purdy attempts to define his poetry as something permanent that will outlive him. When Purdy describes twentieth-century people as "executives of noon death / warblers with things that explode" (32-33), the poem's violent imagery suggests that he fears that "twentieth-century people" (30) may be in danger of extinction. Because of his sense of impending doom, Purdy wishes to see his art as something that can turn thoughts into a kind of indestructible ivory that will be legible even "after 60 years" (73). He wants to appropriate the immediacy of the thoughts that are "500 warm" (75) in the carving. His disregard for any traces on the carving that might obstruct his access to the Dorset's thoughts, however, implies that he does not want to imagine that future readers could change or obscure his poetry's meaning by interacting with it. At several points in the poem Purdy has an idealistic vision of pure, unencumbered communication between the maker and reader of a material object. By focusing on his own creative role in imaginatively re-constructing "Kodjulu's" life, however, Purdy partly undermines the idea that poetry can communicate a perfectly preserved thought to someone in the future.

In his poem, Kroetsch similarly aligns his poetic practice with the shaping and carving of the stone hammer. The title "Sonne (Hammer Poem)," like Heist's title, blurs the line between the poem and the object and suggests that the work can be read as a poem about the evolution of either the hammer or the poem itself. Kroetsch most explicitly establishes this connection in section seven when he writes

The poem
is the stone
chipped and hammered
until it is shaped
like the stone
hammer, the maul. (77-82)

Section seven suggests both that Kroetsch has "chipped" the poem until it resembles the stone maul and that Kroetsch is somehow comparing the process by which the poem and the stone are "shaped" (90). Kroetsch uses poetic form to create parallels between the shape of the poem and of the hammer. For example, the gaps that Kroetsch leaves between words in his lines, especially in lines two, three and five, perform the voids and absences that Kroetsch highlights in the stone:

the rakehole loops
are gone, the

hand is gone, the
buffalo's skull
is gone. (7-11)

As mentioned earlier, Kroetsch's poem's "illegibilities" and lack of temporal sequence echo the way in which the temporal traces on the stone are not straight or linear. Moreover, when the speaker describes the stone on his desk

swelling a little of its
grass or maybe even of
ripening wheat or of
buffalo blood hot
in the dying sun (143-147).

the mixing of the different scents again mimics the way Kroetsch's poem sometimes seems to move randomly between times.

Kroetsch identifies his poem with the material object in a less straightforward manner than does Purdy. Kroetsch's hammer is radically separate from its form and shape and does not contain preserved human thoughts. When describing the stone hammer, Kroetsch emphasizes that the stone existed long before the people who appropriated it:

it is a million
years older than
the hand that
chipped stone. (32-35)

Kroetsch also highlights the stone's intimate connection with the land on which it is lost and found. Many of the people in the poem share the common misconception that the land is theirs; in section eight, Kroetsch describes the long series of people who owned the field but "who did not / notice that the land / did not belong" (88-90) to the person who sold it to them, and in section ten he talks about the stone being found in

the field
my grandfather
thought
was his
my father
thought was his. (40-45)

By placing himself at the end of this progression of people who thought they owned the land and then used the stone they found on it, Kroetsch suggests that his act of writing his poems "for that / stone hammer" (149-150) is just another appropriation and use of the stone, the equivalent of his father keeping it "on the table / of the back porch in / a raspberry basket" (34-36). Kroetsch presents the writing of his poem as both another form of keeping or shaping the original stone

hammer and as the creation of a material artifact—the poem—that in some way resembles the stone hammer. Kroeetsch imagines his poem as a material artifact that, like the stone, undergoes a process of being “chipped and hammered” (7). Thus, he suggests that his poem is made out of material that he too has appropriated from a land that he mistakenly believes belongs to him.

By comparing his poem to the stone, Kroeetsch demonstrates a radical as-bivalence to his own creative process. Unlike Pundy, who imagines that an object or a poem can be a materialization of its maker's thought, Kroeetsch imagines the poet or maker as someone who takes a pre-existing substance and “chips [and hammers]” (79) it into a new form, or as someone who simply inscribes (or text on an already existing palimpsest). Moreover, his emphasis on his father and grandfather's assumption that the land, and by extension the stone, was theirs suggests that Kroeetsch suspects that the artist may suffer from the misappropriation of the words or ideas he finds and uses somehow belong to him. Kroeetsch's association of his poetic process with the shaping of the stone further models the idea of the author being “a kind of god who can create a world from nothing by giving it voice and form” (Lecker 127); the hammer is created not by one craftsman's thoughts but by a multiplicity of hands acting on a stone.

old as the last
ice Age, the
retreating, the
recreating ice (Kroeetsch 47-50).

Kroeetsch even acknowledges the artistic agency of the ice in “recreating” the stone. Moreover, the poem's preoccupation with people losing and finding the stone suggests that Kroeetsch believes that rather than being an original work of art, his poem may just be a re-shaping of old ideas and images that other people have discarded or “lost” (109).

As discussed earlier, Heaney's title blurs the line between his own poem and the stone into that his father made. Heaney's meditations on his father's creation of the harvest bow therefore also explore his own poetic practice. Heaney's vision of artistic creation seems much closer to Pundy's than Kroeetsch's. Like Pundy, Heaney imagines that a maker invests a part of himself into the thing he creates. Heaney describes how his father “plained the harvest bow” (1) and “implicated the mellowed silence in [him] / in wheat that does not rust” (2-3). Heaney also seems to believe that decorative art like the harvest bow can allow someone to “see” (14) the past, but he suggests that he must choose to “step into its golden loops” (15) in order to re-live his childhood memories. When he is not “scrying into its golden loops” and it is simply “pinned up on our deal dresser” (27), the harvest bow does not communicate but is simply “worn” (30). In his interactions with the harvest bow, Heaney's speaker emphasizes his own role in reading the bow; he describes how he “tells [and] fings[s] it like braille, / glean[ing] the unsaid off the palpable”

(11-12). Heaney imagines that the harvest bow has an unarticulated, “unsaid” message that is “palpable” to those who can read it properly. By describing the harvest bow both as a kind of text to be read and as something that can be pinned “in your lap” (18), Heaney suggests that art can serve a decorative purpose while simultaneously containing readable traces of its past maker, like the ivory swans that communicate the carrier's thoughts to Pundy.

By aligning his poetic practice with the making of the harvest bow, Heaney suggests that the poetry he creates can be decorative and beautiful while still offering a deeper meaning to attentive readers. Just as the wheat that “brightens as it lights / rust by rust” (4) can be both “a knowable corona” (5) and “a throwaway love lost of straw” (6), Heaney recognizes that his poem may be read as a meaningful re-working of the past or as a transient token to be discarded. While Heaney does not have Kroeetsch's sense of the multiplicity of hands involved in shaping things or poems, he recognizes that as a thing or a poem moves through time, people read its value and significance differently. His own interaction with his father's art, however, gives him hope that future readers of his poem will also “finger it like braille” (11) and “glean the unsaid off the palpable” (12). Perhaps he hopes that the reader will “glean the unsaid” off the many un-interpreted images in his poem.

In all three poems, the speakers attempt to understand the dual nature of historical artifacts that create an enduring social world while also changing as they move through time. By developing non-linear narratives from these palimpsestic objects, the poets question the connection between maker and object and try to imagine how their work will survive into the future. For all three poets, narrativizing these material things is a way to understand their roles in creating a poem's meaning. The poets all imagine that their poetry allows them varying degrees of control over the meaning their work communicates. Pundy is highly invested in its ability to preserve a pure “ivory thought” (74); Kroeetsch, on the other hand, accepts that many other hands may be involved in the shaping of his poetry, and Heaney recognizes the reader's necessary role of “gleaning the unsaid off the palpable” (12) in art. While the poets imagine that they can invest something of themselves in their work, they also recognize the role that careful or imaginative readers play in contributing to the meaning of their art. By maintaining that their poems come into being as the result of the contemplation of historical artifacts, and by presenting their literary artworks as artifacts in their own right, the writers suggest that their poetry is able to generate not just an enduring social world, but also the creation of more art.

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Closure, Copia, and Commonplaces

Three Meditations on Rhetorical Technologies and Discontinuities in the Conclusion of *King Lear*

by Aaron Golish



I

*The weight of this sad time we must obey,
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say;
The oldest have borne most, we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.*

With these two couplets Albany, or if you prefer, Edgar, ends *The Tragedy of King Lear*. It comes as no surprise that *Lear* concludes with a pair of end-rhymed couplets seeing as most of Shakespeare's plays end with such a construction.¹ It appears to be a convention as old as theatre itself that signal the closing of a play in the absence of theatrical apparatuses such as lights and curtains.² In fact, such rhetorical and poetic constructions can be understood as a form of theatrical technology—and the closest thing an Elizabethan playgoer had to the abrupt close of a curtain to end a play dramatically and without recourse to an epilogue or a jig. Much has been written on these particular concluding lines, perhaps more than on the codas of any other Elizabethan play and to some degree more influentially. The discussion centres on the question of to whom these lines should be attributed—Albany (Q1) or Edgar (P1)—perhaps because in our passage the final climactic end of a play or piece of literature is a critical point of interpretation. The difficulties of the play's tragic closure heat this debate beyond the attribution of a line would normally demand.³

Conventionally, tragedy concludes with the restoration of order following the hero's exaltation, either through death or banishment, but *Lear* specifically rejects proper dramatic closure. Breaking from his source material, *The Chronicle History of King Lear*, Shakespeare orchestrates a deeply tragic, nearly ironic, ending when he employs the unexpected *catastrophe* of Cordelia's death just when Edgar is to step over Edmund suggests a comic resolution.⁴ It is for this reason that so many critics have viewed *Lear* as a problem play, from Tate's popular rewriting of *Lear* Lamb's contention that *Lear* was unstageable, to Bradley's belief that *Lear* was

Shakespeare's "greatest achievement" but not his greatest play (Bradley 244). Recent criticism on the other hand views these dramatic irregularities as profoundly connected to the meaning of the play. As Alan Rosen argues, "rather than considering the unconventional structure an obstacle that must be surmounted, [modern criticism] sees the play's disorder as purposeful, and as integral to its meaning" (3). Rosen goes on to suggest that "to be understood, the dramatic peculiarities of *King Lear* must be viewed against the formal coherence that was characteristic of conventional drama." Returning to the final couplets that close the play, I suggest that, like the "Cordelia catastrophe," the interpretive importance of these lines is best understood when viewed against dramatic convention. This paper will then discussively explore why, within the context of the historical theoretical traditions, the denouement of *King Lear* can only be historically understood as deliberately unresolved.

The closure of a play, being the product not merely of an author but intended for a paying public, is especially governed by convention. Whereas the closures of Shakespeare's comedies unravel the knotted conflict, often through an unmasking, the tragedies focus on a solemn reflection of the tragic events (Beckerman 36-7). The ends of nearly all of Shakespeare's tragedies involve an elegy for the tragic figure and the laying of provisions for the future. The assumption of power by a surviving leader signals the restoration of order and social stability. The eulogies demonstrate their authority and legitimacy through elegiac respect for the fallen and the firm ability to govern. In *Hamlet*, there is no ambiguity in Fortinbras's loss—"I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, / which now to claim my throne doth invite me"—that he will assume the rule of Denmark (5.2.374-75). Not to raise any question whether Lucius will take firm command at the end of *Titus Andronicus*, or whether Malcolm will succeed Macbeth. In *Richard III*, Richmond is crowned shortly after killing Richard and then proclaims to restore order in England by uniting "the white rose and red" (5.2.19). In *Lear* alone this clarity is missing. Despite the destruction of the evil faction led by General, Regan, and Edmund, Lear's society is in shambles. The aristocracy is largely collapsed and no one wants to rule. Albany resigns his authority and the surviving characters all show signs of doubt. On account of this conspicuous lack of closure, a number of scholars have tried to position these final couplets as the restoration of order, and claim that the lines are properly attributed to Edgar on the grounds that he is the most legitimate one to take power. Shakespeare, however, would not have unapologetically promised the restoration of monarchical order at the very last moment (effectively as the curtain falls), nor in such ambiguous language.⁵ As discussed above, the formal nature of these lines is consistent with the Elizabethan convention for signalling the end of a play. As poetic technology, the lines are the closest alternative to a certain call for effecting sudden dramatic closure. That Shakespeare employ this form here indicates that *Lear* ends abruptly and without the promise of future stability. Furthermore, these last four lines form two generic couplets.

Through such sententiae occur frequently through Shakespeare's plays and scenes, these are the only two generic couplets to close one of his plays.

In *The Garden of Eloquence*, Henry Peacham's 1577 rhetoric handbook, the genre of sententia is described as "a saying pertaining to the manners and common practices of men, which declareth by an apt brevitate, what in this our life ought to be done, or left undone" (189). Not all brief ethical statements, however, can be generic—only those which are "notable, worthy of memorie, and approved by the judgement and consent of all men" (189). George Puttenham, in his 1589 *Art of English Poesie*, describes genres as "a manner of speech to adage texts or authorities of wily sentences, such as sound more doctrine and truth wisdom and good behavior" (321). *Leare*, unlike any other Shakespearean play, concludes with sententious couplets. The message should be unequivocal. Shakespeare calls for the necessity of plainness and honesty, especially in the face of theatrical decorum.¹ Shakespeare, however, is rarely unequivocal, and indeed the rhetorical culture of his age was carefully trained to examine any topic in *utramque* person or from two sides.² Moreover, rhetoric and dialectic were as much a system of eloquence as they were a system of thought, and the sixteenth century man was trained in what Joel B. Altman calls "the total cultivation of ambivalence," referring to the skepticism that Trapp offers to be expressible in language. Consequently, rather than unequivocal truths, genres or sententiae were particularly memorable "places," or commonplaces, "which fostered lushness and often profundity in style," and though particularly "weighty," they were far from proofs (Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*: 101). Nonetheless, sententiae were a popular form of memorable pithy statements that lent themselves to commonplaceing, the early modern practice of compiling "copie-books" of *loci* or *topoi* for later use.

Commonplaces, as Walter J. Ong describes them, were "devices primarily for oral performance," serving the orator to ensure an endless supply of *copias*, the free flowing or fluency of invention (Ong, *The Presence of the Word* 62). Ong developed the important notion of *rhéotone* as a form of oral technology for the storage and retrieval of information. *Locos* and *topoi* are central to this system. The purpose of the commonplace, or *topos*, was to supply a headline from which a speaker might build *copias*. Unlike a category, however, *topoi* included a plurality of references localized to "places," within the formulate rhetorical mind.³ "The noetic economy of an oral culture," Ong writes, "demands that knowledge be processed in more or less formulaic style and that it be constantly recycled orally—otherwise it simply vanishes for good unless it be discovered anew" (Ong, "Conceptual Rhapsody," 94). The "noetic economy" is how the rhetorical tradition *techno*izes these generic utterances and it is part of the general economy of cultural capital.

That whole commonplace tradition, an organized trafficking in what in one way or another is already known, is obviously part and parcel of the ancient oral world, the primitive human music universe, to which the Renaissance rhetorical doctrine of imitation also obviously relates (94).

Initially a part of the rhetorical technology of oral cultures, including the epigraphic mnemonic systems, commonplaceing survived in the renaissance written cultures through the humanist tradition of rhetorical education. The humanists "broke down virtually the whole of classical antiquity into these bite-size snippets or sayings (adages or proverbs, and apothegms or more learned sayings) which could be introduced into discourse" (Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 62). In fact, perhaps the easiest way to identify a commonplace in a play is how readily it lends itself to extraction. Typically grammatically indefinite, they are insular, self contained, often general or abstract and therefore easily released from the text. Tiffany Stern and Martha Andersen have both linked this practice with a deliberative practice on the part of the playwright to prepare the sententious utterances of their characters for audience appropriation (Stern 144). Andersen identifies such ephoric expression as "a Janus-like stylistic device that encourages [two] modes of perception, required for full response to the play": a psychological realism of the *locus* of the scene and the emblematic mode (Andersen 150-51). Incidentally, what Andersen and Stern identify in Shakespeare applies equally to the drama of the ancient world where pithy adages also feature a similar extractable character. In fact, a perusal of the thousands of fragments that survive from an ancient Greek Tragedy, Comedy and Satyr-play will reveal that most bear a sententious form and are preserved in Anthologies similar in scope to the popular commonplace books of the Renaissance.⁴ From this, we can surmise that Shakespeare is working in an old tradition of writing, a mode that is also open to emblematic extraction, trafficking common-knowledge and capital in the noetic economy as others had done before him for thousands of years. For a Renaissance reader of Shakespeare's text, this practice would have been ubiquitous; for us, however, such contextualization is important, since this ancient practice has all but become alien.

While commonplace books, such as Erasmus's *Adages*, were common and often enormous compendiums of pithy wisdom, by the turn of the seveneenth century works of poetry, drama, and romance began to indicate vernacular center-textual markers and marginalia pointing the reader to useful and clever lines for their own copybooks (Dery 18-4). Isolated from its original text and without character names the sentence provides its own proverbial authority. Many sententiae, however, are never really stripped of their source, and instead continue to reference and recall their matrix, nesting, instead, their authorial or discursive weight within the text from which they are derived. This is how Edgar-Allan's final couplets operate. Closing the play, the couplets cite the adage within the proof of the play's action. The "weight" of the plot lends authority to the final generic clauses. They summarize—without summarizing by localizing—the *topos* of the play. The *topos*, what Cicero calls "the seat of the argument," within the rhetorical technology of storage and retrieval, instantly recalls the entirety of the play and its argument back to mind. Within the context of the deponent I suggest that the significance of these formal aspects overshadows the speaker. In the absence of a

final curtain, language signals the close of a play. This signal follows the dramatic closure and involves the heightening of poetic form and a pair of simple, gnomic verse. This heightening of form and the universal proclamation estrange the truth from the character and narrative locus. The speaker, whether Albany or Edgar, speaks on the *phreca*, at once de-localized and localizing.¹¹

Lear differs in numerous ways from its source material *King Lear*, not least of all through its deeply tragic conclusion. But with the gnomic exalt *Lear* returns to the locus of its source. Explorations of Nature and God (in his absence) through critical discussion in *Lear* are secondary Shakespearean additions to the *Lear* myth. The core of the *Lear* myth is the topos around which it revolves, the commonplace wisdom regarding the necessity for plainness in the face of flattery and rhetorical decorum. By invoking a sentiment on honesty in the final lines, Shakespeare localizes *Lear* within the *Lear* topos. This ending, is abrupt by Elizabethan standards but certainly deliberate. Constructing a memorable conclusion, Shakespeare uses a pair of gnomic couplets to draw the 'curtain' to a striking close. Concluding with a gnomic couplet, especially without the orthodox re-establishment of poetic structures, is ironic in the face of the irresolvable uncertainty about God and Nature that permeate *Lear*.¹² If the wisdom of these lines is in any way hopeful, it is a false hope that deconstructs the epistemological operative modes of Renaissance rhetoric. That is to say that, insofar as the Renaissance viewed Rhetoric (and even more so the *Dialoque*) as operative methods of knowledge, *Lear* deconstructs those assumptions and questions the faith in language to speak the truth. What on the surface appears to be an unequivocal call for honesty, an ethical imperative even authenticated by the weight of the tragic action and its own gnomic formulaic, proves to be fundamentally empty without the growing rhetorical suspicion of the era. Writing for a public theatre, and for an audience hungry for witty sentiment Shakespeare offers not only copia of wit, but a sceptical outlook on rhetorical practices, turning the theatre into a space to consider political and rhetorical practice, question and deconstruct it, and to learn to resist claims to plainness.

II

"Rhetoric is the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors."

Amongst contemporary scholarship on the early modern rhetorical sphere, it has become ironically commonplace to make reference to this phrase and others like it from the introduction to C. S. Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Extending Drama*. With a conclusion that only a poet could utter, Lewis expresses in a mere page the general thesis of Walter J. Ong's essay: "In rhetoric," Lewis explains, "more than in anything else, the continuity of the old tradition was embodied" (61). Older than church, law, and philosophy, rhetoric has been the pervasive 'art' of oral culture. More than an 'art,' however, *rhetoric*, as Ong expands, was a 'technology,' a technology of memory, of eloquence, and, perhaps most importantly, *rhetoric* was a technology for thought (Ong, *Rhetoric*,

Rhetoric, and *Technology*, 4-5).¹³ All human culture being initially oral, Ong describes the "economy of thought" as also being oral. "Human thought structures," Ong suggests, "are tied in with verbalizations and must fit available media of communication: there is no way for persons with no experience of writing to put their minds through the continuous linear sequence of thought" (2). Of course, even after the invention of writing, western culture remained essentially rhetorical as basic composition slowly transitioned from the various genres of oration: "Lames themselves," Ong explains, "[were] organized in the same fashion as oration proceeding from exordium, through statement of proposition to be proved, proof, and refutation of adversaries, to a peroration or conclusion" (27-28). Ong looks the shift in modes of knowledge storage and retrieval to the Romantic age when verbatim written record, sufficiently refined, demoted the oral mnemonic apparatus of loci or commonplaces into obsolescence (Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 85).¹⁴ There is in effect a linguistic, and by extension cognitive, discontinuity between our literate technological age and the rhetorical technology culture of Western Culture before Romanticism. In terms of aesthetics, Lewis explains:

Nearly all our older poetry was written and read by men to whom the distinction between poetry and rhetoric, in its modern form, would have been meaningless. The 'booklets,' which they chiefly regarded in every composition, were those which we either dislike or simply do not notice (81).

This lack of sympathy in aesthetics and operative modes, Lewis suggests, raises an "invincible wall between us and them" (Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 83). Interestingly, while so many scholars of early modern rhetoric praise their work with homage to this discontinuity, no one writing on Shakespeare, to my knowledge, acknowledges Lewis's 'rhetorical barrier.' Even amongst the New Historicists, who quite readily engage in contextualizing political and ideological concerns in literary texts (or valuable as this research is), there is little attempt at linguistic and operative contextualization.¹⁵

These operative, formulaic modes of rhetoric are essential to a contextualized understanding of Shakespeare. As Ong demonstrates, rhetorical cultures are *formulaic*, rather than *analytic*. These rhetorical conditions, operative in both the invention of oral or written texts and their reception, determine how they mean. "Literary cultures," Ong writes, "tend to overrate verbatim repetition or record. In literature cultures the illusion is widespread that if one has the exact words someone has uttered, one has by that very fact his exact meaning" (*The Presence of the Word*, 32). Likewise, the analytic approach threatens to anathematize what a text means, when in fact, the practice of commonplacing, especially for plays already in the public space of the theatre, "fostered common ownership of the ideas" (Roberts 99-100). Such commonplaces represented a technology of rhetorical and dialectical formulation. Whether gnomic or not, these phrases did not carry a stable meaning so much as they were a manner by which meaning could be

generated. The final excerpts of King Lear contain the *loci* of the play but they are neither categorical nor an encapsulation of the complexities of the play. Rather they are *loci* from which the play emerges and is generated. Understanding how Shakespeare used commonplace to formulaically construct his plays also reveals how a rhetorically educated audience could repackaging Shakespeare into commonplace and *topos*. This rhetorical expansion and contraction is the method through which Lear reaches for its audience.

III

Before it was categorized with the tragedies in the Folio, King Lear was a True Chronicle History—and the Chronicle as a genre carries with it a different set of presuppositions than a tragedy. Chief among those presuppositions is that as a History it will explain the causality behind political-historical events. This final meditation will consider the *topos* of the politics at work in Lear, particularly considering the differences between the *topos* of Lear and the final remnants of Albany/Edgar. In the Quarto it is Albany not Edgar who speaks the final lines. While this probably adds to the custom of having the surviving member of highest rank close the play, there is another element at stake, especially in terms of the flattery that Shakespeare is himself engaged in. Shakespeare departs considerably from his source material and, while Lear is later classified in the Folio as a Tragedy, it is still published as a Chronicle. Although the history genre always enjoys a degree of latitude with respect to its accuracy, Shakespeare takes a license with Lear that disrupts the very Chronicle into which it is supposed to fit. In Holinshed's Chronicle, as well as the earlier play King Lear, the daughters all survive to continue the royal, Trojan dynasty of Britain that does not end until a central fracture of Lear's descendants extinguishes this lineage. Importantly, this Trojan origin of British rule was the official dogma of the Tudor reign and powerful under Elizabeth's rule. Only outside of England—and, significantly, by James VI and the Scots—was this mythology openly rejected.

When Shakespeare kills off the entire Lear family, he is rewriting the True Chronicle changing British chronicle history and rejecting the popular origin myth of the sixteenth century. This is not merely an act of rewriting history in order to make it more concise so that it can fit within the *topos* of the stage; Shakespeare is publicly rejecting the dogma of the Elizabethan reign. Does it mean that the development of Shakespeare's political thought is culminating in Lear, as Richard Slater would have us believe (104-33)? That with Elizabeth's death he is finally able to speak boldly through his plays the truth he has always believed? Certainly not. Shakespeare is opposing to his incoherent monarch, presenting a True Chronicle History (as befitting James VI's Scottish tastes). Of course, we know from the title page of the 1608 Quarto that Lear was performed "before the Kings Maestie in Whitehall upon St. Stephens night in Christmas" (all mine); it arose certainly in 1606 (Walker 15). Moreover, this is not the only significant change Shakespeare makes to the Lear plot. He also changes the demarcation of Cornwall and Cambray to Albany and Cornwall.²⁰ The division of the kingdom becomes re-territorialized on the island of Albion, and the separate division becomes the most likely the non-English nucleus of Cornwall and perhaps Wales

and the greater division of Britain itself (presumably what was to be Ceredolia's portion), and then finally Albany or Scotland to the north. When Shakespeare assigns the final *topos* of the play to Albany, he is doing more than obeying custom; he is representing the unification of Great Britain under Albany (Irgo, Scotland). This reading also explains why, in Shakespeare's True Chronicle History alone, Albany is presented as a virtuous and benevolent ruler, sympathetic to Lear's plight, who survives the play, and more importantly is a reluctant ruler. We know from Julius Caesar that the reluctance to rule was a common plot indication of a trustworthy ruler as Caesar rejects the crown three times—to which mood cheered (Julius Caesar 1.2.313-343).²¹ Similarly, Albany rejects his claim to rule first in 3.2.490-515 (Q2), and again at 3.61-363. When in the Folio edition the final lines shift to Edgar, the play is also no longer a True Chronicle History but the Tragedy of King Lear. Likewise, Albany receives fewer lines and, in particular, to 4.3, where his condemnation of Goneril is cut down, his resistance to the evil represented by her being is diminished.

Reading the Quarto in this light may explain why Shakespeare (or someone else) updated the text for the Folio, reducing Albany's role, since the play had already been performed before James I and the flowering portraiture of a Scottish King—uniting Britain and Irgo in some basic capacity to bring a degree of resolution to the bleak tale—would not have been necessary. Perhaps, then, substituting the lines to Edgar was a revision returning Lear to their rightful place, or perhaps such a revision occurred for other artistic reasons that will forever be indecipherable to us. Either way, there is an obvious attempt at adaptation for the Scottish King in both reasons that it arose in the face of the play's unmistakable commonplaces against flattery.

Concluding Remarks

Many critics have muddled over understanding Lear and its irregularities. As A. C. Bradley suggested, it is Shakespeare's greatest achievement but not his greatest play (246). Bradley's position, however, only really makes if we consider Lear according to classical principles of tragedy, paradigms that, strictly speaking, as a dramatic tragedy Lear violates. Tragedy, as Northrop Frye tells us, is a mode that in its most elementary form involves the modification of natural law, which the tragic hero disturbs but, as tragedy moves closer to irony, the attempts to give a cogent form to shifting an illegality of an unqualified existence may make tragic irony (or ironic tragedy) almost too hard to bear (205-12).²² Tragic irony at least suggests an inherent natural order but ironic tragedy existing when any hope of a comprehensible system of divine justice.²³ By the tragic order, Lear simply does not make sense: the suffering at the end is ironic, Cordelia's death incomprehensible. As a Chronicle history, however, these violations of genre and conventional comprehension begin to fade. The History play pretends at least to tell the past, however fictionalized, as it may have tragic elements, but it is not beholden to them. Instead, History is held to account for political circumstances and actions, to explain why historical actors acted as they did and how the results of those actions came to be. But Lear does not fit neatly into History either, largely because it is so tragic and because as mythic history it describes events from a lost past that can be neither confirmed nor denied, so Shakespeare is licensed to

take education liberties with his source texts. Nonetheless, Lear explains political action in human terms, if we are willing to read it that way. Reading is, of course the key word here (once until relatively recently the tendency has been to read Shakespeare out of context critics have read Lear almost exclusively as a tragedy (Yachnin 2009, such a strictly literary reading has precluded us from seeing many of the ironies of Lear. Read as a poetry tragic text, the critical investigations must attempt to explain the cathartic effect of Lear." Read, however, as a historical chronicle and therefore as a political text, we are licensed to read it as a cultural artifact containing and preserving (at least tentatively) ideological assumptions, political history, scientific beliefs, and cultural capital of the era in its creation. Moreover, once we begin to consider Lear within its cultural milieu we can also consider its conditions of production and the market into which it was placed.

Epitaphs

1. More accurately, most of Shakespeare's plays end with a coda of at least one end-rhymed couplet, though more often a series. Although some, such as *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens*, include a half-line following a penultimate couplet, and *Cymbeline* includes a hyper-metric "Epitaph," following what would have otherwise been an end-rhymed iambic couplet, *2 Henry VI* and *2 Henry IV* lack an end-rhymed coda, though both plays use an epilogue (or in the case of *2 Henry VI* as pseudo-epilogue through Suffolk) to indicate the end of the show. These conventions appear later in the Comedies; neither *A Winter's Tale* nor *Two Gentlemen of Verona* feature end-rhyme or epilogue. This is likely attributable to the chance that followed the comedies hence negating the necessity for metrical closure.
2. See Roberts, "Parting Words: Final Lines in *Sophocles* and *Euripides*." Infamously, five of Euripides's nineteen surviving plays feature identical or near-identical five-line codas, which signal a certain atmosphere of the final diminuendo.
3. The debate over whether 5.3.317 "freak, heart, I'm three break!" should be attributed to Lear(Q) or Kent(F), receives comparatively little attention, likely in part

- because it lacks the modern privilege of the last word, and because it has no effect of the play's conclusion, whereas 329-332 carries significant interpretative weight for how the play concludes.
4. By catastrophe I am referring to the traditional Terencean trope and comic figure of ten generically named Catastrophe. This figure is characterized by perfect timing and his appearance resolves the comic or, less commonly, tragic knots. It is this aspect of Catastrophe that Edmund associates with Edgar when he says, "And pit his genes like the catastrophe in the old comedy" (1.2.141). See Rosen, esp. 6-9. On the figure of Edgar as Catastrophe in act 5 see Rosen 14-16. On Terence's influence on Shakespeare, see T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure*.
5. The Edgar/Gloucester deus-ex-machina comic structure to the tragic portion of *Lear/Cordeus*. Being in a manner a *complexe* plot in and of itself, it fulfills this comic structure to the tragic portion of *Lear*: Edmund in the guise of a knight, followed by Kentian comic structure, the *complexe* reversal corresponds with the revelation of nobility in the seeming ignoble figure.
6. The change in speaker between the

- Quarto and the Folio, rather than evidence for the revision of the text by the author, could be applied equally as evidence that the speaker of the lines is arbitrary.
7. The poetic quality of the first couplet comes in part from the paradox that as a phrase the phrase carries an implied 'ought,' as then it seeks by telling the listener out to seek what they ought, "What we ought to say," however, relies to the discretion or discretion of rhetoric. Discretion or *decorum* is essentially the goal of good rhetoric and its standard by which rhetoric is judged. Therefore, the sentiment advises throwing discretion to the wind in favour of plainness. On decorum and discretion in rhetoric, see Wilson, esp. 76.
 8. For a discussion of the extent of the Tudor interest in rhetorical ornamentation and training in uterine pattern, see Alpers's *The Tudor Play of Mind*.
 9. Topic, from the Greek *topos*, and focus from the Latin, are interchangeably refer to *thema*, while *locus* continues to be the Latin term for commonplace. Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 89.
 10. Incidentally many Renaissance commonplace books adopt their genre-metaphor *liber Primus Stabat in Florilegium*. See Kiss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
 11. By this of course I am referring to Robert Warren's ideas of the locus and *placea*, where the actor on the stage exists in a liminal space outside the localized diegetic narrative, while by employing *sententia* the speaker is also localizing in the rhetorical sense of "place," *topos*, and *locus*. See Wilsonian, "Toward Authority in Shakespeare's Theatre."
 12. I use "ironic" in something of the

- original Greek sense of the word, from *eraino* someone who dissembles and says less than they mean. That is, Shakespeare, by being ironic rather than direct in the final address, opens up a number of interpretive avenues rather than drawing a traditional closure.
13. Aristotle considers rhetoric and dialectic to be sister arts. By extension the art of dialectic, or as Cicero calls it *ars disserendi*, "the art of disputation," dialect later becomes known often simply as the "art of thinking," though coming out of an oral background logic and dialect were not concerned with "private thinking" until after Descartes.
 14. On rhetoric as a memory system Ong explains that oral culture developed the fact, or commonplace as its "formulary apparatus for accumulating and retrieving knowledge." See Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 95.
 15. Most scholarship in the area of linguistic contextualization is concerned with clarifying Shakespeare's language rather than exploring its operative dimensions. G.L. Brook's *The Language of Shakespeare*, for example, provides a short chapter on rhetoric, merely citing examples of different forms. In *Prose Unraveled: Sixteenth Century Rhetoric and the Art of Shakespeare*, Trevor Meleney does in fact reference Lewis's account of early modern rhetoric, but he only mentions the importance of rhetoric to the sixteenth century, ignoring Lewis's "historical barrier."
 16. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th Century *The History of the Kings of Britain*, the two Dukes are the Duke of Cornwall and the Duke of Albany. In this history, however, both Dukes are hostile to Lear and are defeated by his forces. In *Historia*, the Dukes are again Cornwall and Albany but once again they are both hostile and killed in battle. Spenser's *Fairie Queene* replaces Cornwall with Cambusa, which the anonymous King Lear

adopts also for Albany. So while Shakespeare does honour the source material, besides King Lear with the names of the Dukes, his version since presents Albany in a positive light.

17. At the time many areas of Cornwall spoke the Cornish language.

18. We can infer from Casca's remarks, though, that Caesar is merely performing the role of a reluctant ruler—whereas I believe we are to take Albany at face value, unless played otherwise by an actor, as a figure genuinely reluctant to accept the rule of Britain.

19. In irony, Frye tells us, the catastrophe is either arbitrary or meaningless. The nearer the tragedy is to irony, "the more human the hero is, and the more the catastrophe appears to be a social rather than a cosmological event." See Frye 284.

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20. It is perfectly noteworthy that Frye does not seem to know where to place Lear in his topographical categorization, except that it exists Janus-like somewhere along the gradient between Tragedy and Irony. He mentions it a number of times in his essay as Mytho each time at a different place of either tragedy or irony.

21. The difficult question of cathartic effect let, I believe, to the near half-century debate as to whether Lear was a true of Christian doctrine complex with the ultimate salvation of Lear and Christ-like sacrifice of Cordelia, or a deeply problematic text that is skeptical of the presence of God(s) and in which the suffering is unmitigated. This debate, begun perhaps by Harold Craig, lasted until Eliot's *King Lear and the Gods* (1966) for the most part debated the doctrinal camp. I have not set one, however, who argue for a Christian reading.

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