

The background of the cover is a deep space scene. A large, blue, metallic-looking hand is the central focus, reaching out from the top. Below it, a ringed planet, similar to Saturn, is visible. In the upper right corner, a portion of a futuristic aircraft or spacecraft is seen. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and oranges, set against a dark, starry background.

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POLYPHONY

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EDITORIAL

This second instalment of *Polyphony's* third volume has been a year in the making and is our first ever issue dedicated solely to final year long essays, an annual issue we hope to continue into the future.

These essays, widely regarded as most students' magnum opus, reflect a depth and quality of research and writing that is often unparalleled in undergraduate work. Within this issue you will find seven exemplary pieces of work; from an exploration of theatrical resistance to the nation-state in post-independence Nigeria to an in depth analysis of Imagism as outlined by Ezra Pound, this issue reflects the sheer variety of literary interest here at Manchester. This kaleidoscopic range of interests neatly reflects what we stand for at *Polyphony*: a diverse array of pieces written by different students, about unique texts, from divergent perspectives working harmoniously to enrich our academic environment.

Within this issue you will find seven long essays. Opening we have an important exploration of Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at Metropolitan* and Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* by Megan Matthews, two novels which work to give weight to black female voices in South Africa's literary-historical tradition. Following, Kwame Owusu's *Surreptitious Insurrection* gives insight into the theatre of post-independence Nigeria. Other highlights include Matthew Barton's explorations of male desire in Nabokov, Baldwin, and Roth as well as Margherita Concina's more modern approach to Millennial politics in film. In addition to these, we are especially pleased to bring you two long essays from the American Studies department focusing on American-Israeli relations and anti-feminist jurisprudence, by Torrin Hoynes and Tilly Bruder, respectively.

A no doubt eclectic collection of texts to launch our annual Long Essay series, I hope you enjoy these in-depth pieces of writing.

Daniel Speight
Editor in Chief

How Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at Metropolitan* and Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* give voice to black female experience in the South African archive

MEGAN MATTHEWS, English Literature

INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault defines the archive as a system of records that 'differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration'.¹ Read through this definition, archival records document the experiences and voices of past generations in a way which shapes current countries, communities and curricula. However, Verne Harris claims that these records 'at once express and are instruments of prevailing relations of power'.² Those in control of governmental bodies are in control of the contemporary archive. Gabeba Baderoon, in an analysis of South Africa's relationship with the archive, states that there is a 'stubborn silence' surrounding black female slave narratives.³ Consequently, Baderoon asserts that 'South African relations to slavery are marked by 'amnesia'.⁴ Harris provides evidence for this, affirming that black female experience in apartheid South Africa, over 100 years on from slavery, was 'poorly documented' and that black female voices were still, 'seldom heard'.⁵ Linda Krumholz, in her reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, asserts the important role of literature in filling archival space. Krumholz writes that as 'individual memories exist in the world as fragments of a historical memory, then, by extension, the individual process of recollection or 'rememory' can be reproduced on a historical level'.⁶

However, with regard to black female South African writers, Boyce Davies asserts that 'a major task is just to establish that they exist'.⁷ Miriam Tlali's 1975 novel, *Muriel at Metropolitan*,⁸ was the first novel written by a black female author published in South Africa.⁹ The novel depicts the racism and sexism faced by black women under apartheid using what Boyce Davies calls

autobiographical prerogative' to document history and detail the individual and group experience.¹⁰

Thirty years on, Yvette Christiansë, in her 2006 slave narrative *Unconfessed*, gives voice and a platform to Sila van Mozambique¹¹ – a slave woman defined historically in the archive solely by her crime of infanticide.¹² In this semi-fictional narrative, Christiansë reclaims control of Sila's legacy from the colonial archive. Both authors carve space for their narratives in the archive through the most traditional female occupations. By exploring the significance of the mother figure, black female literacy, the ocean and its specific set of cultural meanings, and the metaphor of the toilet – which exposes the endemic sexism and racism within apartheid South Africa – Tlali and Christiansë retrospectively give voice to South African black women through universal metaphors for black female disempowerment.

MOTHERHOOD

Both Christiansë and Tlali use depictions of motherhood to retrace genealogy through the gaps in the South African archive. Samuelson argues that the archaic exclusion of the slave-mother from the archive is what perpetuates the contemporary exclusion of feminine self from the records.¹³ Quoting Orlando Patterson's definition of the slave as a 'genealogical isolate', suffering 'natal alienation', Meg Samuelson asserts the impact of forgetting the slave mother.¹⁴ The removal of the mother figure cuts off genealogical ties to personal and social pasts and environments. This, in turn, makes it easier for a slave master to sell his 'property', as they have no written genealogy and therefore no legal family or sense of belonging. However, Samuelson asserts that 'If in the era of the trade the enslaved had been forced to *forget mother*, now their descendants were being encouraged to do the impossible and reclaim her'.¹⁵ Christiansë and Tlali 'reclaim' the mother figure and forcibly create space for her in the literary archive.

Christiansë's *Unconfessed* uses the trope of the mother to write and therefore remember the abuse faced by women in colonial South Africa into the archive. Baderoon quotes Zoë Wicomb's assertion 'that memories of slavery among descendants of slaves in South Africa have been comprehensively suppressed by the "shame" that enslavement and sexual exploitation induced in indigenous and enslaved South Africans'.¹⁶ Christiansë depicts this shame, and its relationship with motherhood, to recall, expose and record the stories of female abuse that the archive historically 'suppressed'. All but three of Sila's children are the products of sexual assault and rape. Sila recounts how 'After all these years, my body still has no say in what happens to it. Another child'.¹⁷ She directly references the shame that the birth of her children creates for her own sense of identity as 'when I looked at my body I was ashamed'.¹⁸ Oumiesies, one of Sila's slave owners, hears rumours of her son Theron raping Sila, and places the blame and consequent shame on Sila, instead of Theron, exclaiming, 'what kind of woman are you to let such things happen?'.¹⁹ This instantly places blame on the female victim, rather than the male perpetrator. Similarly, on Robben Island, Mina, Sila's black female slave counterpart, 'said I was a shameful creature'.²⁰ Significantly, Mina is also the victim of rape throughout the narrative as 'Mina is also growing big. Yes. Soon there will be two more babies on this island. And how many fathers?'.²¹ It is therefore key that Mina is part of the accusatory voice that labels Sila as shameful. In this patriarchal colonial society, women are to blame for the sexual assaults they experience. Sila's own children assert the stigma of shame associated with sexual assault as 'Two weeks in that prison. Carolina and Camies saw things they should not have seen. They were ashamed of me'.²² Her role as mother transforms to that of victim to be 'ashamed of'. Sila expresses the impact of this shame on her sense of self when she addresses her child saying 'Baby,

I am your mother. I am the one who should know all the things about you[...] but I am already less than your mother because I do not know what one is your father'.²³ Samuelson asserts that 'the right to be a mother, and to be part of a family, is available only to those who have redefined the category of family according to the colonial power, such that the freedom to be a mother might entail new forms of enslavement'.²⁴ Slave mothers watch their children be born into enslavement and become the property of the men that assaulted them. Krumholz argues this exposes the 'incompatible roles as a slave and as a mother'.²⁵ This is most clearly seen when Sila observes that most of the other slave prisoners on Robben Island 'are all the colour of milk in tea. We know what that means. They are the children of fathers only their mothers know'.²⁶ It is clear that Sila's individual experience is not a unique one, and instead is reflective of a colonial past of forced motherhood and sexual assault. Christiansë explores the relationship between slave motherhood and sexual shame so as to write into the archive the undocumented assaults of black South African slave women.

Christiansë highlights the links between motherhood and death to expose the impossible situation of slave motherhood and record the abuse of black women and their children into the archive. Samuelson asserts that Sila is 'Incarcerated at the Cape for *kinder-moord*' and 'is entered into the colonial archive' with this label of 'child-killer'.²⁷ However, Christiansë gives Sila a backstory that enables her to reconstruct Sila's narrative and rewrite her legacy in the archive. Van der Wat, Sila's most abusive master, beats both Sila and her children. However, Van der Wat specifically targets her son, Baro, and Sila describes how Baro 'took the same beating. Yes, he received the blows of a grown man. I have never been able to hear as I did before arriving at Van Der Wat's farm, but Baro lost something else'.²⁸ Van der Wat is unyielding in his abuse of the child and Jessica Murray draws the conclusion that 'Ultimately, it is Sila's inability to protect Baro from the same beatings she endured that leads to her act of infanticide'.²⁹ An attempt to protect her son, and a lack of other options leads to this heartbreaking murder— that which Christiansë renames as 'a sleep that has saved him'.³⁰ Sila creates an imagined figure of her dead son so as to understand her actions. Murray reads this created figure as a 'euphemism for the infanticide that reveals just how tragically limited her maternal power is'.³¹ Sila's love for her children is paramount to her sense of self. Arguably her decision to kill Baro comes from an instinct to protect, not harm. However, Sila's sense of motherhood consequently becomes associated with death as Sila asserts 'I felt my body was giving birth to generations already dead'.³² Christiansë makes it clear Sila is not murderous, but rather desperate in her inability to protect her children from oppressive and abusive colonial powers. Christiansë also documents the story of Hester and her children to show how the relationship between slave motherhood and death is not unique to Sila. Hester is a slave mother who 'threw her children, then herself into the water of Table Bay' and Sila repeatedly references her story in the narrative to give voice to this other victim of colonial slave oppression.³³ Hester and one child do not die in the water and authorities 'Dragged out' the pair only to have 'tied a leather strap around her [Hester's] neck. One man took one end, another the other end and they pulled and pulled. That was how she was punished. And then they threw her into the sea'.³⁴ Hester is saved from a watery death only to

be 'punished', made an example of, and brutally murdered at the hands of the colonial abusers she sought to escape. In depicting both Sila's and Hester's motherhood as linked with death, Christiansë is subverting the traditional image of motherhood to expose and write into a refused and refuted archive the unparalleled oppression of black South African women.

Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at Metropolitan*, asserts these same associations between motherhood, fear and ultimately death. Muriel, in reference to her own motherhood, remarks, 'You shudder at the thought of bringing into this world children to be in the same unnatural plight as yourself, your parents and your grandparents before you — passing on a heritage of serfdom from one generation to another. You are not human'.³⁵ The use of the word 'serfdom' refers to slavery— which highlights the perpetual entanglement of motherhood and slavery. Muriel and her children are still not considered human beings some 150 years on from Sila's slave account. Wicomb's 1993 analysis of the South African female literary canon asserts that the contemporary 'society remains umbilically linked to the matrix of apartheid'.³⁶ Arguably, Tlali holds the patriarchal apartheid system, and the legacy of slavery, explicitly accountable in the perpetual condemnation of black female motherhood in the archival records.

Tlali attempts to write into the archive a sense of Muriel's female agency that is separate from her role of motherhood so as to reclaim independent female space for her in the archive. Muriel recounts how 'After being absent from work for six days because my child was ill, I experienced a wonderful feeling of satisfaction as I approached the shop. It was like going back where I really belonged'.³⁷ This sense of belonging in the professional, instead of the domestic world highlights Muriel's attempt to reclaim an identity separate from her motherhood. However, Boyce Davies claims that 'the South African racial biases constantly impinge on this desire for self-realisation'— that which confines Muriel to her maternal, racially segregated, domestic role.³⁸ Tlali exposes these restrictions on black female identity when Muriel does return to the office early, leaving her child at home, and 'the boss shouted at me again, still looking as if I were a leper approaching'.³⁹ Muriel's maltreatment at the office is arguably punishment for her abandonment of the domestic roles of mother and wife. Tlali is using the trope of motherhood to highlight and record the suppression and exclusion of black female self-realisation in apartheid South Africa.

The figure of Mmè, Muriel's mother, becomes representative of both the genealogical condemnation of the mother figure in South African history, as well as that which allows Tlali to trace Muriel's genealogical past. Strikingly, Mmè is never physically present in the narrative, in the same way that readers do not see Muriel's own children. However, Mmè phones into Muriel's office in a stark crossover of the domestic and the professional realms. The conversation, between two mothers, becomes increasingly political and Mmè's questioning about Muriel's plans for the future of her and her children's lineage, highlights the desire to establish historical agency for their family's genealogy. Mmè asserts her fears over a loss of agency for her daughter and her retrospective grandchildren as she questions Muriel, "When are you going to start thinking seriously about your future, the future of your children?".⁴⁰ Muriel notes how Mmè's motherhood is intertwined with politics as she

perceives political understanding as a way to protect her children's and her own lineage as 'All she wanted to do was to redeem her own; to grab me to safety before I too, sank in the quicksand with all the others. The Republic was beyond redemption'⁴¹ This image of the mother desperately attempting to protect her children is omniscient with Christiansë's portrayal of Sila in *Unconfessed*. Both depictions record the role of black female motherhood in fighting against the 'shattering of genealogical temporality' brought on by contemporary politics— that which refuses the inclusion of black female mothers in the archive.⁴²

EDUCATION

Mmè, as the representation of this maternal-political figure, asserts the importance of female literacy in the fight against suppression in the archive. She laments to Muriel that 'All the education I worked hard to give you has meant nothing'.⁴³ Evidently, Mmè views education as a tool for self-improvement and so emphasis is placed on her providing Muriel with educational opportunity. A mother's most basic role is to protect, and Mmè sees the education she 'worked hard to give' Muriel as a protective armour— that which should allow Muriel to record herself and her family in the archive and avoid the 'quicksand' of the Republic. However, the idea that this 'meant nothing' hints at the overwhelming power of dominant apartheid structures. Tlali and Christiansë assert the importance of the recorded word and the impact that the denial of literacy had on the portrayal of women in the South African literary archive. Both authors write fictional accounts based on factual circumstances. Sila in *Unconfessed* is a real slave recorded fleetingly in the archive, and Muriel of *Muriel at the Metropolitan*, lives an adapted version of Tlali's own life story. The semi-autobiographical form of Tlali's novel, and the semi-biographical form of Christiansë's, asserts their desire to document real-female experience in their reclamation of literary archival space. Harris asserts that in South African literary tradition 'it was oral rather than documentary evidence which carried the story'.⁴⁴ Harris asserts that the impact of this oral, rather than written tradition, is what allows governmental bodies to control the archive, therefore making the real experiences of those most marginalised 'a sliver of social memory' and 'of the documentary record'.⁴⁵ Denied education, Sila's illiteracy reinforces her hopeless position as a slave without agency. Contrastingly, Tlali uses Muriel's literacy to expose the manipulation of the written word by apartheid power structures— that which allows authorities to ensnare, trick and in some cases redefine the identities of those most marginalised. Both authors expose political control of the written word and, through their own writing, attempt to record suppressed and ignored voices back into the literary archive.

Muriel's literacy, whilst allowing her to decipher the manipulation of the written word around her, holds less agency than her white office counterparts. Tlali asserts how a white worker who 'hasn't got half the education' that Muriel has is 'already getting three times' her pay.⁴⁶ In the same way, her education does not protect her job and Muriel details the harsh reality of being a black female worker, as she is always at risk of 'victimisation and unconditional dismissal. It hangs like a dark cloud over the head of every non-white worker — no matter how hard you try to evade it'.⁴⁷ As

she details, regardless of her education, 'Your fate depends entirely on the whims of the white masters!'⁴⁸ That is why when she writes, in her own handwriting, her letter of resignation she exclaims that 'My handwriting had never looked so beautiful. I had at last decided to free myself of the shackles which had bound not only my hands, but also my soul'.⁴⁹ The use of words synonymous with slavery such as 'shackles', 'bound' and 'masters' highlights the permeating entrapment of black female workers. Here, Muriel's literacy proves to be the tool Mmè asserted it to be. It is through Muriel's writing that she literally frees herself from the 'shackles' of her discriminatory workplace and sets herself apart from the 'passive resistances' her mother critiques— that which allows her to write herself, and arguably the novel's narrative, into the literary archive.⁵⁰

Tlali uses Muriel's literacy and understanding of the written word to write the narratives of those 'voiceless' into the archive.⁵¹ Harris asserts that 'resistance to apartheid in this period was a struggle of remembering against forgetting' and Tlali uses Muriel's literacy in *Muriel at Metropolitan*, as a branch of this resistance, to expose the perpetual manipulation of the written word by those in power in apartheid South Africa.⁵² Muriel works in the office of a furniture and electronics shop. Part of her role is writing letters to late paying customers. Muriel details how 'When the 'bad' customer is white, the account is handed over to solicitors[...]'.⁵³ Contrastingly, 'In the case of blacks, the letters may be phrased in any way[...] the letter-writer was given licence to deviate from the usual accepted business letter. Indeed, some of them were personal, insulting, even abusive'.⁵⁴ Tlali is exposing the manipulation of the written word to perpetuate racial discrimination. Similarly, Tlali exposes how the Republic uses their power over literacy and consequentially the written word to define black identity. During a conversation over the 'funny first names' of African customers, the white office workers ask Muriel the meaning of 'Ayisiyu', the name of a black female customer.⁵⁵ Muriel explains that she

asked that customer what her name meant and she said that it was actually the initials 'I.C.U.' Her father used to be an official of an organisation called Industrial Commercial Workers' Union at the time she was born. She says the clerks at the pass-office did not understand what she said when they made her pass, so they just wrote Ayisiyu.⁵⁶

The 'clerks at the pass-office' have the power to define this woman's name and arguably, therefore, her identity through their agency over the written word. The link to her father's working union exposes the hold patriarchal apartheid governmental systems have over female identity. The Republic has the ability to redefine whole human beings and Tlali uses this example to highlight the manipulation of the written word and the consequent exclusion of true black female experience from the archive.

Muriel's complex relationship with the written word is evident from the opening of the novel, as she crucially remarks 'I am not a writer'.⁵⁷ As a semi-biographical novel, this statement is an exposure of Tlali's own complex relationship with the written word. Tlali is the first published black female South African writer. It is striking therefore that Cherry Clayton asserts 'In Miriam Tlali's writing

there is a much more conscious deployment of African phrases, proverbs and folktales, and she draws more consciously on the oral tradition to oppose both colonial imposition and the fragmentation of African support systems.⁵⁸ Tlali's combination of this African 'oral tradition', and the written documented form, sees her asserting traditional African black female voice in the typically white, and/or male realm of the literary archive. Tlali's own relationship with the written word and her literacy allows her to expose apartheid's condemnation of her community's counterparts and record them into the literary archive.

Similarly, Christiansë uses Sila's illiteracy in *Unconfessed*, to reinforce how a lack of education allows colonial powers to control physical bodies and consequently deny them a voice in archival narratives. The slave masters in possession of Sila's body are constantly writing throughout the narrative. The Minister's wife on Robben Island, she who steals one of Sila's children, Meisie, and 'took her in a boat in this weather and with that cough', constantly 'writes letters for the prisoners. And she writes letters to people[...] she sits in the hut[...] and writes more letters'.⁵⁹ ⁶⁰

Similarly, the guards who rape Sila and the other female prisoners 'write too and I say they write with spit'.⁶¹ Those in control of Sila's body and her children's bodies have the agency of the written and recorded word— that which Sila is denied. Mister Neethling refuses Sila's writing lessons as a child on his farm as he remarks "That must stop. I cannot have that".⁶² Neethling arguably fears literacy as a vehicle for escape— a way for Sila to get out of what she defines as the 'country of lies'.⁶³ This denial of literacy is what Baderoon asserts as the reason 'that the views of slaves are almost irretrievably absent in the historical record'.⁶⁴ In contrast, those with literacy have the tools to combat this colonial control. Spaasie, a slave woman who uses her education to demand her freedom, embodies this. Sila notes that 'Spaasie was one of those who got freedom as *Oumiesies* wanted[...] She can read, you know. She was too much trouble for Theron'.⁶⁵ The fact Spaasie can read makes her 'too much trouble' because she can actively combat recorded lies— those both about herself and others. Literacy, in *Unconfessed*, is power. It is clear that a denial of Sila's literacy halts her ability to counter her own and her children's enslavement, whilst those with literacy have more agency to combat these injustices and secure a place for themselves as humans in the archive.

Sila's illiteracy renders her powerless to combat those in control of the definition of her own and her children's identities. *Oumiesies*, Sila's second master, makes Sila and her children free in her will. However, first Theron, and then Van der Wat, manipulate the written word and refuse Sila's freedom. Van der Wat writes Sila and her children into a book with the 'cows'.⁶⁶ In recording them in the book with his cattle, Van der Wat easily transforms them from free humans under law, into animals belonging to him. Sila's claims that she is a 'free woman' therefore fall on deaf ears as he simply inscribes her as his property.⁶⁷ Baderoon asserts the true extent of written archival manipulation as 'the history of slavery has in the past been subsumed behind a depiction of leisure and beauty'.⁶⁸ Literate slave owners have the ability to disguise and hide their actions. Slave masters are therefore in complete control of slave bodies, and lives, and it is clear the manipulation of the written word is what excludes those most marginalised from the literary

archive. In the same way, even when the King of England pardons and spares Sila's life from the murder of Baro, she still has no agency and she cannot read the letter that details this. Sila gets 'the guard who does not come to us at night to read it to me again. I must learn it all because, already, I am forgetting some of what the king said'.⁶⁹ The reference to rape, as this is the sole guard who 'does not come to us at night' hints at Christiansë's understanding of Sila's abuse as being both sexual and manipulative in terms of the written law. Sila is unable to read the letter and so is dependent on her memory, which shows the ease with which colonial powers manipulated, suppressed and excluded black female identity in the archive. In the last few moments of the novel, Christiansë explicitly details the impact of this 'forgetting' on truth and archival tracing,

They make me sick. And now that sickness has a name. It is forgetting. It is their contagion. They write— the sound of rats in the grain— they want to put down their father's name, their mother's[...] They think if they give that sickness to us it will keep them safe.⁷⁰

Christiansë is depicting the success of this colonial 'sickness' of forgetting and the entrenched manipulation of the written word in colonial history. However, in writing this semi-autobiographical novel Christiansë is reclaiming Sila's 'forgotten' space in the literary archive.

THE OCEAN AND ITS SPECIFIC SET OF CULTURAL MEANINGS

Christiansë attempts to reclaim the power of the written word in her redefinition of the ocean as a space for Sila's recovering of self, and retracing of genealogy. This is an active subversion of the ocean's traditional image as 'the space of White male endeavor'.⁷¹ Anke Bartels accounts how the oceans are historically masculine in the literary, colonial archive, as

From William Shakespeare's Prospero to Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe[...] the heroes and anti-heroes of canonic seafaring narratives[...] figure as the core agents of Western globalisation[...] they all pass through global waters without much restriction to explore, to exchange, to exploit, and to conquer.⁷²

Baderoon asserts that 'turning one's gaze to the sea recovers evidence of slave lives otherwise erased from folk memory, as well as the decisively modern character of slave practices subsumed behind picturesque portrayals of the Cape'.⁷³ Christiansë redefines this ocean space as a way to trace Sila's lost genealogy— that which adheres to Samuelson's assertion that South African slave writers, 'encode the sea as an archive in which the afterlife of slavery continues to surface'.⁷⁴ This works to not only give Sila a past that predates her enslavement, but also as a way for her to trace multiple lost slave narratives.

Samuelson asserts the ocean as 'the irrevocable breach between Sila and her familial past', and Sila strikingly reclaims her heritage pre-enslavement through this image as 'There were those of us

who are called Mozbiekers. We all came in ships and we never got that rolling world out of our ears because, on some days, one of us would stumble and the others knew the ocean was sending us a message'.^{75 76} The phrase 'us who are called Mozbiekers' actively reclaims Sila's name and heritage as that separate from colonial control. The personal pronoun 'we' in the phrase 'we never got that rolling world out of our ears' hints at the collective experience of her transportation over the ocean. The water becomes a symbol of the slaves' entrapment as the distance between them and their homeland is 'that rolling world' that they know they will never again cross back over. It is through this oceanic image that Sila is able to document the brutality of this enslavement as *'The mainland floats into the dark like my home as we are loaded into the ship. We are taken out at night in long boats and we are pulled up in a big net and that net puts us in a night darker than the demon's heart'*.⁷⁷ The 'big net' animalises Sila and her people as they are physically ensnared and the reference to her 'home' that 'floats into the dark' highlights the distance between her and her childhood past. The symbol of the man-made ship on the water also allows Christiansë to further assert the horrors of slave transportation as Sila 'learnt from the day I was taken onto that boat, even before I went into that great hole where we had to lie down like people not yet dead but dying. I knew that who I was, who my mother was or my father, did not matter'.⁷⁸ Colonial powers, those embodied in the ship on the water, reduces Sila and her family's sense of humanity. Baderoon says Unconfessed 'is remarkable for Sila's memory of her life as a child' and the exposure of the transportation of Sila's family acts as a recalling of her past, as well as an exposure and therefore recording of the horrors of Sila's experience in the literary archive.⁷⁹

Whilst Baderoon asserts the ocean as a remembrance of 'the cruelty of slavery', Christiansë reclaims the ocean to voice undocumented slave narratives and thus give them immortality in the literary archive.⁸⁰ Baderoon asserts how the ocean in Unconfessed looks over 'the oldest slave graveyard in South Africa, [...] Tana Baru'.⁸¹ This graveyard is therefore the fitting setting for the recalling of Sila's dead son Baro, and for her lost family. Bringing Baro back as a spiritual figment of her imagination, she asks him 'Tell me if you found the hole in the rocks where the sea has made a gate? The spirits of those who die here pass through it'.⁸² This 'gate' acts as a joining of Sila's past and current lives. Another of her children die, this time on Robben Island, and Sila sees her daughter through this 'gate'. In her most striking recalling of the dead and lost, Sila envisions

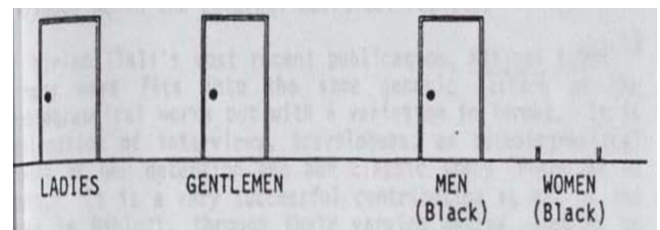
up, there, to the right of that mainland's coast, more people were coming. You could hear their feet on the water. It made the water drum[...] I saw two people[...] Come, come! My mother, my father, come and be your daughter's guests[...] I have been waiting all the years of my bones for you.⁸³

Christiansë resurrects Sila's family in her memory and envisions them through the metaphor of the ocean— that which retraces them and records their genealogical presence in the literary archive. The 'middle passage' that the ocean represents between Sila's entrapment and her homeland, is arguably a bridge between her past and her present.⁸⁴ Bartels asserts that 'Postcolonial narratives have

been instrumental in voicing the gaps, the silences, and often the bitter ironies of Eurocentric renderings of ocean space[...] that are more often than not reduced to the status of mere backdrop or obstacle, object or symbol of alterity profiling White male struggle and achievement'.⁸⁵ By recalling the physical bodies of her family members across the middle passage of the ocean, Sila is able to recall not only their memory but their presence in her genealogical timeline. Christiansë is clearly 'voicing the gaps' left in the colonial literary archive by recalling Sila's familial past across the ocean.

THE METAPHOR OF THE TOILET AS A REPRESENTATION OF BLACK FEMALE DOUBLE MARGINALISATION

Like Christiansë's reclaiming and redefinition of the ocean, Tlali, in *Muriel at Metropolitan*, uses the metaphor of the toilet to shape her narrative structure— that which embodies the double marginalisation of black women in apartheid South Africa. Boyce Davies asserts the practical problem of the toilet as key 'in underlining the question of lack of space, literary and otherwise' for black South African women.⁸⁶ In Tlali's narrative, the metaphor of the toilet embodies the sexual and racial discrimination Muriel faces both personally and professionally. Through Muriel's accounts of the politics that accompany the image of the toilet, Tlali is forcibly creating space for black South African women in the archive. Boyce Davies uses this diagram to highlight black female exclusion from society through the metaphor of the toilet.



[figure 1]⁸⁷

Describing the toilet as a place of 'symbolic space allocation' in the makeup of South African society, Boyce Davies explains how 'the African woman's existence is totally negated'.⁸⁸

This symbol of exclusion is omniscient with the denial of black female space from the literary archive. Tlali uses this allegory to first depict the racism Muriel faces in her office as Mr Bloch bans her from using the office toilet of the white female employees. In a mortifying exchange between Muriel and her boss, Mr Bloch, which serves to dehumanise Muriel in front of the white employees, Mr Bloch asserts that "Mrs Stein and Mrs Kuhn have complained to me that you have been using their toilet".⁸⁹ The possessive pronoun 'their' denies Muriel any right to use this bathroom and actively positions her as 'other'. Muriel apologises saying "Yes, I know, Mr Bloch, and I promise I will never use it again. I'm sorry... I..." Before I could say more, he continued[...].⁹⁰ Muriel's fragmented speech and Mr Bloch's forceful interruption of her further denies Muriel's personal agency. Muriel interprets this ban from the toilet as a metaphor for her acceptance into the office itself as she remarks

'it seemed I had carried the idea of being accepted too far'.⁹¹ Tlali is asserting the toilet metaphor as reflective of social acceptance. Muriel's denied access to this toilet means she must use the one in the park, that which 'was two blocks down, and it cost me two cents in the slot every time'.⁹² However, Mr Bloch disciplines her for these journeys to the park as they interrupt her work. Consequently, Mr Bloch denies Muriel any space to relieve herself. This lack of space reflects the negation of black female self in apartheid South Africa. It is clear Tlali is using the metaphor of the toilet to write black female racial oppression into the archive.

This toilet metaphor also exposes the sexist prejudice that Muriel faces from within her own race. Adam, the black male office worker, uses the white female toilet that Muriel is not permitted to use. Boyce Davies writes that in terms of inter-racial agency, the toilet metaphor exposes 'firstly the albeit problematic possession of the phallus [which] assures the African man some space. Second, the African woman's existence is totally negated'.⁹³ Adam casually uses 'the 'Whites Only' lavatory that I had been forbidden to use[...] without bothering even to shut the door'.⁹⁴ Adam's self-exposure not only highlights a disregard for the feelings of those in the office, but is an example of the power of the male 'phallus'. Whilst Adam is black, his penis gives him agency where Muriel has not. In fact, he is overtly disrespecting Muriel by almost relishing the use of this supposedly white female only bathroom. Similarly, 'After he had finished' Adam exits the bathroom 'not bothering to wash his hands'.⁹⁵ His disregard of cleanliness highlights the power yielded by a black man in the face of Muriel's black female exclusion. Adam can act with less civility than Muriel, and yet still claim agency in terms of the toilet metaphor.

Similarly, Muriel's advancement professionally becomes impossible because of a toilet, and it is through this metaphor that Tlali records the extent of black female entrapment in the apartheid system. Mr Saladino offers Muriel a job at Continental Scooter Repairs. Yet, after months of her planning her leave, the 'inspectors' of the Republic do an assessment of her new work place and tell her employer that he 'must build another toilet[...] They say we can't use the same toilet because you are non-white'.⁹⁶ The phrase 'non-white' furthers Muriel's portrayal as 'other'. When she suggests 'I can use the same toilet as your other black workers,' Mr Saladino denies this also, as 'If they know I have a non-white girl here working for me, and I don't have a separate toilet for her, they'll charge me'.⁹⁷ Once again, as a black woman, Muriel lacks more agency and space than both her racial, and sexual counterparts. This denial takes place 'Two days before I was due to leave Metropolitan Radio and start the new job' and Tlali exposes the overriding control of black female bodies by the apartheid system.⁹⁸ Through the metaphor of the toilet, Tlali is exposing apartheid's control of the most intimate human necessity. As Boyce Davies asserts, 'The South African struggle is of course, much more than the sharing of toilets. But the metaphor has strong validity here when we consider the question of the allocation of space and the concomitant exclusion, separation and marginalization of African women represented thereby'.⁹⁹ The metaphor highlights apartheid's exclusion of black female identity in both the literal and archival worlds. Evidently, Tlali uses the exposure of the unfairness of this bathroom system to

write female double marginalisation into the literary archive.

CONCLUSION

Both Tlali and Christiansë's novels mark a beginning of the reclamation of space in the archive for black women, as they trace the roots and familial ties of black female South African identity. Nicola Cloete asserts that it is a combination of 'memory, heritage, identity and nation-building within the context of the country's[...] willed amnesia about its history of slavery' that allows this reclamation of archival space.¹⁰⁰ Tlali's semi-autobiographical and Christiansë's semi-biographical novels are both arguably important texts in the creation of space in the archive of negated black female South African experience. Boyce Davies's 1986 article asserts 'the South African woman's story is just beginning to be told', and Christiansë's 2006 novel shows the continuation and augmentation of the telling of this female South African story.¹⁰¹ Boyce Davies asserts that 'For the South African woman writer, telling her story is a simultaneous structuring of her own space'.¹⁰² It can be said that Tlali is structuring this 'own space' in a reclamation of not only her personal identity, but also those represented within Muriel's office— that which Boyce Davies describes as a 'microcosm of the South African apartheid system'.¹⁰³ In the same way, Christiansë is 'structuring' space for the woman, Sila, who was not given the agency to do so for herself. Christiansë's research into a woman denoted and denounced as a child killer and the rewriting of Sila's identity in terms of the feminine tropes of motherhood, and the significance of the ocean, is part of the 'collecting' that Harris said should be the driving force in the 'post-apartheid' imperative to 'give the voiceless voice'.¹⁰⁴ Evidently, by marking the significance of the mother figure, and highlighting the double marginalisation that oral tradition, illiteracy and the toilet metaphor places on black women, a new past is created which could 'lead to a rethinking of some of the most important developments in the history of South Africa'.¹⁰⁵ This would therefore allow documented female experience to mark, and make an impact upon, collective reflections on South Africa's history.

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Megan Matthews English Literature

'Surreptitious Insurrection': Theatrical Contestation of the Nation-State in Post-Independence Nigeria

KWAME OWUSU, Drama and English Literature

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's status as a nation-state has always been a colonial invention, created out of myriad peoples forming over 250 ethnic groups who between them speak over 500 languages, with economic and political exploitation one of the chief motivations for state unity. However, despite this extraordinary cultural diversity, some of the central uniting factors for the people of Nigeria throughout the colonial and 'post-colonial' periods are the extensive structural disadvantages faced by women, the working class and the precarious classes. In 1976, Nigeria, like many other African countries, was a relatively new creation, having only officially been an independent nation for thirteen years. However, despite its new status, the many regions and peoples that made up the country at this time, had a vibrant history for many millennia. At the heart of this history is a long tradition of oral storytelling and performance, which began long before the colonial conquest of the region and took the form of a 'very rich and robust dramatic and theatrical practice that is [unique] to them'.¹ As opposed to being formally documented, these tales and performances were embedded at the heart of communities and passed down through generations - a shared tradition of ritual, myth, celebration and imagination. In the mid-twentieth century, many sections of Nigerian society were agitating for independence and political renewal, and playwrights such as Wole Soyinka were at the heart of this struggle, forming the first of what Emmanuel S. Dandaura has retrospectively entitled, the 'four generations' of Nigerian playwrights.² The early work of Wole Soyinka and his contemporaries has been negatively characterised by later playwright Femi Osofisan, as focusing on 'ancient history, lost in myth' which despite being useful in asserting Nigeria's identity as separate from British rule, had only a limited utility in negotiating the nature of the country's present and future.³ In contrast to this, Osofisan, alongside playwrights such as Ola Rotimi, Bode Sowande, Olufemi Obafemi, and Tess Onwueme, came to prominence in the late 1970s and 1980s for their fiercely political dramas, which were firmly focused on the present moment and positioned 'on the side of the common people, and against the formidable agents of the ruling classes'.⁴ These playwrights were writing in an epoch of repressive military-rule, which began in 1966 and lasted until 1999, punctuated by coups d'état and a brief period of democracy from 1979 to 1983. Their works continued the long-standing Nigerian tradition of strong connections to ordinary people and communities, with the plays 'performed by state arts councils, polytechnics, and social organisations, thereby reaching a stratum of people below the university elite'.⁵

Osofisan calls attention to the fact that Western scholarship often assumes that African literature is 'dedicated to [...] the recovery of our autonomous identity', an assumption that this essay's initial theorising also fell into.⁶ In reality, he asserts that the attachment of the cultural product from an independent nation to a project of belated identity reclamation, is false and reductive. Osofisan pointedly labels the dominant Western discourse on Africa as a 'plague of alienation' which falsely creates the assumption that all African work is 'writing back' to a colonial past, rather than allowing it to be framed around the present, in which the impact of identity concerns arising from imperialism is peripheral at best.⁷ He identifies this European-centric framing as at the heart of Gilbert and Tompkins' *Post-Colonial Drama*, which presents the formal techniques of African performance as 'merely strategies to deconstruct the presence of colonisation', rather than to interrogate the political reality of the continent's present.⁸ Indeed, the text's revered positioning in post-colonial academia is demonstrative of the widespread erroneous critical framing of African drama; a framing that this dissertation will begin to correct. At the core of this regressive perspective is the notion of assumed audience, which despite Western solipsism, was not 'the white men and women of Europe' but instead 'the local public' in order to 'empower [them] for moral and political action'.⁹ He goes on to articulate that any focus on Europe in modern Nigerian drama would actually be on the devastating impact of neo-colonialism. Nigerian theatre at this time was politically radical, using a range of formal strategies through which 'the terror of the state [could] be confronted [and] demystified'.¹⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'radical' as 'relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something', and throughout this dissertation it is used in this linguistically accurate sense - the interrogation of the foundational tenets of the status quo in order to uproot, dismantle and replace it with an egalitarian framework.¹¹

The central argument of this dissertation is that the plays of Osofisan, Onwueme, and Rotimi between 1976 and 1988 utilise theatricality, metatheatricality and performativity in order to be vehicles for a politically radical contestation of the rights and lives of women, the working class, and the precarious classes within the post-independence Nigerian nation-state. Theatricality is one of the most contested terms in theatre studies and is often used in a myriad of contradictory ways, but this dissertation will be drawing upon Erika Fisher-Lichte's semiological perspective which defines it as semiotic system of signs that 'can or cannot be decoded' by the spectator in relation to cultural or social systems.¹² This study will also draw upon Josette Féral and Ronald P. Bermingham's contention of theatricality as 'a process that has to do with a "gaze" that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space [...] from which fiction can emerge', as the use of decodable signs and imagery to construct a theatrical frame that can be interpreted by the audience is central to the political power of these plays.¹³ In regard to performativity, this

dissertation will define it as the actions and formal characteristics of performance that provide new ways of invigorating the relationship between the spectator and the 'virtual space' of the theatrical frame. Finally, the working definition of metatheatricality for this study is the highlighting of the constructed nature of the aforementioned decodable signs to the spectator. Despite metatheatricality not being a uniquely African device, Brian Crow demonstrates that whilst 'the exploration of the metatheatrical in much Western drama has been associated with psychological and existential concerns', African playwrights are notable for their utilisation of it for almost solely 'political and moral' objectives.¹⁴ The playwrights cultivate a dualism through which the audience are drawn in by a theatrical frame that is filled with symbolic meaning and evokes notions of liberation, radicalism, and resistance, whilst the use of metatheatricality and performativity activates the spectator to think critically and take action in the real world. A key methodological challenge faced in undertaking this study is the lack of archival recordings of Nigerian performances available in the United Kingdom, and thus the main primary material is the play-texts themselves. However, this is not disadvantageous as these plays have been written as clear blueprints for performance, as opposed to literary documents, and thus the intricately infused (meta)theatricality and performativity throughout these texts allows us to appreciate their live potentiality, despite the geographical and temporal distance.

The political efficacy of theatre is often fiercely debated, and the ephemerality of the live event makes performance notoriously difficult to research, which is why spectatorship theory is crucial to understanding the relationship between the audience and the production. In recent years, Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* has been widely revered, particularly for his criticism of any notions of audience activation, as he contends that the audience 'observes, selects, compares, interprets' and thus is already active in their interpretation of the theatrical frame.¹⁵ Therefore it is incorrect to assume that theatre rouses them from political inactivity, as Rancière maintains Bertolt Brecht says.¹⁶ However, this study will argue that this latent activity may indeed exist, but that these plays seek to push it further, to the extent that the spectators take active steps in the world beyond the theatre to dismantle the exploitative system around them. Thus, it is not a case of awakening an ignorant audience from stupefaction, but rather utilising (meta)theatricality and performativity in order to build upon already existing political sentiments and push audiences to take action and 'transform the field itself'.¹⁷ Moreover, Rancière's argument does not fit with the specific contextual environment of military-ruled Nigeria because the playwrights do not assume the ignorance of their audience. The plays are not filled with factual content or information for example, but they do counter dominant narratives which reside at the heart of the nation. In examining these plays, it allows us to consider the political power of theatre afresh, not in stirring reasoned thoughts or educating supposedly ignorant masses, but rather in contributing to a radical reimagining of the nation-state through which the position of women, the working class and the precarious is uprooted, deconstructed, and transformed. Indeed, these plays show us the tangible impact that theatre can have on oppressed peoples and communities. That is not to say that theatre can single-handedly cure the ills of the country or topple the government, but rather it

is an undeniable part of a wider, incrementally formed tapestry of nation-state contestation and transformation.

CHAPTER 1: METATHEATRICAL MUTINIES: MARXIST RESISTANCE IN *MOROUNTODUN* AND *IF: A DRAMA OF STRUGGLE*

Since the late 1940s, Nigeria had a longstanding Leftist and Marxist tradition spanning decades of labour struggles, women's revolts, trade union disputes, rural resistance, and nationalist anti-colonial party politics. Adam Mayer makes clear that it would be a gross 'misrepresentation of Nigerian history [...] to ignore the ever present [Marxism] in the history of the country's multifaceted struggles for emancipation'.¹⁸ Leftist thought and collective organising have often faced harsh repression due to challenging state and bourgeoisie authority, and, in fact, Nigerian left-wing parties and movements were 'strictly illegal in the periods 1946-60, 1966-78 and 1983-99'.¹⁹ During the period of 1976-1988, theatre and playwriting played a key role in Nigerian Marxist resistance, particularly in the way in which it was used to deconstruct what Antonio Gramsci labels, 'cultural hegemony'. Gramsci contends that the ruling capitalist class (who control the highest levels of government) usher in an 'extension of power relations beyond the state and the economy into civil society', education, communications, media, and other cultural institutions to accrue and maintain power, beyond blunt military force, so that their worldview is naturalised and becomes the accepted dominant.²⁰ A key example of this is the Nigerian military's guiding influence over widely distributed newspapers in order to control the dissemination of information and sustain their ideological power. This control of culture and civil society exists as hegemonic power because, as Gramsci argues, it is so saturating and insidious that it 'constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under its sway'.²¹ Raymond Williams adopts Gramsci's incisive thoughts in his theory of cultural materialism, which extends the classical Marxist understanding of culture as only residing in a 'superstructure' which reflects what is produced in the 'base' (formed out of the relations of material production which exist between capital and labour). Williams boldly argues that culture is fundamentally bound up in institutional processes, individuals, and the social and class relations between them. Cultural materialism shows us that not only does the capitalist economy imprison workers in exploitative modes of existence that systematically disenfranchise them, but that art is inextricably connected to, produced by, and crucially, produces these very dynamics, rather than just reflecting them as traditional Marxist thought had hitherto asserted. Williams coined the terms 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' to refer to art which respectively fosters, acquiesces in, or resists the accrual of bourgeoisie power and the concretisation of the social order.²² In this chapter, two plays will be explored: *Morountodun* by Femi Osofisan, and *If: A Drama of Struggle* by Ola Rotimi; two urgent examples of dissenting, 'emergent' art which seeks to dismantle the bourgeoisie construction of the worker as solely worth their labour power, and instead resist structurally unequal and dehumanising class relations which pervaded Nigerian society at this time. In analysing these plays, it is possible to observe how theatrical contestation is a key tactic of 'surreptitious insurrection' whereby

the playwrights mobilise their audiences through a potent mixture of performative actions, metatheatricality, language and imagery.

A key event in the history of Nigerian Marxist resistance was the Agbekoya Revolt of 1968-1969. This was a major peasant revolt in reaction to crippling high government taxes on rural farmer communities, and the use of force by local government officials to collect these taxes. The Revolt was only partly successful as despite the agreement of the government to reduce the flat tax rate, and the reported reduction in the level of force in tax collection, the repressive character of the government remained, and the class-based position of the farmers and peasants did not markedly improve. The Agbekoya Revolt is the inspiration for Osofisan's 1979 play *Morountodun*, a metatheatrical, formally ambitious work which seeks to inventively interrogate this historical event for its modern audience. The play begins with a theatre production that is planning to explore and examine the Agbekoya Revolt, which is promptly interrupted by Titubi, the ostentatious daughter of a wealthy family who, accompanied by a mob of protesters, invades the theatre and hijacks the performance. The police are called and Titubi convinces them to pretend to arrest her and place her in prison so that they can use her to infiltrate the farmers' rebellion and bring the leader to justice. As the play continues, Titubi is won over to the side of the resisting labourers and joins them against the police and the government. The play operates on multiple, complex spatial levels, with the 'actors' putting on the play existing in the present, and Titubi existing in the world of 1968. Osofisan's *Morountodun* is staged in 1979, and the setting of this play is a theatre, beginning with the Director speaking of the Agbekoya Revolt as a historical event. As the play proceeds the space is simultaneously a stage in 1979, a prison, a farmers camp, and police headquarters in 1968, during the Agbekoya Revolt. The 'real' world of the fictive present is dismantled with Titubi's entrance and the action is plunged into 1968, with the actors remaining self-conscious performers and simultaneously transforming themselves into the protesting farmers that Titubi interacts with, thus highlighting the artifice of the entire play, constructing an intricate, performative exploration of storytelling, history, and political activism, which constantly draws the audience's attention to its constructed nature for political effect.

The start of the play is a key example of *Morountodun's* use of metatheatricality as the Director addresses the audience directly when he declares 'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We will soon be starting. [...] I'll try and give you a rapid summary of our play tonight'.²³ Direct address is used throughout the play and serves the purpose of powerfully engaging the audience in conversation about the events of the play and presenting these events as a construction to be actively analysed and interpreted by the audience, rather than passively consumed and forgotten. Another important metatheatrical device that Osofisan employs is the use of role play and multi-rolling to highlight the constructed artifice of his play. At the start of Scene Two, once Titubi and the Police Superintendent have left the stage, Bogunde asks 'may we come in now? It's our cue', to which the Director responds that they must 'put on [their] clothes and make up. Disguise [them]selves well' (p.139), whilst handing them the farmer costumes which they will use in Titubi's narrative. Not only does this set up the fascinating metatheatrical layers at the heart of the play, but it also highlights the play's narrative focus,

because the actors are choosing to perform the role of the farmers, whose role and nature the audience are being invited to analyse, assess and understand. This positions *Morountodun* as a cultural product which seeks to deconstruct the pro-government narratives of the Agbekoya Revolt which have been valorised through official depictions and reports, with the specific silenced thoughts and actions of the farmers. Moreover, the way that the 1979 performers chose the character they wished to play, shows the audience that appreciating the farmers holds deep significance for understanding the present: the people at the heart of this seminal instance of collective resistance should be understood in order to approach the political environment of 1979. Osofisan's use of role play is a clear example of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* because, by introducing the actors to the audience as themselves, and then having them visibly take on the additional role of key characters within the narrative, the play refuses to have a total level of verisimilitude, thus encouraging critical distance and reflection on the audience's part about the society they inhabit.

Role play also plays a key function within the narrative and Titubi's journey through the play. Disguise is frequently shown to be a political act, such as in Titubi's masking of herself as a prisoner with the permission of the Police Superintendent after she requests 'can you arrange for me to be captured?', in order to lure and capture Marshall, the leader of the rebelling farmers.²⁴ Similarly, when Titubi returns to the police, having switched allegiances to the side of the farmers, she acts as if she is still pretending for them. These compounded layers of role play and disguise play a dual role, being both key to the plotting of the narrative, and also indicative of the masks layered upon masks that need to be uncovered to get to the heart of political intention. Osofisan shows the audience that it is only through being constantly alert to the presence of constant disguise and sleight of hand, that one can unearth the complex layers of deception at the heart of Nigerian political life. This play works to introduce, or indeed, remind the audience of the omnipresence of the hidden motives that underpin the exploitation of workers by the ruling classes in Nigeria, because as Osofisan himself says, 'a play with levels, masks, [and] role-playing, makes for a lively, provocative theatre', and this theatrical exploration of motive and agenda 'provokes' the audience into a greater awareness, and to potentially take actions which aid the deconstruction of bourgeois power.²⁵ Osofisan's metatheatricality powerfully disrupts the natural appearance of hegemonic power, revealing its constructed nature and facilitating audiences to critically assess and remove themselves from its reach.

A key formal technique in *Morountodun* is the use of temporal fluidity, as the play darts between the 1968 setting of the Revolt and the world of Moremi - a real-life Yoruba queen from the twelfth century. Moremi's presence in the narrative is initially as a source of inspiration for Titubi, but as Titubi realises the class-based injustice that the farmers face, Moremi's legacy is reassessed. Osofisan approaches history and tradition not as 'an inert legacy' but as a dynamic construct which is constantly produced and reproduced in relationship to the social processes of the present.²⁶ He shows the audience that the past is endlessly contestable, and it is in challenging accepted narratives about history that one can begin to

dismantle the bourgeoisie's authority and power. This is particularly evident in Osofisan's framing of the story from the perspective of the farmers, which he has called the offering of a 'dialectical counter-narrative, in which history is seen [...] from the perspective of those who are society's victims'.²⁷ Furthermore, the legacy of Queen Moremi is shown to be entirely contestable because she is initially presented as having held up the 'stability' of the country against insurgent forces and is described as 'the brave woman of Ilé-If, who saved the race

But after Titubi's class awakening she disdainfully states that she 'had to kill the ghost of Moremi in [her] belly. [...] Moremi served the State, was the State, was the spirit of the ruling class'.²⁹ By having Titubi realise that Moremi was not a saviour of the country, but a 'symbol of ruling-class hegemony', we are shown how interpretations of the past have a fundamental bearing on actions undertaken in the present.³⁰ Osofisan asserts that history should be shaped into an inherently progressive force that moves society forwards into an egalitarian model, and this is only achieved by firmly arguing that it is not an immutable object that discourages class emancipation.

One can similarly observe the deconstruction of dominant narratives in Ola Rotimi's 1983 play *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled* - a materialist text that counters the frequent marginalisation of working-class stories by placing them at the heart of its narrative. It is set during the run up to a general election and is located in a single housing block. It follows an assortment of the block's tenants as they deal with the news that they are being threatened with eviction by a landlord who is also a 'Patriotic People's Party' candidate in the upcoming election. The play takes the form of a series of vignettes that begin with the tenants debating their imminent eviction, and proceeds to show snapshots of them living their day to day life, discussing the future, sharing knowledge, and organising to resist capitalist oppression. Rotimi has structured the play in this way as he sought to evoke an atmosphere of 'theatrical "naturalness"' - to construct a theatrical world which showcased the working-class of Nigeria who lack adequate representation in mainstream cultural production.³¹ The play calls for collective solidarity and resistance. Indeed, Martin Banham remarks that 'their courtyard is a microcosm of Nigeria' and that Rotimi uses this microcosm to show his audience that unless 'people of all ethnic backgrounds and social classes [unite, they] will always be prey to the corrupt and the exploitative'.³² Rotimi constructs this multifaceted world with precision, showing the audience a community filled with wit, humanity, and honesty, but also one that is facing dire socio-political hardship every day. Firstly, one can observe the reality of their political situation, in the scarcity of secure accommodation in the city, such as when Akpan complains 'where [...] can a man find a toilet - forget about single rooms. I mean a filthy latrine to rent and sleep in within 24 hours?'.³³ Secondly, the audience is faced with the reality of exploitative landlords in Nigeria who increase rents 'from twenty to thirty Naira', which is described as an act of 'robbery' (p.14). Thirdly, the nature of Nigerian workers' class position is unwaveringly laid out by Akpan's friend, who declares that they are 'slaves! Slaves! [...] Workers, students, farmers - the whole lot of contented blind wretches!' (p.48). However, alongside exposing the reality of working-class disenfranchisement, Rotimi

also displays the ways in which this community resists their oppression. Firstly, they are shown to prioritise education over everything and are intensely politically conscious, particularly Hamidu who tells Papa that 'Fanon comes once in a while into [his] political dialectics. But the spirit is unswervingly Che Guevara' (p.6), the knowledge of which empowers him to identify the exploitative tactics of the Landlord as a 'pure capitalist gambit yanked straight off the precepts of the Machiavellian stratagems' (p.16). Furthermore, they embark on a dual process of resistance by exercising their democratic power to refuse to be bullied, choosing to vote against their Landlord and for a party that will 'inspire a forthright judiciary before which [they'll] present [their] case', alongside petitioning the Landlord and formally stating that they 'regard his letter discriminatory and vindictive' (p.15). Rotimi reinforces that this all revolves around a central project of nation-reimagining, and that this task can only be meaningfully undertaken through collective organising. As Hamidu states, 'we cannot build a nation on a foundation of individual self-preservation [...] We must survive: *together*' (p.82). This call to collective action speaks directly to the audience as well, whose 'closeness [...] to the action forces it to confront the picture that Rotimi draws' of Nigeria's inequities, and the way to begin to challenge them.³⁴

Alan Sinfield asserts that it is through representation and the stories we tell 'that we develop understandings of the world'.³⁵ Stories 'transmit power' and are used by the ruling classes to shape the social order and 'the scope of feasible political change', and thus it is in creating and contesting stories that the possibilities for far-reaching political change can be expanded.³⁶ Rotimi's *If* fulfils that purpose of constructing representations of the lived experience of ordinary Nigerian workers, whose existence in this narrative serves to display the multiplicity of their society, rather than allowing the power of representation to reside solely in the hands of government. A crucial instance of this is when we are introduced to a Fisherman whose livelihood has been ruined by rapacious oil companies, supported by the Nigerian Government, who as Banji warns, 'will arrest anybody who dares to disturb the Oilmen' (p.27). This scene serves as an incisive analysis of the problems facing many Nigerian workers and an indictment of black leadership who have joined Western oil companies in devastating the natural landscape and robbing local fishermen of their source of employment. This is a crucial example of the play's Marxist analysis, examining how unequal power relations of economic production have a tangible impact on quality of life and the environment. Rotimi shows us that *carte blanche* given to foreign corporations to exploit Nigeria's natural resources is one key cause of working-class impoverishment at this time. This analysis not only holds deep importance for the daily reality of his 1983 audience, but also for a contemporary audience today, as Adam Mayer notes 'it has been the Washington Consensus that confined Africa to its role as a provider of raw materials', which led Nigeria to become 'essentially a petro-state'.³⁷ In the play, Hamidu argues that the greatest challenge the working class face is self-hatred, because 'when a people are oppressed long enough, they grow to *hate* and *fight* themselves, while secretly *admiring* the oppressor' (p.17). This echoes Marx's seminal theory of 'false consciousness' which argues that the idea of the world as an

equitable, meritocratic place is a manufactured sense of reality, designed to make 'members of the proletariat unwittingly misperceive their real position in society'.³⁸ The role of superstructural forces in the construction of this falsity is then expanded by Gramsci into a theory of hegemony. In this scene, Hamidu is arguing that the Nigerian working class live through this lens of false consciousness which fosters a consensus that the world is fair and true, but that this consensus is underpinned by self-hatred and a peculiar admiration for one's oppressor. Representation is a central factor of the increased self-love needed to resist this punishing perception of one's self, as these stories produce a political subjectivity for their audiences that is centred around pride in working class identity and a collective desire for change. Moreover, this connects to Osofisan's *Morountodun* because, in the play, the imagined realm is disrupted and shown to be constructed, when Titubi bursts in and in the many instances of metatheatricality, equally, here the imagined realm is disrupted and shown to be constructed in an entirely different way. In both plays, the fantasy is confronted and ruptured in order to fuel a politically radical argument, and both acts of disruption encourage the audiences to critically consider the extent to which they are distant from an equitable society, and the steps that are needed to allow workers to truly seize control over the means of production.

Rotimi powerfully constructs his spatial environment in order to create the impression of a fully functioning tenement complex and also make clear symbolic points. A unique feature of this play is the use of simultaneous scenes which both creates this multi-dimensional world, and also gives agency to the audience who can choose which section of the theatrical frame to analyse and engage with at each given moment. A key simultaneous instance has Chinwe and Betty leading Bible Class, Hamidu dictating political theory to Akpan, and Papa teaching children the history of ancient monarchs. The concurrence of these scenes brings them into critical discussion and interplay with one another, with each being a different type of education - theological, political, and historical.³⁹ One can conclude that Rotimi is making a clear point here about the centrality of pedagogy and education to the liberation of the Nigerian working class. Furthermore, this serves as a clear example of cultural materialism, whereby Chinwe, Betty, and Papa's classes function as residual culture because a history of ancient monarchs or religion neither actively promote the status quo nor rigorously challenge it, whereas Hamidu's class functions as emergent culture as he equips Akpan with the tools necessary to directly challenge bourgeoisie power, thus intelligently displaying the spectrum of political radicalism within this community.

Finally, Rotimi's play is written predominantly in English, and thus places itself in the centre of a knotty debate around the political use of language in African literature. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o proposes that language is the central arbiter of 'people's definition of themselves' and articulates how imperial forces policed the African sense of self by imposing English on the colonised peoples.⁴⁰ Ngũgĩ goes further to argue that this violent process of control continues unabated when European languages are still regarded as the *lingua franca* for all forms of communication and literature in 'post-colonial' Africa. He states that the valorisation of European languages above native ones serves to 'annihilate a people's belief [...] in their languages, in their environment [...] and ultimately in

themselves'.⁴¹ Ngũgĩ argues that this has two main effects. Firstly, it causes the denigration of native languages as inferior, which is frequently extrapolated onto the entirety of African culture. Secondly, it lessens the often politically radical sentiment of the text. However, this study dissertation argues that Rotimi intelligently engages with this issue, as *If* does not slavishly adhere to English as its sole form of communication, but instead playfully manipulates the language into an 'Indigenized English', alongside the wide-ranging integration of pidgin and various other indigenous languages, such as when Woman 1 questions a young boy 'Afo anam nso ke ndo!' in Ibibio which translates as 'what are you doing in there!' (p.4).⁴² This recognises the linguistic diversity in the audience and more accurately represents the idiosyncratic multilingualism that characterises Nigerian communities, rather than a restricted focus on a singular native language would have.

Femi Osofisan argues that the role of the modern playwright is no longer 'the celebration of customary ethos', but rather 'the stimulation of active questioning, doubt and insurrection'.⁴³ It is in interrogating and challenging the current structuring of society that one can begin to dismantle it, and in Osofisan's *Morountodun* and Rotimi's *If*, a materialist understanding of class power places prime importance in challenging the stories that the ruling classes tell about our shared histories, stories, and future. Through challenging the monopoly that the bourgeoisie have on culture and representation, these two playwrights empower audiences to see lives and legacies that have been previously obscured from them, and it is this very knowledge which is designed to fuel their radicalism and encourage them to take steps, however small they may be, to change the society around them for the better.

CHAPTER 2: A RURAL REVOLUTION: WOMEN'S LIBERATION'S IN *THE REIGN OF WAZOBIA*

Tess Onwueme's 1988 play, *The Reign of Wazobia*, follows a young woman who, following the death of the monarch, is selected through ceremony to ascend to the throne and become king. The play depicts the period towards the end of her allotted three seasons of kingship, showing Wazobia's fight for the rights of women in society, and the resistance she faces from male chiefs such as Idehen and Iyase who see the women's liberation movement as a disruption of the natural order of things. The play explores the nature of women's place within the nation-state and the ways in which repressive, patriarchal power structures might be resisted in order to assert the political autonomy of women in Nigeria's post-independence present. Onwueme interrogates the ways in which history and tradition are inextricably linked to the continuation of a socio-political environment of 'facile nationalism', controlled by male military leaders, who see the reclamation of the country's past glories and the liberation of women as incompatible concepts.⁴⁴ Jacques Rancière argues that 'representational mediation', whereby art changes the world through the representation of a counter model, is an ineffective form of political art, however, this neglects to reckon with the way in which the dominant political force in the nation-state undertakes its accrual of power and influence.⁴⁵ Here, the military dictatorship of General Ibrahim Babangida, functioned through the facilitation of a national ideology of nostalgia and misogyny

which constructed an imagined narrative of what the nation should be. Onwueme's play directly counters this reductive narrative by employing language, imagery, allusion, and an unwavering political sensibility to construct a 'virtual space' that contains a compelling alternative reality. This blueprint for a future society which its audience might draw upon and fight for in the real world, effectively utilises hope and idealism rather than a solely dispiriting presentation of the current reality.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the play employs a vocabulary which is a form of Nigerian English 'usually spoken and written by Onwueme's intended homeland audiences', thus showing how her play is designed to directly connect to the general public, as opposed to just the university academic.⁴⁷ Onwueme situates the play directly in the audience's repressive political present, with Wazobia drawing attention to the stark hypocrisy of the men of the Anioma Kingdom who detest the apparent length of her reign, despite the fact that she has reigned for 'just *three* easons' and in contrast, she has 'known military intervention last 10, 15, ... 20 years!!!'⁴⁸ The repeated assertion of the length of military-rule is designed to resonate with the production's local audience, who, by 1988, were well accustomed to military factions forcibly taking power, claiming a clear, time-limited mandate, and then indefinitely extending that rule, until forcibly deposed by the next military junta, as had happened with Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi (1966), General Gowon (1966-1975), General Mohammed (1975-1976), Major General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976 - 1979), and Major-General Buhari (1983-1985). Later in the play, Wazobia, having discovered the plot to depose her, states that they are carrying out this action 'so they can rig... elect a male king' (p.129). This word-choice is not accidental because Wazobia is frequently shown to be a character who uses words for particular effect and thus it can be read as a coy indictment of the illegitimate nature of military rule. In this example, Onwueme uses the metatheatrical device of soliloquy, rupturing the fourth wall, strengthening the connection between the represented and the real, and inviting audiences to directly engage and agree with Wazobia's critique. Moreover, Onwueme not only places the play within this particular political context but presents it from a perspective that is frequently underrepresented - that of Nigerian women in rural communities. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie contends that a pervasive, erroneous myth is that Nigerian women's liberation can only take the form of 'linear development [...] from rural bondage to the sophisticated, urban Westernised and thus free women'.⁴⁹ In *The Reign of Wazobia*, one can observe the rare accomplishment of depicting women whose liberation is situated in the rural, rather than in a pining for an urban identity. Onwueme's play occupies a unique place within Nigerian, and indeed global feminist discourse by showing its audience that the liberation of rural women can be self-produced, rather than indebted to an urban, Western model of feminism which Ogundipe-Leslie argues may have overlapping goals, but does not adequately respond to the self-declared identity of rural Nigerian women. A key example of the play's particular situating in the rural is in the visual establishment of the world of the play, with the stage directions noting that Wazobia '*stands equidistant from the palace throne and the surrounding huts making up the community*', thus ingeniously using proxemics and placement within space to connote Wazobia's role of disrupting the relationship between power, political autonomy, and the rural woman (p.126).

Finally, by placing the narrative within a rural environment, the play not only explores the unique political identity of the rural Nigerian woman, but undertakes a process of 'surreptitious insurrection' whereby it avoids a narrative of overt urban revolt which would certainly have been censored by the authorities.

Ogundipe-Leslie argues that 'the rural woman is often depicted as subordinate, dependent and passive', but in *The Reign of Wazobia* one can observe how rural women are presented as independent and active in their positioning as strong, autonomous beings (p.51). Firstly, there is a clear rejection of their previously subordinate societal position, Wazobia stating that 'it is no time to kneel but a time to stand' (p.142). This interplays directly with a previous scene in which Wazobia orders male chief Iyase to kneel in submission, and the repetition of the word 'time' clearly insinuates the ending of an epoch of male power and the commencement of an era of women's liberation. Secondly, the political equality of women is firmly asserted, particularly in governmental matters from which they had been hitherto excluded. Wazobia declares the necessity of an open system of state planning, arguing that there is no reason 'why women and youths must be kept away from matters of state concern. Matters of state affect them much as they affect chiefs and princes' (p.148). Thirdly, Wazobia sets out an expansive domestic policy platform which extends from education policy with schools 'to tutor women and bring out the best of their potentials', a decree promulgating a ban on domestic abuse, and the total rewriting of inheritance law in order to ensure that 'women shall have equal rights of inheritance in matters of land and property!' (p.153). This final point is a clear example of the ways in which 'Onwueme's play sought to decolonize the role of women within the nationalist project to establish a more democratic and pluralistic society'.⁵⁰ This exemplifies the efficacy of 'representational mediation', whereby an alternative reality is presented, not in a hollow or rhetorical manner, but through a concrete domestic policy platform that could and should be adopted by Nigeria's rulers to eradicate the structural misogyny that riddled the country at this time. Amkpa argues that the play 'portrays the vision of a monolithic political collectivity as a utopian ideal', and I believe that this utopic envisioning is in itself a political act because it fundamentally reframes the gendered power relations that have underpinned the structuring of the Nigerian nation-state.⁵¹ The ending of the play demonstrates how the audience are wrapped up in the presentation of an alternative reality of politically empowered women, because it ends on an ambiguous note, in which the battle is not fully resolved. This demonstrates that the contestation of women's political place does not end within the theatrical frame but extends into the real world, the onus placed upon the spectator to pick up the gauntlet and continue the struggle in their day to day lives. Brecht writes of the necessity of theatre which not only releases radical feelings or makes one think about the structuring of 'the particular historical field of human relations', but facilitates 'thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself'.⁵² Onwueme's play rises to this challenge, and the ending encourages its audience to enlarge their toolkit of practical tactical strategies and affect material change.

In *The Reign of Wazobia*, the exploration of women's liberation extends beyond domestic policy and governmental positioning and stretches into the inherently political nature of the female body

itself. Michel Foucault argues that the 'body is used as a way of placing human beings within a regulatory system' and this notion of the imposition of power relations through the body is central to understanding the control of women within this patriarchal society.⁵³ It is the aforementioned 'regulatory system' which controls the symbolic construction of the female body and strips women of political agency in order to concretise the misogynistic social order and dictate both women's identity and the behaviours permitted within this identity. The regulatory system is one of silencing, repression, and authority over bodily expression. In depicting a rejection of the female body as solely a vessel of motherhood or male sexual gratification, the play contends that the body is a key site for the contestation of discourses of gender and power. Throughout the play, the audience are shown that women's bodies have been endlessly maltreated in this society, with Wazobia arguing that 'for ages [men] have used and sucked [women] dry and disposed of [them] at will' (p.132). It is the palpable rage at this treatment which encourages them to boast of the physical strength of their bodies, which can withstand 'the soup when it is hottest while the men scrape it from the sides' - a clear rebuke to any notions of feminine fragility (p.130).

Another key response to the male depiction of the female body is a reclamation of the symbolic construction of their bodies, most importantly in their assertion of the political power of the naked female form. Maggie B. Gale argues that 'the gestural potential of women's activist bodies as occurring in public spaces in which those bodies are not socially, politically, or economically equal' is potent, and one can observe this in the defence of Wazobia by the other women in the face of attack by the conservative male chiefs.⁵⁴ In response to this act of male aggression they '*advance, naked and unison [and] form an arc behind Wazobia, to which the men retreat, stagger and freeze in their stupefaction*' (p.173). In this scene the women showcase their naked bodies, not as objects of male gratification, but as weapons against the patriarchy. They tactically use the symbol of the naked female body to control and shape representation, to invite the male gaze and simultaneously reframe their subjectivity so that their nakedness is not sexualised and passive, but politically autonomous and powerful, and thus the summoned male gaze is not an act of submission but a mode of attack.

This serves as another example of the radical construction of the theatrical frame, which can be analysed through the lens of Elaine Aston and George Savona's 'Theatre as a Sign-System', which contends that 'everything which is presented to the spectator within the theatrical frame is a sign which signifies explicit or implicit meaning to the audience.'⁵⁵ In this instance, the women are not only physically confronting the men, but are literally reshaping the semiotic meaning which their bodies exude. So, on a functionalist level, on both sides' construction of society, nakedness is denotative of an absence of clothes. But residing above the functionalistic level in the hierarchy of signs is the symbolic level, which has been shifted on the women's terms rather than the men's and thus the symbolic meaning at the heart of the female body has now become one of emancipation. In this framing, they have liberated themselves from the symbolic construction of submission and sexualisation which the patriarchy draws its strength from. This pushes the audience to

take what Rebecca Schneider articulates as a 'second look' brought about by the 'astonishment' of the visual display of sudden militant nakedness.⁵⁶ This act of 'astonishment' encourages a 'second look' at the symbolic meaning imbued in the female body, and thus by extension a 'second look' at the political place of women in post-independence Nigerian society. Moreover, one can also read a compelling double meaning at the heart of the stage direction '*[they] advance, naked and unison*' (p.173). 'Naked' also means unembellished, and thus this act can be interpreted as being fundamentally about showing women in their pure state, because central to this act of nakedness are notions of collectivism - an act of communal resistance in which 'naked' and 'union' are inextricably conjoined.

Alongside her incisive exploration of radical femininity, Onwueme also interrogates the nature of masculinity which is shown to be a fundamentally insecure construct which exists in fear of usurpation and thus responds in a constantly reactionary manner towards womanhood in order to maintain dominance. This further highlights the innate generative power of womanhood whereby Wazobia and her fellow women produce positive alternatives rather than simply repress and react, as the symbolic representatives of masculinity do throughout the play. Firstly, for example, masculinity is shown to be constructed in relation to femininity in its existential reliance on female dependency. Before her conversion to the feminist cause, one of King Wazobia's ceremonial wives states that 'a woman without husband is like pudding without wrap which feasts the eyes but which no one longs to have' (p.140). This demonstrates the subordinate view of women which she has been indoctrinated with and shows how masculinity pushes women to seek validation from men for their own self-worth. Secondly, the male penis is constructed as representative of virility and power. Throughout the play, many of the men argue that the overriding threat that the women pose is to literally and/or symbolically castrate the male penis and thus by extension, castrate male power. One can observe this in the derisory rejection of the gender equality movement by an unnamed Man who states that 'I will offer myself for castration the day I allow a woman [...] to lie on my top and taunt me' (p.151). The symbolic power of male sexual organs is also used by men in order to emasculate other men into rejecting Wazobia's movement, such as when Iyase tauntingly tells Idehen to 'get the pieces of yourself together, man. Or has Wazobia so shattered you that she has crushed the balls between your thighs?' (p.156), and when Iyase tells Ozoma, who argues that Wazobia should be allowed to speak, that 'creatures must open their mouths when men who are men stand up to speak!' (p.150). These two examples show the audience that structural misogyny is reinforced by constructing masculinity as incompatible with women's rights. The threat of castration is also portrayed as an issue of the identity of the community, rather than solely an individual concern, when Idehen questions 'with what mouth will it be said that we sons of Ilaaa lost our manhood with a sweep of a woman's hand?' (p.169). The 'threat' that insurgent women pose to masculine society is further espoused when the gender equality movement is characterised as a 'reign of terror' (p.128), Idehen feels diminished into 'a toy cap in the fingers of a mere woman', and Wazobia is described as 'the new disease that plagues us'. These hysterical statements demonstrate the nature of these men as part of what Ogun-dipe-Leslie calls a ruling, 'indifferent, oppressive [...] black bourgeoisie' under which

'all women in contemporary Nigeria are under the stress of living' (p.74). Indeed, the hysteria of this bourgeoisie is not only irrational but self-sabotaging, as the political exclusion of women throughout Nigeria's recent history has been identified by economists as 'one of the major setbacks for economic development'.⁵⁷

One of the key ways in which masculinity in post-independence Nigeria is shown to operate is in the deployment of tradition in order to oppress women and facilitate a regressive form of nationalism. Man argues that 'as our fathers did, so must we' (p.153), and this statement is indicative of the view in Nigerian society that the post-independence period should be characterised by the reclamation of past glories before colonialism, and that any attempted societal evolution towards women's liberation would be a perversion of this nostalgic project. Women's supposed traditional place is explored when Iyase mockingly asks, 'Liberation from what? From the kitchen or from where?' (p.149). Alongside, forced placement within the domestic sphere, the notion of tradition is also used in the contestation of sexual relations, with women's supposed true place being 'lying below' (p.149) the male. Onwueme depicts the ways in which women challenge the masculinised concept of tradition, stretching from the questioning of the 'torment of incessant funeral rites that men are free of' (p.143), to protesting the fact that women are forced to partake in ceremonies which are 'meant to extort the very last breath, wealth, and dignity from them!' (p.144). In challenging the gendered imposition of tradition upon women, the audience are encouraged to embrace the notion that 'seasons too change' (p.144), and that the evolution of a society towards equality is a sign of its progression and health.

Susan Bennett writes that 'reception [is] a politically implicated act', and this dissertation argues that this idea of politicised spectatorship is central to understanding the effect of *The Reign of Wazobia*, as by watching the on-stage women reclaim their bodies and destinies, the audiences are automatically bound up in the radicalism of the act.⁵⁸ The transformative effect of Onwueme's dramaturgy is that it both reconstructs the nature of post-independence nation building by placing women's liberation at its heart, and reconstructs the subjectivity of the spectator by transforming them into a radicalised subject, armed with a tactical manual of strategies 'which help transform the field itself'.⁵⁹

CHAPTER 3: MAGIC AND MOBILISATION: STATE POWER IN *ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS* AND *HOPES OF THE LIVING DEAD*

A notorious feature of this period of military-rule was an epidemic of armed robberies which increased rapidly throughout the major urban centres of Nigeria, such as towns and cities in Anambra State, Bendel State, Lagos State, and Ogun State. It is important to note that in 1970 the number of armed robbery incidents reported and recorded by the police numbered 12,150, but by 1976 this rose to 105,859, which in turn rose to 271,240 by 1982.⁶⁰ General Gowon's government issued Decree No. 47 in 1970 to enforce mandatory capital punishments for those found guilty of armed robbery, with no right of appeal. Furthermore, the definition of the 'armed robber' was extended to include not just those with offensive firearms but those with anything that might be used as a weapon such as a piece

of wood, metal or stone. However, as the aforementioned statistics show, there is a positive correlation between the issuing of this Decree and the dramatic rise in reported cases, as over 400 armed robbers were executed in the period of 1970 – 1976, suggesting that the outbreak of armed robbery was not an issue of insufficient levels of punishment or policing.⁶¹

The notion of an alternative cause for the armed robbery epidemic is the focus of Femi Osofisan's compelling 1976 drama *Once Upon Four Robbers*, which is inextricably linked to the aforementioned evidence, that 'the armed robbers studied had one thing in common: all had a low-status background, coming from one group that bears much of the burdens of the depressed and mismanaged economy'.⁶² In his Programme Note that precedes the play, Osofisan argues that the 'legalised slaughtering of the erring members of our society will certainly not bring the restoration of our society'. In exercising its power to deliver harsh justice and vilify the 'precarious classes', those who are 'shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural mechanisms of social integration'⁶³, these socially excluded groups are forced to commit crime, and the state avoids the fact that the real catalysing issue lies in 'our sprawling slums and ghettos, our congested hospitals [...] The callous contradictions of our oil-doomed fantasies of rapid modernization'.⁶⁴ *Once Upon Four Robbers* follows four armed robbers who are given the magical power, through a traditional divination ritual, to charm bystanders through the power of song, where they will 'sing and dance and then head home' (p.31), allowing the robbers to escape with their goods without the need for violence. The play is set in an environment in which the state chronically underfunds structures to support the precarious classes of Nigeria's urban society to the extent that large swathes are 'reduced to searching for food in dustbins' and 'exposed to preventable disease and death'.⁶⁵ The government responded to the pursuit of basic necessities by framing the crimes as acts of personal evil, and setting up public firing-squad executions on the infamous Bar Beach of Lagos - events which rapidly became televised public spectacles with thousands of live spectators and print journalists.

In *Theatre Matters: Performance and Culture on the World Stage*, Osofisan firmly embraces the Brechtian tradition of spectator activation, arguing that Nigerian theatre can 'stir the class out of its customary apathy into combat, provoking it into anger and active resistance'.⁶⁶ At the heart of both the play's aforementioned 'active resistance' of the state and the advancement of the rights of the precarious classes is the relationship it cultivates with the spectator. This relationship is formed through the construction of the world of the play and its theatrical frames, and employment of a range of metatheatrical and performative strategies to mobilise its audience to resist the state's diversionary vilification of the disenfranchised, and instead highlight the structural causes of the armed robbery epidemic of the 1970s and 1980s. A core strategy which is employed is the insertion of direct democracy and audience participation. At the end of the piece the on-stage scene freezes into a tableau, after which the audience is asked whether the robbers ought to be executed or set free and prompted into a fully-fledged debate - which is stipulated in the stage directions to be 'a full discussion, not just a gimmick' (p. 96). After this, a vote is taken and the majority decision decides the ending of the play, which is consequently performed,

with the play-script laying out both alternative depicted events depending on either eventuality. This example clearly shows how the audience are pushed to have a visible impact on the art itself as Brecht calls for in 'A Short Organum for the Theatre' in which he derides theatre that 'shows the structure of society (represented on the stage) as incapable of being influenced by society (in the auditorium)'.⁶⁷ This direct engagement serves to trouble the distinctions between the represented and the real and facilitate the audience to consider justice, class, and the nature of state power in their own reality, rather than just within the world of the play. It is in this troubled terrain that theatre's political potential lies because the audience are invested not only in deconstructing meaning within the theatrical world, but in dynamically shaping the art depending on their participation. The inclusion of direct democracy within the production cements its connection to the real world as it stands in stark contrast with the military government and its substitution of democracy with enforced edicts and fiat. Furthermore, each departing audience was said to always be engaged in 'fierce' arguments debating the current political situation which demonstrated how the audience had left 'a real event, not an invented tale'.⁶⁸ This clearly shows how the play pushed through the boundaries of fiction and mobilised audiences to be actively engaged in the political moment.

Osofisan argues that *Once Upon Four Robbers* ought to 'shock us [out of...] passive acceptance or sterile indignation into a more dynamic, more enraged determination to confront ourselves and our lives' (p.1), espousing a Brechtian rejection of theatre which confirms assumptions or provides simple cathartic release. He accomplishes this initially through his construction and deconstruction of the theatrical layers within the play such as at the outset, the stage directions inform us that '*the actors and musicians have gathered on stage, evidently all in a light mood [...] discovering the costumes, they begin to pick and choose [...], gradually establishing the various roles they will be playing*' (p.3). This is the first example of metatheatricality within the play and serves to highlight to the audience the constructed nature of the theatrical frame and thus encourage them to think critically about the art in relationship to the real world in which it is situated. Soon after, the audience is shown a wordless sequence of soldiers who '*lead in a prisoner and tie him to the stake*' (p.4) and brutally execute him. This display constructs a poignant juxtaposition between the notably playful atmosphere of the beginning and the clinical assassination of the unnamed prisoner. The use of metatheatricality in the playful start connects to this later sequence because the actors being able to choose their characters powerfully contrasts against the inability of the prisoner to change their fate.

The play embraces a fluidity of genre, particularly through its fusion of magical realism and traditional storytelling forms. These attributes bolster the performativity of the play, by utilising formal innovation in order to engage audiences in new ways, 'condition social action and foster social interaction'.⁶⁹ As previously mentioned, the function of the magic is central to the premise and allows Osofisan to weaken the state's vilification of the robbers by removing violence from the equation, thus focusing the audience's attention on the motivations behind robbery in Nigeria at this time. The embracement of magical realism shapes the play into a folk tale and is a key strategy to evade detection by censorious state authorities.

Osofisan highlights this in his scholarship, arguing that 'these tales [...] have the kind of techniques to shelter the outspoken artist from official harm'.⁷⁰ The use of traditional storytelling forms is also another example of strategic audience participation, the play opening with a Storyteller playing a traditional West African percussion instrument called a *sekere*, coming onto stage and singing out 'Aaalo-o!' (p.1). This is a traditional call and response which these audiences would recognise requires their response of 'Aaalo!', and thus establishes a world which requires their direct intervention and participation, just as the political emergency beyond the doors of the theatre does. Live music is also used in the construction of tone in the play, such as in Alhaja's performance of a *slow dirge*' (p.4) which underscores the conversation of Angola and Hasan about the death of the unnamed, killed prisoner who is revealed to be Angola's husband. The music sonically constructs an elegiac atmosphere, further emphasising his untimely death rather than vilifying him. The use of live music is central to the task of spectator activation throughout the play, as it encourages direct participation in the world, Mineke Schipper summarises, 'making music, by clapping in rhythm or by dancing and singing in refrains'.⁷¹ This all serves the cultivation of a total theatre aesthetic in which scripted stage action and extra-textual audience intervention are all mutual, interdependent signs which make up the theatrical frame. Music and song is also compellingly integrated into Ola Rotimi's 1988 play, *Hopes of the Living Dead: A Drama of Struggle*, such as in the inclusion of spirit-lifting choral music which is '*harmoniously balanced, rich' and 'wraps up the entire audience in a full-bodied suffusion*' (p.1). Rotimi constructs what Osofisan identifies as 'euphonious songs and heart-rending dirges' which interplay with 'poetry dense with echoes of traditional wisdom' to shape an environment imbued with symbolic music and language.⁷² This play draws upon the age-old tradition of music as a form of communal resistance, and thus one can infer a connection between the liveness of protest and the liveness of theatre. Part of theatre's radicalism comes from its proximity to the immediacy of protest and this is reinforced through the integration of communal singing and the play's clearly stated intention to wrap the audience in its sound, and by extension wrap them in its political radicalism.

Hopes of the Living Dead is set in the late 1920s and follows Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, a historical figure who is widely considered to be the 'father' of contemporary Nigerian choral music. Whyte suffered with leprosy and the story shows him and his forty fellow sufferers responding to the state attempting to evict them from Port Harcourt General Hospital in which their condition was being studied. In depicting the state of their existence and treatment in the care of the state, Rotimi explores the ways in which state power is manifested through control over life, death and the body. In 'Necropolitics', Achille Mbembe explores and extends the Foucauldian theory of biopower which articulates the ways in which state apparatuses mediate their power through institutions such as hospitals or prisons, that remodel our subjectivity so that our very being is inextricably linked to them. Mbembe frames state power through the notion of necropolitics; defining state control over who may live and who must die as the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty'.⁷³ He paints the remit of this power as existing beyond the strict definition of life and death and articulates the concept of 'death worlds', such

as the American slave plantation.⁷⁴ This has a strong resonance to the execrable living conditions within the hospital in *Hopes of the Living Dead*. These conditions are shown to stem from the neglect of the state medical authorities, such as the stopping of medical treatment causing 'headaches, yellow fever, diarrhoea - all sorts', on top of the leprosy they already suffer with.⁷⁵ Their maltreatment by the hospital is additionally overseen by the Superintendent of Police, exemplifying the utilisation of biopower via interconnected institutions within the state apparatus. The state of living death that defines Mbembe's 'death worlds' is firmly alluded to both in the title of the play and in Harcourt Whyte's triumphant statement towards the end of the play: 'Now we dead are awake!' (p.101).

Mbembe situates the right to kill as at the heart of all forms of state control and argues that this power manifests itself in a variety of ways depending on the political needs of the state, but that it is constantly summoned through the political construction of exceptionality, 'emergency, and a fictionalised notion of the enemy'.⁷⁶ This sits at the heart of the historical context of military-ruled Nigeria, the period of Muhammadu Buhari's government, in power before the premiere of this play, 'brought in its wake an era of authoritarianism such as had not previously been known in Nigeria's post-independence history'.⁷⁷ In the play, one can observe the facilitation of a state of exception by the government authorities in which the leprosy sufferers are stripped of their fundamental rights for the furthering of the state's political objectives. Moreover, this expression of state power can be seen as characteristic of the entire period of study, as the use of state execution in *Once Upon Four Robbers* is a clear example of control over who must die being the ultimate power of the sovereign state.

Rotimi's play was written twelve years after Osofisan's and was inspired both by Buhari's authoritarianism and the neoliberal policies of General Ibrahim Babangida. In 1986, Babangida accepted an IMF-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which decimated the public sector and 'led to a gross and rapid decline in the standard of living for everybody except the upper class' and 'the incredible widening of the gap between the rich and the poor'.⁷⁸ In *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Rotimi is not advancing a singular argument about the rights of those living with leprosy in state hospitals, but instead allows them to represent the entirety of the disenfranchised in Nigeria who have been forced into a category of exclusion in which the most powerful were enriched. For example, Babangida 'became a billionaire' whilst the health and human rights of the vast majority deteriorated.⁸⁰ Furthermore, one can infer the argument that neo-colonialism is a direct factor in the creation of this state of exception because it is the imposition of the SAP which impoverished the nation and irreparably damaged institutional support for those most in need.

Sola Adeyemi characterises Osofisan's dramaturgy as constructed through 'the manipulation of the mechanics and metaphors of play-making and of performance in such a way that the performances do not directly expose themselves to immediate repression'.⁸¹ This essay argues that this process of 'surreptitious insurrection' can be extended to analyse Rotimi's dramaturgy, as the decision to situate his 'Drama of Struggle' in the colonial past allows the text to evade unwanted state attention, but through his depiction of the lives of these characters, the audience are presented with clear parallels

of the post-independence political situation in which they live - a world in which vast sections of the population 'experience a permanent condition of "being in pain"'.⁸² By highlighting this in stark terms, the audience is encouraged to take action and change it. In Osofisan's case 'surreptitious insurrection' applied to the process as well as the product, exemplified through the fact that they rehearsed in clandestine rehearsal conditions and productions were often prohibited by central government, such as a production 'in Ilorin which was banned on orders from Lagos'.⁸³ The rehearsals and development of the play were undertaken through a fluid working process, encouraged by the spirit of revolution and comradeship whereby the script was constantly 'interrogated [and] reworked' until the text had become a 'completely different, living thing'.⁸⁴ The importance of radicalism in the process as well as the final product demonstrates how all aspects of Osofisan's theatre were political and communal.

In *Hopes of the Living Dead*, the distinction between the real and the represented is disrupted through the play demonstrating to audiences the ways in which communities resist oppression in their encounters with the state. In a key scene towards the beginning of the play, Court Clerk disdainfully asks 'what are we doing? Writing letters, scribbling memos', arguing for more direct action and declaring that the civility of petition writing is seldom effective.⁸⁵ Rotimi also imbues the spatial constructions of the play with symbolic meaning such as when 'five policemen break into the Ward, wielding batons', the contested ownership of the space becoming inextricably linked to agency over the leprosy sufferers' future.⁸⁶ Additionally, we are shown two characters who are dishevelled and weather-beaten, but yet 'an inexorable will to live still sustains a buoyant strength in them'.⁸⁷ Here resistance to the state is situated in a collective refusal to die, rejecting the state's necropolitical power and maintaining agency. Finally, Harcourt Whyte declares that 'we all are part of this land. We are not fighting the people. We are fighting for the people', clearly rejecting any state-imposed separation from the national community and reclaiming their status within the category of 'the people'.⁸⁸ Here he reconstructs the nation 'through the imaginative realm' and through the power of language stakes his and his comrades' claim of equal belonging within the nation.⁸⁹ The play employs over fifteen different languages, including Yoruba, Edo, Tiv, Urohbo, Nembe, Idoma, Hausa, Igbo, and Kalabari. This can be read as a micro-construction of Nigeria; whose borders are a colonial invention containing over 250 ethnic groups and 500 languages. By showing these peoples from different groupings within Nigeria working together in collective resistance, the play further constructs an 'imagined community' which despite linguistic divisions is united by political purpose. Nadine Holdsworth crafts an inherent linkage between the act of shared imagination which sits at the heart of the nation, and the act of similarly communal imagination which is central to theatre-making and spectatorship, particularly at times of 'crisis or conflict'. Indeed one can draw a direct link between the act of manifestation that Whyte executes through language, and the active world construction that the audiences undertake.⁹⁰ This process realises an alternative reality through their belief in the theatrical frame, in the same manner in which they might realise an alternative political reality through a communal assertion

of the rights of all people within the post-independence Nigerian nation-state.

CONCLUSION

At this time, Nigeria was a highly febrile and repressive socio-political environment, with the period characterised by coups d'état of persistent frequency, and ambitious military rulers constantly seeking to remake the nation-state in their own image. However, as has been demonstrated, the contestation of the fundamental nature of the nation-state was not solely a project for rapacious major-generals but was also undertaken by the radical playwrights Femi Osofisan, Tess Onwueme, and Ola Rotimi, alongside their many contemporaries, in order to reimagine a Nigeria with the rights and lives of women, the working class, and the precarious classes placed at its very heart. These playwrights utilised Brechtian notions of politicised spectatorship, placing audiences at the centre of their plays in order to construct and mobilise them to take material actions to transform the world around them. As Williams' theory of cultural materialism shows us, culture is a tool that can be used by the ruling capitalist class to ideologically dominate society and reproduce exploitative power dynamics. Osofisan, Onwueme, and Rotimi recognised this and crafted 'emergent' plays that directly confront the ideological underpinnings of the violently repressive nation-state and celebrate the right to political autonomy of the oppressed peoples of Nigeria. These findings reinvigorate and validate the Brechtian conceptualisation of theatre, reminding us that in times of crisis, political theatre practice and the stories we tell to reimagine our place in society has a concrete relationship to the reshaping of the very societies which we theatrically explore. Theatre, even 'political theatre' can sometimes be seen as of theoretical or academic concern in its use of form or exploration of theme. But what this investigation has shown us is that theatre can have a direct and very real connection to febrile and dangerous political conditions, and that the debates, ideological positions, and arguments within them are central shifting national discourses that shape people's lives and can often literally mean life or death.

In Osofisan's plays he draws upon the millennia-old legacies of Nigerian performance, intelligently utilising the inherently metatheatrical form of storytelling and reimagined history, with frames, narrators, layers, and debates that encourage critical reflection from the spectator to consider their class position and the role of the state in their structural disenfranchisement. Onwueme sculpts a theatrical world of women's emancipation in a ceaselessly misogynistic environment, resisting a male construction of the nation-state as grounded in the traditionalist past, and instead employing language, imagery and allusion to campaign for a future in which the rural woman can reframe her own subjectivity and the symbolic power of her body. Rotimi unmasks the inner workings of state power with an eclectic range of performative forms and invites his audience to consider how effective resistance to state repression lies in the communal and a determined battle for autonomy over space and health. The interplay between the construction of imagery, language, and spatiality in a semiological system, the highlighting of the constructed nature of these signs in order to encourage critical

analysis by the audience, and the use of an array of formal characteristics in live performance in order to invigorate the relationship between the spectator and the production, is what makes these plays truly electrifying. It is the cultivation of a bespoke amalgamation of the theatrical, the metatheatrical, and the performative which allow these plays to powerfully contest the construction of the nation-state, to propose an alternative, liberated mode of living and organising, and finally enlist the spectator in the mission to bring this imagined realm into reality, so that those who have been hitherto oppressed can have the life and political autonomy that they deserve. Despite Nigeria containing a vibrant array of peoples, languages, ethnicities, and regions, these playwrights vigorously reimagine the nation-state, uniting these groups around a central mission of emancipation.

APPENDIX A: BRIEF TIMELINE OF NIGERIAN POLITICAL HISTORY

1st October 1960 - Independence from Britain.

15th January 1966 - First military coup, start of Ironsi regime.

29th July 1966 - Second military coup, start of Gowon regime.

6th July 1967 - Start of Nigerian Civil War.

12th January 1970 - End of Nigerian Civil War.

28th July 1975 - Third military coup, start of Mohammed regime.

13th February 1976 - Fourth military coup (abortive), assassination of Mohammed.

1st October 1979 - Democratic inauguration of Shagari as President.

31st December 1983. Fifth military coup start of Buhari regime.

27th August 1985 - Sixth military coup, start of Babangida regime.

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Kwame Owusu Drama and English Literature

The Toxic Erotic: How is male desire presented as toxic, perverse and corruptive in Nabokov's *Lolita*, Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*?

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Published in America in the 1950s and 1960s, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* all emerged from the lingering repression of the 1930s to expose the potent lust and desire that had been broiling beneath it. Their reception of scandal and controversy attests to the radicalism of the authors' direct response to this social context which challenged conservatism with provocative depictions of unrestrained impropriety and decadent sexuality. Their explicit presentations of fervent sexual craving and pleasure are focalised through male protagonists who convert romantic relationships into a one-sided dynamic, distorting mutual love into a hedonistic pursuit of self-gratification. Male desire is conceived as a toxic agent corrupting and undermining the foundations of society, perverse as it deliberately transgresses social values and boundaries. In *Lolita* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, the men violate the security of the family unit with incestuous passion exacerbated by the taboos of paedophilia and male hypersexuality, while *Giovanni's Room* stages a defiant rebellion against the heteronormative roles prescribed by homophobic culture. All the texts are defined by an atmosphere of restless libidinal longing through a series of lustful encounters that subordinate cooperative civil union to the compulsive desire to satisfy insatiable sexual impulses.

Criticism has typically regarded the texts as efforts to engage readers to identify with these subversive figures and their behaviour through seductively charismatic narration and compellingly beguiling rhetoric. However, this interpretation neglects the ways the powerfully manipulative narrative voices contribute to the authors' construction of egocentric male protagonists who claim their desires distinctly as their own. Reassessing critics' observations of the characters' narcissism, this essay will therefore elucidate how the male protagonists' exclusive accounts and control pointedly oppose rationality, natural boundaries and normative social values, as the authors disrupt romantic convention with texts sustaining a dominant focus on the self. Indeed, the male ego dominates the texts' form and content. Their first-person narrative authority, dictating the reader's interpretation, plot events and framing of other characters' experiences, exemplifies their manipulative command signalled by recurrent possessive language and self-referential commentary. Likewise, their desire permeates the texts thematically and stylistically, as their controlling tendencies reduce human lovers to objects serving for the men's gratification, alongside imagery conveying the wider fetishisation of bodies and objects. Underpinning their erotic obsession are power struggles to subjugate the lovers and their uncontrollable passion, engendering internal conflicts

reconciling guilt, shame and denial evidenced by dissociative third-person self-references and external projections of their resentment. Their narcissistic tone corrupts further by generating obsession for total possession of the love object, indicated by language of food and consumption, provoking aggression and violence frustrated by their dissatisfaction. All of these tensions converge on their tragic endings where the protagonists' pained reflections of their unfulfillment conclude the texts with a final note of pervasive dominance of male desire. This essay will therefore track how the texts' possessive male voices, sexualised imagery and figurative language focus the perspective on their desire for power, which corrupts their objects of desire, the external world and finally the internal self.

MALE DESIRE AS DOMINANCE, POWER AND CONTROL

Deeply embedded in all the texts is the presentation of sex and sexual desire as a pernicious power arising from the men's subordinating control and possessive dynamics. This is entrenched from the outset of *Lolita* as Humbert's narration immediately deconstructs and anatomises Lolita nominally from 'Lolita' to 'Lo-lee-ta' before reunifying her 'in my arms' as he reconstitutes their bodies and identities fused together.¹ He fixes her dependence on himself through a lexical set of permanence connected to his own vitality: I knew I had fallen in love with Lolita forever [...] The word 'forever' referred only to my own passion, to the eternal Lolita as reflected in my blood (*Lolita*, p. 72). This is reinforced when he later rhapsodises, 'in a few hours hence [...] mine, mine, mine, Lolita would be in my arms' (p. 114), the future tense 'would be' converting a conditional possibility into a future certainty, marking his possession of her as inevitable. His discourse is marked by the repeated first-person possessive pronoun 'my' — a recurrent verbal motif shared by all the texts to assert the men's ownership — strengthening Humbert's metonym, 'the sceptre of my passion' (p. 14), which symbolises his desire for Lolita as monarchical authority. Humbert thus claims his desires as resolutely his own rather than universalising them as innate human proclivities. Baldwin makes overt these associations of desire with sovereign dominion in *Giovanni's Room* with imperialist references to the 'conquest [...] to conquer the boy,' as David's lust figures the love object as property of the supreme male ruler.² These colonialist implications recurs later when he possessively appropriates his lovers into the territory of 'my land' (*Room*, p. 44). Humbert, on the other hand, affirms the supremacy of his desire with a predatory dynamic conveyed through a zoomorphic metaphor identifying himself as a spider ensnaring Lolita 'the prey' (*Lolita*, p. 53) in his web. This epithet is reiterated consistently to signify the powerful threat of his desire and her resultant vulnerability, significations Humbert attempts to manipulatively invert by imploring the reader to 'try to discern the doe in me' (p. 146)

as he purports to be the prey. This effort is compromised significantly by his later description of hunting, which physically enacts his predatoriness in a scene ominously foreshadowing the violent confrontation with Quilty. The scene centres upon the symbol of the pistol, consolidating the undertone of threatening male desire within the narrative. Threat is inflicted on Lolita as Humbert uses her as a comparative reference for measuring the pistol, 'length a little under one ninth of Lolita's length' (p. 245), making them coextensive: Humbert's ruthlessly enforced, dangerous power and Lolita's fate, representing the confluence of menacing dominance with passionate male desire.

The possessive dynamics contribute to the wider contiguity between sexual desire and the male ego asserted by the texts' dominant male voices. Humbert's description of himself as 'an exceptionally handsome male [who] could obtain at the snap of my fingers any adult female I chose' (*Lolita*, p. 25) introduces his clinical classification the other (the 'adult female') to ingrain his perverse interest in age and assume the status of professor through 'the trappings of scientific theory and case-study talk'.³ The hyperbolic egotism of the claim introduces the 'self-aggrandising first-person narrative [voice]' established early in all the texts by promoting the men's perspective, and is symptomatic of the texts' shared use of a privileged first-person individual voice to degrade other individuals.⁴ *Giovanni's Room* opens with David admiring his own reflections, which he insists upon the reader with the simile 'like a face you have seen many times' (*Room*, p. 9), before he is superimposed onto the world that is being mediated through his reflections: 'this countryside reflected through my image' (p. 10). Cyclically, we return to David watching his reflections at the end, as the focus on himself bookends the narrative to contain its events within the hermetic seal of his self-interest. Thus, his gaze marks the introduction of his wife Hella, 'I can see her' (p. 10), his field of view permitting her into existence with the modal 'can' and renders her obsolete when they separate — 'so unrelated, finally, to my life' (p. 10) — as her status of significance is determined by the parameters of his perspective. The man's perspective also frames the opening of *Portnoy's Complaint* through the imposition of Portnoy's memory and a reality delineated within his consciousness, 'she was so deeply imbedded within my consciousness,' filtering events through his perception.⁵ The ambiguous deictic reference of 'she' withholds specific information from the reader, securing dictatorial command of our access to clarity and understanding. His dictatorial voice becomes so emphatic that he overthrows narrative convention by proudly taunting the reader with his misleading artificiality — 'Do I exaggerate? Am I doing myself in only a clever way of showing off?' (*Complaint*, p. 94) — rather than fostering a relationship of trust; the same self-interest is reflected in the dynamic of his sexual encounters focused entirely on his own pleasure. His combination of manipulation and self-aggrandisement is encapsulated in the coupling of his early self-attribution of reliability, 'I became honest,' with the preceding self-praise, 'Ah, and brilliant' (p. 2), as the invitation of trust and respect is undercut by the male ego.

In *Lolita*, Humbert highlights his manipulative curation of the narrative when he fictionalises events through a frame story, admitting his use of literary devices: 'main character', 'time', 'place', and 'props' (*Lolita*, p. 63). This clear moment of metafiction that disrupts

linear narratology demonstrates his 'flippant obstruction of the reading process' and his rhetorical strategy to distort the reader's perception, which parallels his use of sleeping pills to incapacitate Lolita, an action he attempts to ameliorate into fiction with the language of fairy-tales: 'the magic potion' (p. 138).⁶ His name itself, 'Humber Humbert', is a doubled word, a tessellation emphasising his inflated importance and echoing the tripled epizeuxis of his chant 'Lolita, Lolita, Lolita' (p. 123) as though obsessively approximating to her. The automated 'Humbert Humbert' repetition, moreover, stresses his name's absurd peculiarity and thus his idiosyncratic alterity. Portnoy, on the other hand, seeks further dominion over the narrative by cataloguing chapters with capitalised subheadings such as 'THE MOST UNFORGETTABselfLE CHARACTER I'VE EVER MET' and temporal clauses such as 'then came my adolescence' (*Complaint*, p. 14), with the pun 'came' tying his development to libido, strictly organising the novel's structure around his experience and sexual conquests rather than his 'efforts to free himself from sex'.⁷

The novels' titles also concentrate the desires of the male voices. *Portnoy's Complaint* references the literary form of a complaint, responding to romantic rejection, which confirms the prioritisation of Portnoy's feelings leading to it being exaggerated into a medical disorder or bodily complaint; Nabokov's and Baldwin's, meanwhile, promote their protagonists' conception of Lolita and Giovanni as the site of their desire, their obsession reverberating out in Humbert's nickname for Dolores and David's fetishized space of sexual freedom. The men's rampant self-interest and promotion of their desire is represented by Portnoy's exhibitionism in which private sexual acts become public paraphilic displays, as he flaunts his sexuality through public masturbation while elevating it to musical artistry — 'staccato half-inch strokes up from the base' (*Complaint*, p. 118) — to cast himself as a social spectacle. This self-centralisation of the male figure within the communal space is also expressed in Humbert's instruction, 'Let them play around me forever' (*Lolita*, p. 20), positioning young girls to eternally orbit him. The centrality of the male protagonists' ego and their dominant voices present oppressive male desire characterised by the powerful assertion of the self.

The corresponding effect, both heightening and resulting from the assertive male voices in the transmission of male desire, is the restriction and minimisation of the love objects' voices. With minimal direct quotations from the lovers themselves, denying them self-expression, their voices are mediated through the men as Nomi Tamir-Ghez observes in *Lolita*: 'When we are given a glimpse into Lolita's feelings [it is] always through a Humbertian filter'.⁸ The 'Humbertian filter' is applied through Humbert's indirect reported quotation of Lolita, 'She said she loathed me' (*Lolita*, p. 232), regulating her subjectivity through the dictation of her speech and assimilation of her voice into his own. Furthermore, the sentence-final first-person pronoun 'me' makes himself the subject of every insight, concluding with himself as the focal point so that 'the context is always Humbert's emotional world,' constricting the impact of Lolita's commentary.⁹ Our inferential ability as the reader becomes 'absorbed in Humbert's feelings of fear, desire, suffering etc., and tends to forget Lolita's side of the story'.¹⁰ Equivalently, even Portnoy's most consistent lover is anonymised by the animalistic

epithet ‘The Monkey’ (*Complaint*, p. 97), assigned for her agility in performing sexual positions. Her identity is defined by his inscribed primal, feral passion, fixed onto her with the definite article and consequently legitimises her function as a sexual object with her humanity effaced. This state of blankness characterises his fantasy ‘Mrs Portnoy’ as ‘faceless’ (*Complaint*, p. 228), just as Humbert ideally imagines Lolita as shapeless and empty in limbo, ‘floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness – indeed, no life of her own’ (*Lolita*, p. 68), recalling the opening fragmentation of ‘Lo-lee-ta’. The curtailment of the lovers’ voices extends to all the other characters. Even Portnoy’s doctor’s voice – the novel’s framing device according credibility and honesty to the account – is held back to one brief, flippant ‘PUNCH LINE’ at the very end: ‘So [said the doctor]. Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?’ (*Complaint*, p. 253). This final moment constitutes, perhaps, Portnoy’s greatest deception of the reader: his sardonic voice bleeds in with the irreverence heightened by the persona’s accent and muddled syntax, mocking the entire preceding text as a joke, with the novel ending before any authenticity ‘begins’. Dan Colson corroborates how this sly gesture uses the doctor’s voice to outmanoeuvre the expectation of legitimacy ‘all the while reveling in his own audacity’ as his opportunity of redemption is supplanted by the undertow of self-regard.¹¹ Indeed, Roth’s predominant monologue structure produces a ‘constant stream of words’ from Portnoy, through which no other voices can be heard except his ‘exhibitionistic and self-gratifying discourse’; the verbal equivalent of his masturbation, as Lilian R. Furst contends – his unrelenting stream of consciousness relating his desire in an ejaculative performance ‘that has the force of a sexual discharge’.^{12 13} The exclusion of the lovers is one of the starkest indicators of the singularity of male desire, refuting Colson’s claim that Portnoy is ‘controlled by them’ as they ‘form the emotional core of the novel’.¹⁴ Instead, in the case of Portnoy and Humbert, the lovers are passive or muted objects circumscribed by the men’s oppressive desire, and ‘emotional’ only in terms of the feelings they generate within the men as their own voices are stifled and their autonomy toxically extinguished.

Further corrupting the lovers’ human identity, dislocating them from reality and relegating them to objects of their desire, Nabokov and Baldwin’s protagonists mythologise them as idealisations within their fantasies. Exercising their aforementioned power to define identity and relationality, the lovers are transformed into abstract embodiments of the men’s desire. Humbert dehumanises Lolita and preadolescent girls as ‘nymphets’ (*Lolita*, p. 15), a leitwortstil used throughout the text that reminds us of his obsessive sexual fantasy that categorises his objects of desire as a different species: entities belonging to his desire rather than the human world. The term’s mystical quality also implies that girls such as Lolita exert a super-human power over him, rendering him innocent as though ‘it is they who are dangerous, not he’ and attempting to palliate the paedophilic reality through the façade of mythic fantasy in which she is objectified as his reward – ‘the magic prize’ (p. 114).¹⁵ To maintain the conceit, Humbert has to elevate himself from the unembellished mundanity of an ‘old man’ to ‘a dream dad protecting his dream daughter’ (p. 168), with the repeated prenominal adjective ‘dream’ straining the illusory effort while also imposing a paternal dynamic to normalise his possessive exploitation as socially permissible. He

exoticises Lolita as an other with ‘what pains I took to speak Lo’s tongue’ (p. 168) – a foreign creature with whom we cannot associate, only interpreted through the language of his desire. She becomes loaded with his arousal, evoked by his ‘toothsome, rhythmically self-arousing language’ displayed in his description of her swimming, focalised through his decadent pleasure with a gushing asyndetic list of grandiloquent adjectives such as ‘bepearled’ and the mellifluous quality of consonance and alliteration such as ‘demure dip’ (p. 182).¹⁶ Anthony R. Moore notices how his sensuously indulgent language is deliberately ‘too close to the source of his erotic inspiration’, so he invests her with the sexual energy of the ‘bewitching, adorable nymphet’ instead of treating her as ‘the human, lonely child’ she really is.¹⁷ In this context, girls exist on a binary between idealised objects of sexual desire or degraded ‘whores’, the extreme polarity between ‘nymphets’ and ‘demons’ (p. 16) evinced by the oxymorons ‘abominably desirable’ and ‘vile and beloved slut’ (p. 166, 270). Their status, thus, is weighed in terms of sexual service and male approval. In *Giovanni’s Room*, David describes his love interest Giovanni in the same sensory terms: ‘it was like moving into the field of a magnet or like approaching a small circle of heat’ (*Room*, p. 31). The similes suggest distance from reality, with the implication of being involuntarily impelled similar to Humbert. His first physiological description of Giovanni is more animal than human in the tricolon ‘insolent and dark and leonine’ (p. 31). He also applies idealised epithets, ‘a freshly fallen angel’ (p. 58), and celestial similes, ‘my baby came indeed, through all that sunlight, his face flushed and his hair flying, his eyes, unbelievably, like morning stars’ (p. 59), as the kinetic imagery combines with the fricatives and sibilance to augment the incoherent sensory impressions of David’s hyperbolic idolisation. Giovanni is left as an amorphous, ethereal being, detached from the naturalistic world as male desire corrupts natural boundaries, forming the lovers into abstract objects of their admiration rather than concretely self-defined humans.

MALE DESIRE AS EXTERNAL PROJECTIONS FETISHISING THE WORLD

After rigorously constructing the lovers as their subjects, the toxic male desire manifests further in Nabokov and Roth’s presentation of sex as consumption and an ‘appetite’ related to the fetishisation of food. Humbert articulates this early in the novel with his conversion of kissing into eating with ‘let me feed on her open mouth’ (*Lolita*, p. 13), the use of ‘open’ imagining her body as submissive. He documents Lolita’s activities in a diary, which he imagines swallowing, figuratively consuming her existence. These moments prefigure his parasitic consumption of her vitality: ‘on her brown shoulder, a raised purple-pink swelling (the work of some gnat) which I eased of its beautiful transparent poison between my long thumbnails and then sucked till I was gorged on her spicy blood’ (p. 175). His pleasure and intense focus are registered in the vivid sensory detail of the visual colours and gustatory imagery, presenting his vampiric feasting on her essence as a culinary, cannibalistic experience. He also invokes biblical imagery of sin when he watches Lolita ‘devouring her immemorial fruit’ described as ‘Eden-red’ (pp. 63-5), her supposed interminable fertility connoting endless corruptive

temptation, overindulgence and thus, the condition of being perpetually consumed by him. These associations become more salaciously graphic in *Portnoy's Complaint*, such as Portnoy's description of 'the girl whose cunt I have been dreaming about lapping all my life' (*Complaint*, p. 114). Here, the connection of the expletive with the verb 'lapping' specifies her anatomy as sexually edible, with the activity of the tongue emphasised by the liquid consonants 'lapping all my life'. He references oral sex in terms of ingestion again when he complains 'What Sally couldn't do was eat me' (p. 220), a defect weakening her as 'her frailties' leave her vulnerable to his consumption, fortifying his self-attributed superior strength. The hunger in his desire is literalised when he bites his mother, 'I sunk my teeth into your wrist clear through to the bone' (p. 116), sharing the cannibalism of Humbert but committed with a ferocious savagery towards the family matriarch. The action realises his retaliatory 'defiance of parental and cultural taboos' of prudish conservatism, expressed through "sexual excess and verbal obscenity".¹⁹ Portnoy's voracious hypersexual appetite imposed on the conservative mother figure is reasserted when he admires her 'flesh' and her stockings' 'delicious journey up her legs', as his hunger for the food she prepares becomes indistinguishable from the sexual body: 'I smell my lunch, my tuna fish salad. Ah, it might be cunt I'm sniffing' (p. 40). This sexual equivalence in which 'food doubles as an emblem of sexuality' is most salient in Portnoy's employment of food as masturbatory aids, damaging them to repurpose them for his gratification: a 'cored apple' (p. 165) and a 'violated' piece of liver (pp. 15-16).²⁰ Read through this analogy between food and the human body, Portnoy's feeding of chopped liver to Anne in an anaphoric reference to his earlier masturbation, and his exclamation 'I fucked my own family's dinner' (p. 123), represent figurative acts of rape whereby he forces them to consume his sexual instruments and thus, symbolically, his own genitalia. This implication is reinstated overtly in his involvement of food in sex acts:

She pushes Drake's Daredevil Cupcakes (chocolate with a white creamy centre) down onto my cock and then eats them off of me, flake by flake. She pours maple syrup out of the Log Cabin can and then licks it from my tender balls until they're clean again (pp. 120-1).

The excessive detail registering 'creamy' and 'tender' sensations, specific references to food brands, animated in the present tense and relayed in declarative sentences, all outline a ritualistic process of savouring his genitals as the centrepiece of a carnal feast. The presentation of characters as edible commodities not only illustrates the way desire corrupts the men's perspectives, but also crucially, expresses the extremity of male desire to consume their counterparts entirely.

Consequently, the proliferating association of food and consumption with the men's sexuality is bound to indigestion and bodily processes, which presents how toxic male desire contaminates the body. Humbert's consummation of his relationship with Lolita is impeded by sudden indigestion, the 'maddening glimmer' of his 'burning' lust resonating within his bowels, as suggested by the hendiadys 'desire and dyspepsia' (*Lolita*, p. 147). Male hypersexuality generates the same bodily response in *Portnoy's Complaint*

as Portnoy's compulsive masturbation is connected to his father's constipation, with Portnoy's protracted gratification in the bathroom toilet delaying his father's relief, both competing for the same space while his mother believes they share the same affliction. His masturbation is described with an aggressive force by the lexical set 'firing', 'flying fist', 'blast', 'savage strokes, beat off' (*Complaint*, pp. 14-15), just as he later refers to his penis as 'that battered battering ram' (p. 29), staging a martial siege betokening the ferocity of male desire retaliating against conservatism: 'Portnoy is at war and sex is his weapon'.²¹ This intense effort seems to produce a spot on his body, a mutation he ridicules as portending his impending 'oblivion' (p. 16), just as he later abbreviates his contraction of venereal disease to 'VD' (p. 245) as a suppressive dismissal with the same possessive 'my', resembling his subordination of women. He weaponises these physiological manifestations of his inner 'impure' character into infecting victims, 'I am about to poison your organs of reproduction' (p. 247), extending his aggravation towards his father into the desire to corrupt human biology, deliberately targeting the reproductive organs for their conservative social value denoting the function of sex for procreation.

Baldwin also utilises images of bodily decay in *Giovanni's Room* to confront the social values of heteronormativity, as David's illicit homosexual desire responds with revulsion towards his wife. His visceral reaction distorts her body to eschew conventional glorification of the female body, beginning with a return to the food metaphor, 'stale,' then fossilising her 'naked body' with his wish 'that it were harder and firmer,' this unnatural disorder encapsulated in the oxymoron 'I was fantastically intimidated by her breasts' (*Room*, p. 149). The stagnation of Hella's body is juxtaposed against the animation of his own — 'I felt my flesh recoil' and 'when I entered her I began to feel that I would never get out alive' — to separate husband and wife as incompatible at an essential level, repudiating the model of heteronormative romance. The resistance of David's latent homosexual desire against the social pressures of his heterosexual marriage is visualised as a physiological response of his bodily resentment. The tangible interaction of the body in the transmission of male desire reaffirms the profound extent to which it distorts natural processes and its influential power on the constitution of all the characters.

Furthermore, the externalisation of male desire is projected onto all bodies and objects, denaturalising the world as it becomes corrupted by their sexualised imagery. Humbert projects his excitement at the carnal pleasure Lolita represents by animating her body with his energised arousal, 'her lovely live legs' (*Lolita*, p. 13), as though his lust is the source of her vitality, amplified by the alliteration, with 'live' also evoking her vulnerable mortality. This carries into the return to the sexualised pistol imagery at the end which imagines an act of murder as an act of sex, 'pulled the pistol's foreskin back, and then enjoyed the orgasm of the crushed trigger' (p. 313), weaponising his own hypersexuality as the analogy between the gun and phallus as symbols of masculine power equates his sexual desire with lethal force. Roth also uses personification when Portnoy animates his testicle with its own autonomy, transgressing its natural bodily position and described as 'an anarchic insurrection' (*Complaint*, p. 34). This alludes to his own sexual deviance and anthropomorphically bestows his penis with a voice issuing imperative

commands such as ‘Jerk me off’ (p. 117), typifying the displacement of his desire onto anatomy. The attribution of power and authority to the male anatomy is enhanced by his regal metaphors, ‘two big healthy balls such as a king would be proud to put on display, and a shlong of magisterial length and girth’ (p. 37), deriving status from the hyperbolic proportions of the genitalia, which is symbolic of the desire to conquer and recapitulate his exhibitionistic flaunting of his sexuality. The association of the body with power is also noted in Giovanni’s Room through the tactile image following David and Giovanni’s sex, after which he ‘dreamed of the touch of hands, of Giovanni’s hands, or anybody’s hands, hands which would have the power to crush me and make me whole again’ (*Room*, p. 85). David’s alternation between tenderness and self-annihilation combines the hand’s dual symbolism of care and strength as his infatuated longing for sexual contact totally conquers the body. This all-consuming desire to worship the carnal body is exhibited by Humbert’s rapturous syndeton: ‘the Lolita that today I could touch and smell and hear and see [...] the bangs and the swirls at the sides and the curls at the back, and the sticky hot neck [...] that Lolita, my Lolita’ (*Lolita*, p. 72). The syndetic listing itemises her assets, shaping her according to his senses, with an accelerating pace intimating a rising sexual climax culminating in his claim to her body (‘my Lolita’), an echo of which ends the novel and cements the impression of her as the synthesis of his desire. The portrayal of the body as the vessel of male desire is foregrounded when Giovanni metabolises David’s fear of losing him:

Giovanni’s face [...] hardened before my eyes, began to give in secret places, began to crack. The light in the eyes became glitter, the wide and beautiful brow began to suggest the skull beneath. The sensual lips turned inward, busy with the sorrow overflowing from his heart (*Room*, p. 73).

The percussive plosives and abrasive sibilance reify the collapse of David’s superficial elevation of Giovanni’s body to metaphysical beauty when he remembers his natural human form, a juxtaposition of the abstract and concrete created by the metaphor ‘the light in the eyes became glitter’. David’s homosexual desire is revealed early in the novel when Joey’s body is compared to ‘the black opening of a cavern’ (p. 14), as his illicit desire to explore the ‘mystery’ of the male body is couched in a homoerotic reference to ‘the anus he wants to enter/has entered’, reducing the body to its sexual function. Portnoy’s view of physical encounters is also reductive – ‘experiments sticking this thing into the holes that come available to it’ (*Complaint*, p. 245).²² His mechanically pragmatic and utilitarian language removes any emotional or sensual significance of the act, and the human body is reduced to depersonalised tools serviced for his gratification. In all the texts, the men’s reconstruction of the body according to their sexualised imagination underscores the power of male desire to corrupt the external world.

Additionally, the fetishisation of bodies is presented as particularly perverse in the men’s focus on the body of the child and the eroticisation of childhood. Humbert’s use of infantilising epithets such as ‘my lovely child’ (*Lolita*, p. 105) distorts the parental dynamic with his romantic attraction and reminds us of her age and vulnerability, similar to his use of the repeated diminutive adjective

‘little’. His vocabulary emphasises how his superior size and maturity produce the dominant power he desires. His fetishization of Lolita’s smallness informs his nicknames for her such as ‘Dolly’ (p. 124), which abbreviates her real name ‘Dolores’ and references a children’s toy, perverting the innocence of childhood as he transforms her into his plaything. David, equivalently, uses repeated infantilising similes (‘like a baby’) and compares the smallness of Joey’s body to his own largeness – ‘he was so much smaller than me’ (*Room*, p. 14) – as he relishes the same power from ‘the fulfilment of his desire as dominance’.²³ The men’s fetishistic gratification in weakening the love object is crystallised in Roth’s intertextual reference to *Leda and the Swan*, magnifying Portnoy’s subordinating control with its theme of rape while its poetic lyricism counterpoints the coarse scene of The Monkey’s fellatio to pun on the innuendo of an oral performance. His educating her by reciting the poem also bolsters the parental authority asserted by his patronising terms, ‘a child’ and ‘a quick and clever little girl’ (*Complaint*, p. 178), which confines her to the inferior position of the naïve subject. Youth is also emblematic of sexual purity, as Humbert desires Lolita ‘unravished’ (*Lolita*, p. 140), re-establishing the language of consumption and rape, which is incorporated into the revelation that she is not a virgin as the symbolising of her virginity as fruit contaminates nature: ‘We ate flavorless mealy bananas, bruised peaches’ (p. 153). The fruit imagery invokes Humbert’s desire for the fresh ripeness of the child’s body, belaboured by prenominal adjectives promoting her predevelopment – ‘my pubescent concubine’ (p. 167), ‘her pre-adolescently incurved back’ (p. 73) and even projected onto inanimate objects, ‘her sub-teen tennis togs’ (p. 262). He idealises her as a rare prize or trophy, ‘The hollow of my hand was still ivory-full of Lolita’ (p. 73), accenting the value he feels in claiming her before anyone else so she becomes his sole property. Consequently, he resolves to impregnate their own children when she loses her maidenhood, imagining ‘a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the second [...] or] supremely lovely Lolita the Third’ (pp. 196-7) – an incestuous cycle which engineers the body of the child into a reproductive machine, foreshadowing her death in childbirth, as though succumbing to his eternal desire for her eternal chastity. The texts’ fetishisation of children perverts natural boundaries to epitomise the men’s desire for powerless subjects and pure bodies they can corrupt with their hypersexual imagination.

MALE DESIRE AS INTERNAL TENSIONS CORRUPTING THE SELF

The corruption of male desire also manifests internally within the protagonists and their own bodies through the struggle to maintain control over uninhibited lust. The conflict between order and impulsivity is denoted by Humbert and David’s opposition to their initial marriages. Humbert separates his vitality from his spouse with the hendiadys ‘my life and my bride’ (*Lolita*, p. 51), while David expands on the imagery of marital tethering by describing his wife as ‘something to be moored to’ (*Room*, p. 11). The connotations of mooring extends into the text’s motif of water to represent David’s impulsive drive of relentless forward movement and the freedom of his desire liberated from the binding static constraints of heteronormativity, following his reduction of his marriage to the solo act of

'masturbation' (p. 11) as his personal lust breaks the dual union. The water motif is most prominent in his encounters in Giovanni's room: 'life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea, time flowed past indifferently above us, hours and days had no meaning' (p. 73). The room is markedly detached from the outside world, a subterranean space so far from 'the gaze of his family and national community' that it exists outside of time and so embedded within his desire that it is bordered instead by the 'sea' of his surging emotions.²⁴ The water imagery delineates his own landscape for his sexual reawakening from the homophobic cultural world but also comes to signify an untameable force which could overpower him, 'I thought of the people before me who had looked down at the river and gone to sleep beneath it' (p. 99), accompanying elemental destruction of his space:

I could do nothing whatever to stop the ferocious excitement which had burst in me like a storm. I could only drink, in the faint hope that the storm might thus spend itself without doing any more damage to my land (p. 44).

Roth also infuses tension between impulsive male desire and the foundations of conservative society, as the protection of familial posterity is undercut by Portnoy's sardonic bathos: 'while all the other sons have been carrying forward the family name, what he [Portnoy] has been doing is – chasing cunt' (*Complaint*, p. 92). The long phrase is abruptly juxtaposed against the parataxis reflecting his impulsive, immediate sexual lust, spilling over into the next sentence, 'Chasing it, sniffing it, lapping it' (p. 92), as his sexualised, uncontrolled 'verbalization squirts out in all directions'.²⁵ He describes his masturbation with an asyndetic list of active verbs such as 'kneading' (p. 170), the culinary association evoking a methodological recipe that attempts to restrain his desire's intense activity into domestic routine. Furthermore, his sexual desire governs him so entirely that it positions him in the service of the nation's anatomy, 'I pledge allegiance to the twat of the United States of America' (p. 218), formulating his conquests as a nationalistic act of patriotic devotion while reducing the female population to the dysphemistic metonym 'twat'. Therefore, when the novel ends with Portnoy's terminal, primal howl, 'Aaaaaaaaa [...]' (p. 253), it is not a 'truly cathartic' relinquishment of sexuality as Paul Strong contends, but an orgasmic charge which finally consumes him as cognitive articulation submits to the overpowering corporeal force of his innate desire.²⁶ The texts present male desire as a volatile force that destabilises order and threatens the coherence of the self.

Male desire further corrupts the men's identity in their reconciliation of guilt and denial over their repressed responsibility, manipulating the reader and surrendering agency as they claim powerlessness to their instincts. The protagonists' self-exonerating first-person narrative voices serve to persistently assert their innocence. *Lolita* is deceptively written in the confessional mode but overlaid with a guiltlessly indignant self-exonerating tone victimising himself: 'it was she who seduced me' (*Lolita*, p. 150). Humbert mitigates his intention to use drugs to rape Lolita by innocently equating it to fantasy through the rhyme: 'schemed and dreamed' (p. 79). His primary strategy in abdicating responsibility is the self-referential third-person which dissociates himself from his actions: 'Oh, what

a crafty Humbert!' (p. 112). He creates further distance through synecdoches such as 'My knuckles lay against the child's blue jeans' (p. 55), substituting the involvement of a part of his body for his full complicity, as though 'acting on its own, against the inclinations of the soul'.²⁷ However, he becomes so detached from reality that he eventually loses his sense of self to the demands of cognitive dissonance: 'In fact – said high-and-dry Humbert to floundering Humbert – it might be quite clever to prepare things – to transfer the weapon from box to pocket – so as to be ready' (p. 260). His coherent sense of identity fragments as his previously luxuriating, euphuistic extended prose is broken with dashes and third-person references, contradicting Wayne Booth's belief in Humbert's 'full and unlimited control of the rhetorical resources'.²⁸ David's linguistic confidence similarly falters in the effort to protest helplessness, 'I could do nothing whatever to stop the ferocious excitement' (*Room*, p. 44), with the laboured tautology 'nothing whatever' emphasising his strained delusionality; just as his anaphoric repetition of 'I knew' when he surrenders to his lust – 'I knew I could not open the door, I knew it was too late' (p. 64) – captures his struggle to assuage his underlying self-doubt. He becomes increasingly emphatic, with the repeated apostrophe 'For shame! For shame! that I should be so abruptly, so hideously entangled with a boy' (p. 62) deflecting his guilt as exclamatory indignation, and the condescending epithet and generalising indefinite article rejecting his lover as an insignificance. David's shame is deeply rooted in the conflict of his homosexual desire against 'the fear of not meeting the heterosexual values of his society', apparent in projecting his own guilt-ridden self-loathing onto his affair with Sue: 'I thought *Well let her have it for Christ sake, get it over with*, then it was ending and I hated her and me' (p. 96).²⁹ The disorientating clash of tenses is coupled with the generic deictic reference 'it' to encode his heterosexual affair, repeated as a pejorative mechanisation of sex and divorcing his emotion.

Ultimately, the men's lack of self-control and their possession of the love objects becomes destructive, as the texts consider death the logical conclusion of this toxic mode of male desire. Humbert connects death to his desire by diagnosing Lolita's resistance to his seduction as a fatal illness, 'she began to whimper in an unusually dreary way when I attempted to fondle her. Lolita ill. Lolita dying' (*Lolita*, p. 272), supposing the failure to obey their sexual duty can only result in death. David makes a similar morbid comparison noting the equation between his desire and vitality: 'I was beginning to think of Giovanni dying – where Giovanni had been there would be nothing, nothing forever' (*Room*, p. 28), as his hyperbolically nihilistic prophesy subsides 'beginning' into 'nothing', while the use of anadiplosis with 'nothing' shows how desolation underpins his worldview of unfulfilled desire. Humbert and David encapsulate the self-destructive obsession of male desire and its corruption of self-identity with their fraught attempts to delude themselves and the reader of their innocence.

All the texts challenge a culture of social repression and a literary tradition of idealistic heteronormative romance with antithetical male protagonists who aggressively pursue their own sexual gratification. The authors pervert fundamental values of human relationality and the traditional presentation of reciprocal desire through first-person accounts that promote the protagonists' dominance

over other characters. Comparing heterosexual and homosexual encounters in the three texts proves dominance and possession to be a prerogative of male desire. Indeed, this informs the male worldview more widely as their desire is externalised to define all bodies and objects as their sexual property. With their singular perspectives excluding other characters, the texts refute prescriptive roles of social connection through marriage, family and relationships. Rather than encouraging the reader to identify with their exploitation, the authors' frame the men's desire as their own, enabling us to notice their construction of a fantasy detached from realism. This fraught detachment from the social world informs the texts' presentation of male desire, using the men's sexual conquests to allegorise the struggle of making a claim on a world which restricts personal liberty with questions of morality. It is this conflict between liberty and responsibility which corrupts the self, stranded between gratifying their own desire and their dependence on possessing others to do so, leaving us with the anguish of isolation and unfulfillment. Their tragic conclusions argue that liberated personal desire is an illusion in such a moralistic world: an impossible dream of gratification which can only lead to loss.

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Matthew Barton English Literature

A Consideration of the Differences Between the Early Tenets on Imagism, as Outlined by Ezra Pound, and the Poetic Works of Amy Lowell with Particular Reference to the *Some Imagist Poets* Anthologies to Critically Assess Whether Lowell's Poems can be Considered Imagist

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INTRODUCTION & THE DEFINITION OF IMAGISM

This essay seeks to critically assess the statement that 'Amy Lowell's poems are not truly "Imagist"' by using poetic analysis of her publications in the 1914, 1915, 1916 and 1917 *Des Imagistes* and *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies respectively, to outline the differences and similarities between these and the definition of Imagism as laid out by Ezra Pound's three tenets. There are three broad stances which could be taken on this statement, namely agreement – that Amy Lowell's work is not Imagist and is indeed something new altogether; disagreement – that Lowell's work *is* Imagist and upholds Pound's three original tenets; and finally – that Lowell's work signified an evolution of Pound's Imagism and may be considered a separate but related work under the umbrella term of 'Imagism'. This essay shall critically analyse her works, particularly 'In a Garden', 'The Bombardment', 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces "Grotesques," for String Quartet' and the *Lacquer Prints* 'The Pond', 'The Camellia Tree of Matsue' and 'To A Husband' to determine which of these three stances hold the most ground. By analysing poetry from each of the Imagist anthologies, this essay also seeks to provide some historical analysis surrounding the progression of Lowell's 'Imagism' – if it can be called so – over the duration of the movement.

Over time, the Imagist movement has undergone numerous evolutions and changes in both its leadership and its purpose, therefore, various definitions of Imagism have arisen. These include Ezra Pound's three tenets, Amy Lowell's six rules in the preface of the first *Some Imagist Poets* anthology, and numerous other definitions from various critics and other contributors to the movement. This essay uses Pound's three tenets as the definition of Imagism for the purposes of analysis – as laid out by F.S. Flint in his essay 'Imagisme'. The three tenets are as follows:

- (1) Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
- (2) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
- (3) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.¹

This section explains and justifies the use of Pound's tenets as the definition of Imagism and provides an interpretation of the two latter, more subjective tenets for later analysis.

Pound's three tenets have been chosen as the definition of Imagism as they are, to an extent, the dictatorial backbone of the 1914 anthology; they formed the basis and are comparably superior to the six tenets published by Lowell in 1915. Furthermore, they facilitated greater artistic representation and inclusion in publication – despite Lowell's rebuttal.

The first *Des Imagiste*, which includes work from eleven poets, is the first publication of Imagist works. This book signifies the birth of Imagism and is bound by Pound's three tenets. Therefore, despite Lyon's claims that Pound's tenets were 'anti-manifesto' and 'a brief and cryptic series of texts designed to advertise Pound's own explicit proposals for the improvement of contemporary [...] poetry,' they do, in fact, form the manifesto under which the first Imagist poets united – that being the 1914 anthology.² This is likely why Pound is often considered the Godfather of Imagism.

Pound's three tenets were informative enough to produce a shared set of standards amongst the Imagist poets, and were not strict to the extent of stifling artistic creativity. Lowell's six tenets enjoyed less success and arguably became too vague in their definition of Imagism. Thacker argues that:

The 1915 preface is much closer to the rhetorical form normally found in manifestos: the six 'common principles' of this school of poets are much more explicit; the formation of the group is explored further, as are the selection principles used by the 'informal committee' so detested by Pound.³

While Lowell's rules sought to change the boundaries of Imagism in the poets' favour, ultimately she risked losing the very essence of the movement; especially since the rules had to be clarified later by Lowell in the 1916 anthology in lieu of the confusion they generated. Whilst Lowell's tenets in conjunction with Pound's may create a more holistic overview of Imagism, Lowell's tenets were based on Pound's – the two sharing evident similarities. This affirms the idea that Pound was the original founder of Imagism and the inspiration behind Imagism under Lowell.

Finally, while Lyon states that Pound's rules were merely an 'illusion of avant-garde kinship and familiarity', Pound was able to include the works of eleven different poets in the anthology; in comparison, only six poets published in the later *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies.⁴ Publication of Imagist works at this time was mostly dominated by those who sat on the "informal committee" so detested by Pound'. Therefore, despite Lowell's concerns about inclusion, and the authors' right in selecting their own best work, argument can be made that Imagism under Lowell's rules was actually less inclusive and more restrictive than the original three tenets

as laid out by Pound. This lack of author diversification remains apparent in all three *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies edited by Lowell's committee.

In light of the reasons presented above, this essay concludes that Pound's three tenets are both the original and most defining set of rules to outline the Imagist movement, hence their selection as the benchmark for the analysis of Lowell's work in order to assess whether her poems can be considered 'Imagist'.

Now that justification has been provided for the use of Pound's tenets as the definition of Imagism, an explanation and interpretation of them is required to outline the parameters of their use in analysis.

The third tenet is relatively straightforward and difficult to misinterpret - for the purposes of analysis, the poem must merely adhere to the definition of free verse as being '[i]t does not use consistent metre patterns, rhyme, or any musical pattern'.⁵ However, as the interpretation and analysis of the first two tenets can be subjective, it is important to identify the parameters of these criteria as they are adopted within this essay.

The first tenet - direct treatment of the 'thing' - is considered as broken if the poet strays from a clear, direct portrayal of what they are describing. An example of this could include Lowell's 'Bath', in which she describes the water as 'the green-white water, the sun-flawed beryl water'.⁶ Here, there are two separate descriptions of the water's colour, which creates a break from a clear, direct image of the water's colour; therefore breaking the first tenet.

The second tenet, 'no word that does not contribute to the presentation', is considered broken if fewer words could have been used by the author to create the same overall effect. Any superfluous use of words is therefore considered a breach of this tenet. An example of this includes some of Lowell's longer poems that use complete sentences, such as her poem 'Patterns', in which the line 'I should see the sun flashing from his sword hilt and the buckles on his shoes' could be condensed to 'I should see sunlight flashing from his sword hilt and shoe buckles'.⁷

This essay will work chronologically through the Imagist anthologies, starting with the 1914 *Des Imagistes* and finishing with the 1917 *Some Imagist Poets* anthology, analysing the poems using the aforementioned criteria.

LOWELL'S 'IN A GARDEN' FROM THE 1914 ANTHOLOGY

The first of Lowell's Imagist poems - 'In a Garden' - was published within Pound's first and only Imagist Anthology. It is a strong example of a poem by Lowell which upholds Pound's three tenets. The opening stanza demonstrates this well with the clear, vivid imagery of the water in the garden:

Gushing from the mouths of stone men
To spread at ease under the sky
In granite-lipped basins,
Where iris dabble their feet
And rustle to a passing wind,
The water fills the garden with its rushing,
In the midst of the quiet of close-clipped lawns.⁸

The use of numerous concrete images here allows for a full exploration of the sensory experience the water provides, even without having to directly state the subject until the sixth line. The use of 'gushing' in the opening line provides both a visual and auditory experience of the water in a single word. The depiction of the garden as a real tangible place is then achieved by using concrete objects such as 'stone men', 'granite-lipped basins' and 'close-clipped lawns' to bring the garden to life on the page. The main subject, the water, is the concurrent theme running through each line that ties the separate images together into one complete picture of the gardens emotive grandeur. As a whole, this direct treatment of the water is just one example used to demonstrate the poem's adherence to Pound's first tenet. Lowell is successful here in her direct treatment of 'the thing', in this instance the water feature of the garden, and is equally successful in close adherence to this rule throughout the rest of the poem through direct treatment of other images and themes.

The use of water as an image remains a constant for Lowell throughout the poem. An argument could be made that, as the editor of the anthology, Pound is somewhat responsible for the inclusion of the repeated word 'water' - five separate times across the poem's stanzas - as he should have them out accordingly. However, despite the second tenets dictating that a superfluous use of words should be avoided, the repetition of 'water' cannot be said to be unnecessary in contributing to the poem's presentation. While the word is repeated, each repetition still contributes to the separate presentations of various images in the poem and also to the fluidity of the text. The five uses of the word 'water' throughout the poem are shown here:

The water fills the garden with its rushing, [...]
Marble fountains, yellowed with much water. [...]
It falls, the water; [...]
White and shining in the silver-flecked water. [...]
Night and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing!⁹

In each instance of the word's use, 'water' acts as the direct focal point for the numerous sensory images Lowell writes to express: the sound of the garden, the fountain's aged appearance, the passage of time and, the water itself. All these repeated uses of the word are included to convey different aspects of the garden's overall experience as the speaker's time in the garden passes. They ground the reader to a concrete image throughout the poem, thus necessary to remain in line with the first tenet.

In regards to the use of free verse, 'In a Garden' is successful in maintaining the definition as outlined by this essay and therefore follows Pound's third tenet - to avoid the use of any consistent metrical, rhythmical or musical patterns. The poem's fluid flow, similar to the water it places such emphasis on, comes from the natural rhythm of the readers' cadence when read aloud. Lowell herself was a large proponent of this *cadenced* verse, as it allows readers to 'inhale and exhale essential life rhythms in their own idiom'.¹⁰ That sentiment is demonstrated clearly in this poem and in the rest of her Imagist work. Reflecting on 'In a Garden' in its entirety, Lowell's sole contribution to Pound's *Des Imagistes* is a clear example of what her poetic ability could achieve while maintaining close adherence to Pound's three Imagist tenets, classifying itself as a successful piece of Imagist poetry.

For the purposes of later analysis, it is now important to note the significance placed on the infamous Dinner Party by numerous critics of the Imagist movement. Taking place in July 1914 – between the publications of Pound's *Des Imagistes* in 1914 and the first *Some Imagist Poets* anthology in 1915 – the Dinner Party has become a widely regarded focal point for the personal issues that arose between Pound and Lowell over the Imagist movement. In an attempt to summarise this event, Peter Brooker succinctly unites the various critical retellings of the Dinner Party. He recounts that there are numerous versions of the events, wherein the discussions taking place, the number of guests who attended, the guests themselves and even the restaurant in which it was held changes wildly.¹¹ While the true specifics of the event will likely never be confirmed, the fallout from the dinner party and the short period following remains critical to the personal feelings of Pound and Lowell towards each other and to the reasoning behind their parting. Helen Carr gives an incredibly well-researched, chronological biography of these events culminating in Lowell taking Imagism forward under her own leadership and Pound's infamous labelling of Imagism under Lowell after his departure as 'Amygism'.¹²

The fact that so many critical works make reference to this event and its consequences in the Imagist timeline shows that it stood for a significant point in the development of the Imagist movement as a whole. This essay argues that, as the personal feelings between the two figure heads of Imagism turn sour as a result of this event, it is likely the catalyst or even the main reason why Amy Lowell, one of the key figures in the movement so far, is now taking Imagism under her own aegis, and why her poetry from this point onwards reflects such a drastic change from her work in *Des Imagistes*. Typically, progression in a literary movement is founded on the positive relationships formed between its creator and the subsequent contributors who take the movement forward in new, exciting directions. An example of this could be the relationship between mid-18th century writers Joseph Warton, who began the Romanticist movement in English poetry, and Thomas Chatterton. Romanticism was progressed and expanded further as a movement by Thomas Chatterton, who is now widely considered as the first English Romantic Poet, while paying close attention to the work of Warton.¹³ However, in the case of Imagism, the period of July-August 1914 represents a clear personal rift that separated Pound and Lowell, the two figureheads of the movement. Lowell herself reveals how she personally felt about Pound in her co-authored review of the *Some Imagist Poets* 1915 anthology with Fletcher. Under the pseudonym George Lane, she writes that the 'jejune maledictions and assertions of their chief spokesman, Mr. Pound [having] done so much to make the group ridiculous', demonstrating that she still held personal feelings of resentment towards him.¹⁴ An understanding and awareness of this personal fallout will help to serve in analysis of her subsequent poetic works, and potentially explain the drastic differences between Lowell's early Imagist poem in *Des Imagistes* and her works in the subsequent 1915 and 1916 *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies. A clear example of this drastic change can be found in her 1915 poem 'The Bombardment'.

LOWELL'S 'THE BOMBARDMENT' IN THE 1915 ANTHOLOGY

In the 1915 anthology, Lowell had gone from a single published poem in Pound's *Des Imagistes*, to publishing seven total poems in one collection. While the other six poems not analysed in this essay vary greatly in their adherence to Pound's three tenets, 'The Bombardment' is an example of a clear departure from Imagism and strays further from the three tenets than any of Lowell's other poetry in the anthology. For example, in regards to analysis against the first and second tenets, take the following lines:

Quivering, spearing, thrusting, lapping, streaming, run
the flames. Over roofs, and walls, and shops, and stalls.
Smearing its gold on the sky the fire dances, lances
itself through the doors, and lisps and chuckles along
the floors.¹⁵

When comparing this to 'In a Garden's' first stanza, wherein the description of the water in the first stanza slowly builds up to a crescendo of a complete and vivid image, the overzealous use of adjectives here appear messy and confusing. While the nature of the flames themselves could be argued as being uncontrollable and ever-changing, the volume and nature of Lowell's chosen adjectives and adverbs in conjuring the image of the flames are excessive. In regard to the first tenet, the direct treatment of the flames is impeded as the text contradicts itself: the fire is described as both 'quivering, spearing, thrusting [...]' over the city, but also 'chuckles along the floors'. Here, there are conflicting treatments of how the fire is supposed to be seen – an all-consuming, imposing force of nature or an anthropomorphised force of evil 'chuckling' at the misfortune it has caused in destroying the city.

Moreover, the use of five consecutive adjectives to describe the flames is excessive and does not adhere to the second tenet. This is especially apparent when considering Pound's own words on the second tenet stating that 'no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something' should be used when trying to create an image, as 'the natural object is always the adequate symbol.' Rather than simply using the fire as the adequate symbol – perhaps changing the wording to 'the flames run over roofs...' – Lowell chooses instead to break the first and second tenet in explicitly describing the fire with numerous adjectives, confusing the overall direct image.

While examples of the first two tenets being broken can be found throughout 'The Bombardment', the clearest example of Lowell's diversion from Imagism comes from her breaking of the third tenet. It is highly likely 'The Bombardment' represents an early trial of her work in 'polyphonic prose' – as it was later known by – and not a work in *vers libre* (or 'cadenced verse' as Lowell called it herself). In comparison to the free verse in which she wrote 'In a Garden', 'The Bombardment' contains numerous examples of the features characteristic of her later works in polyphonic prose. To begin, this can be seen immediately from the prose-like structure of the poem, in contrast to her other six poems and works by other poets in the anthology. More specifically, however, are the numerous examples of polyphonic prose's 'characteristic devices of verse other

than strict metre (such as alliteration, assonance, or rhyme) present throughout 'The Bombardment'. A few specific examples of these characteristic devices have been taken from the poem and highlighted below:

'[...] sunshine, slipping through young green.' (alliteration)
'turmoil' and 'gargoyle' (assonance)
'swarm' and 'warm' / 'still' and 'will' (internal rhyme)¹⁸

In a review of her officially debuted works in polyphonic prose, published in *Can Grande's Castle* in 1918, Harriet Monroe quotes Lowell:

Metrical verse has one set of laws, cadenced verse another; polyphonic prose can go from one to the other in the same poem with no sense of incongruity. The only touchstone is the taste and feeling of its author.¹⁹

Lowell herself admits there is a distinctive difference between the three mediums of 'metrical verse', 'cadenced verse', and 'polyphonic prose' that allows the author to move between the two other types of verse. By finding specific examples from 'The Bombardment' of some of polyphonic prose's most prevalent characteristic devices, it is reasonable to conclude that it is not an Imagist poem. Indeed, it uses a different form than that of the *vers libre*, which Pound's third tenet requires to be considered Imagist.

Perhaps then, seeing as Lowell understood the difference between the two forms, the choice to include this poem in the *Some Imagist Poets* anthology 1915 may have been a conscious one following her personal dispute with Pound. 'The Bombardment' in itself may refer to Lowell's attempts to distance herself and the movement under her aegis from Pound's original Imagist tenets. The deliberate inclusion of the poem was her own way of fighting back against the 'bombardment' of Pound's vindictive behaviour she faced following the Dinner Party feud, such as his delighting in her nickname the 'Hippoetess' in a letter to Margaret Anderson.²⁰ It would be reasonable, given these personal attacks, that Lowell would feel it particularly justified to give Pound his comeuppance by ending her own Imagist anthology with a complete departure from his tenets, as though taunting him equally by flaunting her ability to abandon his tenets, even Imagism itself, if she so desired. Thus, 'Bombardment' from the 1915 anthology represents Lowell's departure from Imagism, and is decidedly not Imagist.

In light of this, we now move onto her work in the 1916 *Some Imagist Poets* anthology, in particular the poem 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces, "Grotesques," for String Quartet', wherein she demonstrates a continuing theme on pushing the boundaries of Pound's three tenets.

LOWELL'S 'STRAVINSKY'S THREE PIECES "GROTESQUES," FOR STRING QUARTET' IN THE 1916 ANTHOLOGY

While 'The Bombardment' made a distinct departure from Pound's three tenets, 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces' demonstrates an interesting

evolution from the three tenets. An analysis by this essay decides that this poem sits on an ambivalent position as to whether it is truly Imagist or not.

The first tenet of Pound's Imagism requires a direct treatment of the poem's 'thing' whether it is subjective or objective in its treatment. As Lowell states in the foreword to the poem:

The poem is based upon the programme which M. Stravinsky appended to his piece, and is an attempt to reproduce the sound and movement of the music as far as is possible in another medium.²¹

From this, we know without contention that the three movements of the poem are parallel to each of the three pieces of Stravinsky's music, and that they are the 'thing' that the poem is treating. In terms of direct treatment, the poem is fully and only a subjective interpretation of the music as it is heard, which is an adherence to the first tenet. However, there is a fascinating argument to be made for the opposite, as 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces' is a piece of cross-media poetry and the words Lowell uses are describing the music as heard by her. As there are no 'direct' words to describe the exact sounds she was hearing, the immeasurable subjectivity of the poem pushes it into the grey area between the 'black' of breaking the tenet, and the 'white' of adhering to it.

Similar to its unusual treatment of the first tenet, it is impossible to comment with certainty whether the poem fully adheres to the second of the Imagist tenets. To say that any one word fails to contribute to the overall presentation is near impossible. An argument could be made that the lines such as

.. Whee-e-e! Bump! Bump! Tong-ti-bump!
.. Whee-e-e!
.. Bump-e-ty-tong! Whee-e-e! Tong!²²

add nothing to the overall presentation of the poem; they are simply examples of onomatopoeia, and therefore have no concrete 'image' to present in the poem. However, the strange nature of cross-media poetry makes this claim impossible to be made with full certainty. This is due to the fact that the poem, especially the second and third movement, use concrete 'things' to present an image of the music. For example:

An organ growls in the heavy roof-groins of a church,
It wheezes and coughs.
The nave is blue with incense,
Writhing, twisting,
Snaking over the heads of the chanting priests.²³

Here, actual objects, the 'organ', 'church' and 'chanting priests', are used, in the same manner as the onomatopoeia, to describe music that has no such actual form or 'image' to be based on. Thus, the poem cannot be said with confidence to adhere or break the

second of Pound's tenets due to the highly subjective interpretation of the music in this cross-media poem; once again, demonstrating its ability to remain in the grey area between adherence and breaking another tenet.

A definitive answer to how well the poem follows *vers libre* for the third tenet is also difficult to establish. While the poem does follow the rules of free verse as set out previously, it flaunts the idea of 'not following a musical pattern'. The poem, when read aloud, follows no set musical pattern, however, the poem and its structure is based 'as far as is possible' on the movement of the music. Therefore, while the poem does follow the third tenet, it has also found a loophole to the set rules in its subject matter and close attention to cross-media accuracy.

Overall, Lowell challenges the definition of Imagism as laid out by Pound's original three tenets with 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces'. As the very nature of this piece represents an incredible study of the subjective nature of poetry, the definition of whether it is truly Imagist thus falls to the individual. To the author of this essay, 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces' is undoubtedly Imagist. However, Pound's three tenets themselves are stretched to their definitive limits by this poem, making it impermissible to label this piece 'truly Imagist'. Thus, this essay concludes that while a definitive answer as to whether the poem adheres to Pound's three tenets remains elusive, this work does represent an impressive evolution of the Imagist movement that still falls in line with Pound's original Imagist tenets. Had Pound's personal feud with Lowell been less pronounced, it is possible that he too could have seen the potential of this poem to contribute to the evolution of Imagism.

At this stage of analysis, it is important to address any confusion regarding the opinion that 'Stravinsky's three pieces' should be considered an 'evolution' to Pound's three tenets. The necessity for this is due to the fact that this opinion goes directly against Pound's own repudiation of Imagism following Lowell's attempts to develop Imagism beyond his original three tenets. While this essay uses Pound's three tenets as the definition of Imagism to determine which, if any, of Lowell's poetic works are to be considered as such, a biased opinion on Lowell's work based on Pound's own personal opinions is left aside. Although this essay defends Pound's three tenets as the original and fundamental definition of Imagism, it also believes that an evolution that pushes the boundaries of these tenets to their limits should not necessarily be dismissed prematurely, as Pound clearly did when he claimed that all subsequent work by the Imagists under her was 'Amygism'.²⁴ While some empathise with Pound's dismissive stance, based on the frustration with Lowell over their Dinner Party feuds and her eventual takeover of Imagism, Pound's personal feelings towards Lowell's work remain his own. Thus, this essay concludes, with analysis, that Lowell's 'Stravinsky's Three Pieces' from the 1916 *Some Imagist Poets* anthology should be considered an evolution and progressive stage of Pound's three tenets and the Imagist movement, and that it remains faithful to said tenets in their own right.

This brings us to the final instalment in the Imagist anthologies, *Some Imagist Poets* 1917.

LOWELL'S 'LACQUER PRINTS' IN THE 1917 ANTHOLOGY

In this anthology, Lowell's work consists of twenty poems including translations, adaptations, and original poems in the style of Japanese and Chinese poetry. Only one poem of the twenty is an original to this anthology, the three line poem 'Near Kioto', and the other nineteen were previously published in various collections between 1914-16 and collected under the heading *Lacquer Prints*. As a complete collection of works, these poems constitute some of Lowell's poems that are most faithful to Pound's three tenets. As a whole, the first tenet is followed as well as, if not better than, her poem 'In a Garden' in Pound's *Des Imagistes*. The 'things' that each poem is referring to are named outright in the titles of each of the twenty different *Lacquer Prints* poems, allowing an unambiguous reading of each of them. By announcing the 'thing' before the poem even begins, Lowell sets up the expectation that each of these poems' contents will directly address its subject matter. A good example of this can be found in the poem titled 'The Pond':

Cold, wet leaves
Floating on moss-coloured water,
And the croaking of frogs –
Cracked bell-notes in the twilight.²⁵

Despite the poem being only four short lines, Lowell successfully creates a vivid depiction of 'The Pond' by incorporating the senses of sight, sound and touch into the poem's direct treatment of its images; very similar to her previous work regarding the 'water' in 'In a Garden'. The 'cold, wet leaves' deliver a gauge of temperature and texture of the leaves through the sense of touch; the 'croaking of frogs' is direct in creating a soundtrack to the scene the poem conjures and, finally the 'moss-coloured water [...] in the twilight' provides the clear, intense imagery needed for the readers' imagination to fill out the rest of the scene. While the other nineteen *Lacquer Prints* vary in length, they are all equally as direct in their treatment of the 'thing' and obey Pound's first tenet very faithfully.

Regarding the second tenet, the *Lacquer Prints* too remain faithful. While a few tenuous arguments could be made concerning the necessity of a few select words, or conjunctives having no bearing on the overall contribution to the presentation, it is important to note the fundamental necessity for these minor exceptions to the rule. Many of the *Lacquer Prints* poems with 'excessive' words are faithful translations and adaptations from their original Japanese and Chinese languages. Therefore, these seemingly excessive words are required to be included to maintain the artistic integrity of the original poems while also remaining coherent and grammatically correct in the English language. For example, in the fifth and sixth lines of 'The Camelia Tree of Matsue':

At night,
When the moon rose in the sky,²⁶

'At night' could be argued as being excessive, but it still serves a purpose in the presentation of the poem. While it is possible to remove the line as 'the moon [rising] in the sky' already adequately conveys the same passage of time from day to night, line five still contributes to the presentation of the poem as it divides the poems' more realistic beginning with the mythological, fantastical imagery

presented during the ‘night’. It further serves to create cadence in the poem as a natural break occurs after the two short syllables when read aloud. Lowell herself was a big supporter of the performance aspect of poetry as she believed that ‘poetry had to be heard, not just read’, likely explaining her inclusion of line five.²⁷

Lacquer Prints again remains very faithful to the use of free verse, thus adhering to the third tenet. This was to be expected following Pound’s comments in his essay ‘A Few Don’ts’ on rhythm and rhyme for Imagist poetry: ‘Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language.’²⁸ Thus, Lowell’s choice to use the foreign poetry of Japan and China to inspire her own choices for cadence and form, has allowed all twenty of the poems to follow Pound’s third tenet exceptionally well.

Overall, Lowell’s *Lacquer Prints* are some of the best examples of her Imagist work that remain faithful to Pound’s three tenets. Interestingly, it is in this final *Some Imagist Poets* anthology that Lowell comes full circle in her exploration of Imagism to arrive as close, if not closer, to Pound’s ideals than her work in *Des Imagistes*; as she too has chosen to focus on Far Eastern verse forms to inspire her Imagist poetry. According to Schwartz’s theory, when Pound and Lowell met in 1913, he shared with her his enthusiasm for Far Eastern verse, gained as the literary executor of Ernest Fenollosa, who left unpublished manuscripts regarding the Japanese Nō drama and Chinese poetry.²⁹

With this shared personal interest for Far Eastern verse in mind, it almost seems too coincidental that Lowell would have chosen the *Lacquer Prints* to represent her final venture in Imagism without realising the significance of emulating Pound’s own work in the first *Des Imagistes* anthology. These strong links at both the beginning and end of the Imagist anthologies led me to look much closer at the works of Pound in relation to this shared connection with Lowell. It is here that the similarities between one of Pound’s poems predating the Imagist anthologies, ‘In a Station of the Metro’ – recognised broadly by critics as one of his best Imagist poems – and Lowell’s ‘To a Husband’ in the *Lacquer Prints* becomes of interest. For example, as a general overview, both poems are fourteen words in length; Pound’s poem contains no verbs, while Lowell’s contains only a single adverb; they even share similar themes and line structures:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
faces on a wet black bough.

To A Husband

Brighter than fireflies upon the Uji River
Are your words in the dark, Beloved.

With the above examples showing tangible similarities between Pound and Lowell’s works at the opening and closing of the Imagist movement, I would argue that, despite their personal differences over the Imagist movement, Lowell’s inclusion of ‘To a Husband’ may in fact be an honouring gesture towards the original founder of Imagism and his three tenets, Ezra Pound; Pound in this case referenced in the title as the ‘husband’ with whom Amy Lowell argues and bickers with, but ultimately remains faithful to his ‘words’ –

his three Imagist tenets. This line of thinking could also be further supported by looking to her fellow *Some Imagist Poets* contributor, D. H. Lawrence. After receiving an advanced copy of the *Lacquer Prints* before the final anthology was published, he wrote a letter to Lowell airing the following complaint about the *Lacquer Prints* collection; perhaps due to his recognition of how similar in nature it was to the previous work of Pound, with whom he also had issues:

Don’t do Japanese things, Amy, if you love us [...] I am so disappointed with this batch you have decided to put in, it isn’t you at all, it has nothing to do with you, and it is not real [...] Do write from your real self, Amy, don’t make up things from the outside, it is so saddening.³²

Perhaps by including almost verbatim works to those of Pound, it was Lowell’s way of bookending the Imagist movement and its anthologies. She knew herself that her poetic work and her own preferences were moving away from Imagism and wanted the movement to end ‘neatly’. By ending the final anthology with her *Lacquer Prints*, Lowell successfully bookmarks the end of the Imagist movement and brought both the movement and her poetry back in line with Pound’s original three tenets, regardless of motivations.

CONCLUSION

This essay has sought to consider the similarities and differences between the early tenets on Imagism as outlined by Ezra Pound and the poetic works of Amy Lowell with particular reference to the *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies. This was to critically assess whether Lowell’s poems can be considered truly Imagist. Pound’s three tenets were outlined and their employment as the definition of Imagism and thus the analytical basis for this essay is justified. Select poems published by Lowell in the Imagist anthologies, chronologically from 1914-1916, were analysed to assess the extent to which Lowell upheld these three tenets over time. These works included: ‘In a Garden,’ ‘The Bombardment,’ ‘Stravinsky’s Three Pieces,’ and the *Lacquer Prints* ‘The Pond,’ ‘The Camellia Tree of Matsue’ and ‘To A Husband’. This poetic analysis has provided an in-depth view into the poetic development of Lowell’s work, and has provided insight into which of the three broad stances regarding whether Lowell’s work is Imagist is the most accurate – that her work is Imagist; a departure from Imagism; or a separate, but related, evolution of Pound’s Imagism.

It has been demonstrated that the answer to this question is not black and white but rather largely depends on which anthology is being examined and the stage of artistic development Lowell was in at that time, which is potentially influenced by her fiery relationship with Pound. While Lowell’s ‘In a Garden’, published in the 1914 anthology and edited by Pound himself, is a strong example of Imagist poetry, ‘The Bombardment’, published in the 1915 anthology, for which Lowell took up the role of editor and in which her own tenets were published, represents a clear departure from the three tenets and therefore from Imagism. This poem is an indicator that, following the events of the dinner party, Lowell was moving away from Pound’s Imagist tenets, instead working more closely on what would later be termed ‘polyphonic prose’. In spite of this departure, her ‘Stravinsky’s Three Pieces’ in the 1916 anthology

returns to its roots as an evolution of Imagism, considering its ability to stretch Pound's tenets to the extremes of its definitive limits without completely falling out of line from them, while also being an incredible and progressive study in the subjective nature of poetry. Finally, the 1917 publication of her *Lacquer Prints* 'The Pond,' 'The Camellia Tree of Matsue' and 'To A Husband' show a total reversion to Imagism as presented by Pound in the 1914 *Des Imagistes*, coming full circle and bookmarking the end of Imagism for Lowell.

Taking any one of the broad stances on Lowell's relation to Imagism therefore would be inappropriate. Indeed at different points in time her work has been Imagist, a departure from Imagism, and an evolution. Although her works cannot be labelled Imagist in their entirety, the quality of Lowell's poetry sets her apart as a poet and her dominant editorial and historic role within Imagism means that she will forever remain a key figure of the movement.

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Jake Carter English Literature

Millennial Perspectives: Interrogating the Politics of *Normal People* and *The Hate U Give*

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The term 'millennial' is typically used to encompass the youngest cohorts in contemporary society, but there is no consensus on who exactly is a member of the millennial generation. Authors Howe and Strauss are credited with coining the term in 1991 to describe the demographic cohort of the United States born between 1982 and 2003,¹ and it is this definition that I will adopt for the purpose of this essay.² As the first recorded instance of the term's use, it impacted the subsequent usage of the term. Furthermore, this bracket encompasses all the classifications that I have been able to find, which place millennial births between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to broaden Strauss and Howe's definition to include people from all over the world rather than just the United States since the term currently circulates internationally. As the term trickled into quotidian vocabulary and spread transnationally, its use became even more varied and contradictory, this essay aims to critique the discourse surrounding millennials, with special focus on their role as political agents, and to analyse how the novels *Normal People* and *The Hate U Give* capture salient political issues of the present.

The first part of this essay will investigate how the topic of millennial culture circulates in journalistic media, examining selected British, Irish and American journalistic articles published between 2010 and 2020, including both established "mainstream" publications and "alternative" media such as literary and artistic blogs. Furthermore, the essay will incorporate articles by authors who identify as millennials as well as older writers who position themselves as external observers of millennial behaviours. The heterogeneity and recency of these sources provide a nuanced overview of current discourse on the topic, establishing which political views and behaviours are perceived as quintessentially millennial. Having examined the circulation of the concept of "millennials" from the standpoint of cultural studies, This essay will carry out a literary analysis of the novels *Normal People* by Sally Rooney and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas with the aim of exploring their engagement with contemporary societal and political issues. Both the novels' authors and characters can be described as millennials based on the working definition: *Normal People* is set in the early to mid-2010's, and the protagonists are in their late teens and early twenties. As for *The Hate U Give*, the protagonist is stated to be sixteen years old, and her online username 'Nick's Starry Girl 2000' places the setting of the novel in 2016.³ Thus, both novels present stories by millennial authors about millennial characters which take place in the very recent past. Moreover, both novels are international best-sellers, having been translated into several languages and adapted for the screen, which makes them especially impactful in shaping perceptions of millennial writers. Rooney's novel has been praised

for its insight into the millennial experience, whereas Thomas' work has been deemed innovative for influencing mainstream discourse on salient contemporary issues. However, they also differ in many respects, having been produced in different countries by authors with different styles.

The last two paragraphs will explore how each work contributes to cultural debates over political and societal issues of our time, focusing on how *Normal people* critiques the intersection of oppressive systems and how *The Hate U Give* participates in an evolving discourse on political activism. The essay will engage with academic studies pertaining to the broader political themes that appear in the novels and arguments put forward by journalists and reviewers in the former section, while also integrating reviews and interviews with the authors into the analysis in order to assess both the cultural context in which the works were produced and the authors' professed intention concerning the purpose of their writing. By highlighting works that are not necessarily included in academic research, this essay will emphasise the overlap between literary study and political analysis, and explore how literary study can work as a medium to understand wider societal dynamics. Thus, this essay will closely link the themes of intersectionality and political activism with arguments put forward in recent scholarship and journalistic media, which investigate how our understanding of these concepts is evolving to match shifting political behaviours of millennials.

Michel Foucault critiques the Marxist notion of culture as the result of bourgeois ideology imposed on subjects: in his view, culture is not the *result* of a struggle to exert control on discourse, but the struggle itself, carried out by biased subjects.⁴ In other words, the dynamic that shapes culture is the competition to impose meaning, so culture is fluid and inherently perspectival. Through a Foucauldian lens, the focus in studying cultural discourse shifts away from appraising whether the claims presented are truthful, instead veering towards the question of how, why and by whom a concept such as 'millennial' is formed, and what impact it has on society.

The word 'millennial' is used across different forms of media, but statistical data suggests that in anglophone countries, it is much more prominent in journalistic media than in audio-visual channels such as film or television.⁵ In journalism, the discourse on millennials is often carried out by older writers who position themselves as external observers of this generation and who are frequently critical of millennial behaviours, tending to ascribe monolithic characteristics to the entire cohort. Thus, the concept of 'millennial' has come to carry a rather negative connotation in the media. Circa 2010, the concept was used to portray young people as lazy and self-involved. Regarding their engagement with politics, millennials have been perceived first as disengaged, then as overly involved in their political battles.⁶ The label carries such a negative connotation that author Tony Tulathimutte claims to have 'acid reflux' when his work is described as 'a novel about millennials',⁷ while Emily Temple calls

it 'a dirty word'.⁸ The result is that millennials are often ignored in their views, and as they begin to have a significant role in shaping culture, their endeavours are met with derision by influential intellectuals, authors and even politicians. The discourse on millennials started to take shape in the late 1990's in the United States as older generations began to wonder how young people would shape the future at the turn of the century. In 1997, Strauss and Howe predicted that American millennials would do great things for society. They dubbed millennials a 'Hero' generation who would bring about the 'Fourth Turning' in Anglo-American history, a revolutionary societal shift at the beginning of the new millennium.⁹ The Strauss-Howe generational theory is widely regarded to be pseudoscience and presents several inconsistencies, including contrasting parameters for the millennial age group. Nonetheless, Strauss and Howe enduringly connected the millennial label with a sense of radical change. In 2011, Morley Winograd and William D. Hais used Strauss and Howe's theories in their own optimistic predictions about millennials, calling them a 'civic generation' and asserting that they were united by solid core values and a desire to change society for the better.¹⁰

On the other hand, some of Strauss and Howe's contemporaries expressed scepticism about young people's interest in constructively engaging with society. In her 2000 essay *The Me-ME Class: The Young and the Ruthless*, bell hooks lamented that 'societal support of hedonistic consumerism [had] produced a new generation of young people who...[did] not understand class politics or capitalism'.¹¹ Although hooks did not use the term 'millennials', she referred explicitly to American teenagers, who were the cohort born between 1981 and 1987. In 2013, Joel Stein wrote a feature piece in *TIME* Magazine titled *Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation*, with an extra *me* and an even less sympathetic stance than hooks. Where hooks saw young people as victims of capitalism and the toxic influence of mass media, Stein portrayed them as inherently self-absorbed. He cited a study by Jean Twenge reporting a drastic increase in the incidence of narcissistic personality disorder in college students. In response to this, a 2014 article in *The Atlantic* pointed out that this study left room for significant speculation, and that millennials were no more likely to be clinically diagnosed as narcissists than previous generations.¹² Ultimately, like Strauss and Howe, Stein saw millennials as a generation capable of bringing about significant change with their strive for self-affirmation, but rather than being elated by their potential, he was disturbed by it: 'Millennials are the most threatening and exciting generation since baby boomers brought about the social revolution', he wrote, '[t]hat's why we're terrified of them'.¹³ Because of their narcissism, Stein viewed their capacity for change as self-serving rather than revolutionary. This is a clear example of how culture functions as the struggle between competing meanings: from the premise of millennial capacity for change, different authors drew drastically different conclusions, and used them to veer the discourse on millennials in opposite directions. Stein's argument synthesises the sense of novelty associated with this label and the prevalent scepticism towards young people's civic-mindedness. As hooks had done before him, Stein affirmed that despite their considerable potential, millennials were politically disengaged. They were 'informed but inactive', and '[embraced] the system', rather than trying to improve or subvert it.¹⁴ Stein briefly

acknowledged the existence of millennial-led activist movements such as Occupy Wall Street, but contended that they had 'even less of a chance than previous rebellions'.¹⁵ According to sociologist Ruth Milkman, this was '[t]he dominant narrative about the "Millennial" generation' in the early 2010s, 'as selfish, lazy, narcissistic and politically disengaged'.¹⁶

In her study on millennial-led activist movements, Milkman positioned herself against the notion of their political apathy, arguing instead that American millennials were 'far more likely [than other generations] to support same-sex marriage, labour unions, and even socialism'.¹⁷ Furthermore, Milkman highlighted the diversity in these movements as well as their commonalities, presenting the Occupy Wall Street and the Dreamer Movement as case studies. The former was decentralised and driven predominantly by white men, the latter led by Latinx women and LGBTQ+ people. However, Milkman observed that '[b]oth movements [relied] heavily on social media' to shape narratives for themselves, which were crucial in gathering support for their causes.¹⁸ Thus, Milkman's study highlighted successful examples of millennial political activism and contrasted the monolithic view of millennials by pointing out the diversity of their engagement. Lastly, Milkman's study presented reshaping the mainstream narrative as a form of political activism, a notion which will be crucial in the study of *The Hate U Give*.

By the mid-2010s, the term 'millennial' had crossed the Atlantic. In 2014, an article titled *Are millennials as bad as we think?* appeared on *The Guardian*, once again citing Twenge's narcissism study as the supposed proof of the generation by stating that 'the most interesting fact about millennials is the paradoxical nature of their character'.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the anti-millennial rhetoric was changing. Phenomena such as the student-led demonstrations against President Trump in both US and UK campuses, as well as the involvement of young people in transnational movements like the MeToo campaign and Extinction Rebellion, made it increasingly difficult to accuse them of political lethargy. Instead, millennials are now accused of caring too much, of being oversensitive and aggressive in pushing forward their demands. Author Bret Easton Ellis took to Twitter, then to magazines such as *Vice* and *Vanity Fair*, to argue that 'Generation Wuss' had received 'inadequate preparation on how to deal with the hardships of life' and responded 'by collapsing into sentimentality and creating victim narratives'.²⁰ Moreover, he claimed that they were unable to face criticism, which drove them to label any detractor 'a hater, a contrarian, a troll'.²¹ This was the premise of British writer Claire Fox's 2016 book *I Find That Offensive!(Provocations)*, which allegedly popularised the term 'Snowflake Generation'.²² The expression likely referred to a quote in Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club*: 'You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile'.²³ This intertextual reference attacked millennial narcissism and entitlement, but the word 'snowflake' also suggested emotional frailty. Fox found the over sensitivity of young people ridiculous and dangerous for free speech. Millennials were not just 'spoiled wimps or over-anxious cry-babies', but also 'witch-hunters' who ruined people's careers for the sake of outrage.²⁴ The term was picked up on social media by Ellis and other prominent critics of the youth, including Steve Bannon, former Chief Strategist to Donald Trump.

Journalist Rebecca Nicholson called it ‘defining insult of 2016’.²⁵ Today, the narrative of the Snowflake Generation is still the prevalent expression of anti-millennial sentiment. As recently as May 2019, columnist Bret Stephens wrote in the *New York Times* that ‘these younger generations specialise in histrionic self-pity and moral self-righteousness’.²⁶ As millennials start to demand systematic change in various aspects of society, their detractors appear disturbed by their outspokenness: by calling young people histrionic, oversensitive and abrasive, they are effectively urging them to suppress their opinion and adopt a more moderate perspective.

With regards to literature, the negative impact of the discourse surrounding millennials is felt keenly by several authors who identify with this category, ‘It’s predictable that literature should be yet another realm in which this generation is dismissed’, lamented Olivia Sudjic in a 2019 article.²⁷ Furthermore, they are concerned that their work should be depersonalised by marketing it as ‘relatable’ to millennials, because the notion of relatability undermines the individuality of their experience. In 2016, Tulathimutte claimed that ‘[his] only goal was to write about [his] own experiences’, yet he was being labelled as a ‘poster boy’ for an entire generation.²⁸ ‘I certainly never intended to speak for anyone other than myself’, Sally Rooney told the *Irish Times* in 2018. ‘My books may well fail as artistic endeavours but I don’t want them to fail for failing to speak for a generation for which I never intended to speak in the first place.’²⁹ Similarly, millennial artists are often aware that their work could never do justice to an entire cohort, so the label of ‘relatable’ or ‘millennial’ flattens the diversity of young people’s experiences and views. ‘[W]hy did we ever pretend novels by straight white guys about straight white guys spoke for entire generations?’ argues Tulathimutte, while Sudjic admits: ‘If I had to pick my own “great millennial novel” it might well be [Rooney’s *Conversations With Friends*], but I’m a cis, white, middle class, metropolitan millennial woman...so it was easy to relate’.³⁰ Asian-American critic Rebecca Liu is exasperated at a bombardment of ‘art [that] revolves around an archetypical Young Millennial Woman - pretty, white, cisgender, and tortured enough to be interesting but not enough to be repulsive’, including *Normal People*’s Marianne.³¹ Liu remarks that these works are sometimes portrayed as ‘[breaking] new ground in feminism, as if the history of western feminism itself hasn’t been marked by the elevation of upper middle class white voices to the level of unearned universalism’.³² This argument echoes criticism made to mainstream feminism at least since the late ’80s by scholars of colour, from hooks to Spivak. ‘When publishing women are from the dominant “culture” they sometimes share, with male author, the tendency to create an inchoate “other” (often female)...once again establishing the Northwestern Europe subject as “the same”’, wrote Spivak in 1999.³³ To summarise, forging a homogenised, often deprecating discourse on millennials places artists in a niche in which they are not necessarily comfortable, and pushed for a standardisation of culture that perpetuates systems of marginalisation.

Sally Rooney’s *Normal People* appears at first glance to merely corroborate negative stereotypes about millennials, since its young protagonists are arguably emotionally fragile and politically passive. However, this section argues that through the framework of intersectionality, we can identify a nuanced portrayal of current societal issues on the part of this millennial author. Therefore, while

the novel does not appear to take a definitive political position, it can still offer acute insight on politically relevant issues.

Written by Irish author Sally Rooney and originally published in 2018, the novel is set in Carricklea and Dublin between 2011 and 2015. It revolves around the relationship between two young people, which oscillates between romantic love and close friendship. The protagonists, Connell and Marianne, are informed about current events and have ‘good socialist values’, but politics hover at the periphery of their lives, confined to dinner-party conversations and occasional demonstrations.³⁴ Connell described liking an opinionated Facebook post as ‘probably the most strident political action he has ever taken in his life’,³⁵ and although they both take part in a demonstration ‘against the war in Gaza’, this imprecise term indicates a simplistic understanding of the phenomenon against which they are protesting.³⁶ Therefore, the work has been accused of political sloth by critics such as Liu. However, the incisiveness of Rooney’s observation lies not in the characters’ awkward engagement with politics, but in its portrayal of the insidious ways in which oppressive systems, particularly class divisions and patriarchal dynamics, impact their daily lives.

To analyse the power dynamics in *Normal People*, it is important to consider the framework of intersectionality. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and has since been influential in feminist and postcolonial studies. Crenshaw exposed the need to reform the ‘established analytical structure’ of feminism and race discourse, which was insufficient to address the experiences of people discriminated against on the basis of *both* race and gender.³⁷ As Crenshaw observed, the various discourses surrounding discrimination had been operating under a ‘single-axis framework’, failing to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the multiple aspects of one’s identity.³⁸ The concept of intersectionality was later expanded to include aspects such as class as well as gender and race. In *Normal People*, the intersectionality of the protagonists’ identity is emphasised by playing each of them in position of privilege within certain hierarchies, and of disadvantages in others: Marianne’s position in the upper-middle class in contrasted with Connell’s working-class status, his ‘male privilege’ with her femaleness in sexist environments.³⁹ This contributes to the shifting power dynamics between them, which characterise their relationship.

At first, gender disparity is especially influential in their lives. The pair start developing feelings for one another in secondary school, where Marianne is bullied and marginalised in a distinctly gendered fashion. For example, Connell speculates that their classmates spread lewd rumour about her ‘as a way of gawking at something that they’re not allowed to see’: her naked body and her sexuality.⁴⁰ The schoolboys’ sexually derogatory attitudes towards girls are referenced throughout the book, suggesting that this form of bullying is facilitated by normalised sexist behaviours in the school.⁴¹ At times, Connell appears aware of the hypocrisy behind his friends’ harassing of Marianne, but it still influences his view of her. The mere fact ‘some people [think] she is the ugliest girl in school’ makes him feel like ‘a deviant person’ for being attracted to her.⁴² Thus, he too is indirectly affected by the bullying that she experiences. However, he arguably has the upper hand at this point, as Marianne agrees to hide their relationship for his benefit.

At first, class does not appear especially important in their dynamic. Connell's mother works as a cleaner for Marianne's family, which highlights the gap between their financial means and social status. Yet Connell is initially unfazed by his friend's insinuation that Marianne 'think of [him] as her butler', and while he is aware of his own financial precarity, he does not make any connection between his status and his relationship with her until they both start attending Trinity College Dublin.⁴³ In this upper-middle class environment, the power dynamics between them are reversed. She is transfigured into a 'happy' person with 'a lot of friends', while he is 'the lonely, unpopular one'.⁴⁴ Both characters identify class as a deciding factor in his unpopularity. He 'has become self-conscious about his clothes', which are 'cheap and unfashionable', and he jokes tartly to her friends that 'we can't all go to private school'.⁴⁵ On her part, Marianne is aware that people perceive him as slow, and 'deep down' she knows that this because of his working-class background.⁴⁶

Julie Bettie and Betsy Leondar-Wright argue that, while class is normally conceptualised in the Marxist terms of 'class consciousness', constituted by 'the development of a political consciousness', in practice it is more akin to a nation of 'class identity'. In their view, the sense of belonging to a certain social class is not necessarily related to political awareness: rather, it is shaped by 'predispositions inculcated in us by our childhood social position, of which we are largely unconscious.' Thus, the sense of class belonging and class division are constructed through a number of factors in everyday life, from the 'cultural capital' of higher education to simply sharing 'tastes in food, humour, media, and clothing'. This is why Connell's sense of otherness is triggered simply by wearing different clothes, and Marianne's middle-class friends mock his apparel behind his back. Furthermore, hooks writes that 'it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class'.⁴⁷ This argument is echoed by both Bettie, who states that 'class as a topic seems tainted, perhaps perceived as outdated and unfashionable',⁴⁸ and Leondar-Wright, who claims that class is 'neglected' in favour of studies on race and gender.⁴⁹ All these scholars attribute the disinterest in studying class to the United States cultural environment, with its myth of having achieved a 'classless society'. However, I would argue that the refusal to acknowledge class as a crucial factor in perpetuating oppression applies to any democracy, because the political equality derived from the principle of equal rights under the law is often conflated with *de facto* social equality. Connell's marginalisation remains unacknowledged by fellow students, exemplifying this reluctance to recognise class barriers as a current societal issue.

On his part, Connell adopts a contemptuous outsider's perspective on this privileged environment, yet he is also drawn to it. When he applies to Trinity, he fantasises about 'going to dinner parties and having conversations about the Greek bailout', and he envies Marianne the privilege of 'instantly [forgetting] the money that she spends'.⁵⁰ However, he does not realise that Marianne's financial stability is dependent on her abusive family. Marianne's wealth undeniably offers her advantages, from the ability to fit in with ease at Trinity to the option of not working to support herself, so that she does not need to sacrifice 'blocks of her extremely limited time on this earth for the human invention known as money'.⁵¹

On the other hand, it is precisely by finding a job and ending her financial dependence on them that Marianne is able to sever her toxic relationship with her family. In the last chapter, she starts working as a secretary for a property developer who pays her off the books, which signals that even in her emancipation, she is still involved in a capitalist system of dubious morality. Thus, the insidiousness of class hierarchies lies in their unacknowledged power to marginalise and elevate, reversing the protagonists' positions. Furthermore, the financial inequality that drives class divisions pushes people like Marianne to sacrifice their independence for financial security.

Furthermore, despite her class privileged, Marianne remains vulnerable to misogynistic behaviours even at university. Her college boyfriends are physically violent to her, but she and they rationalise this behaviour under the guise of a BDSM fetish. Even her early relationship with Connell has dark undertones, which his own mother regards as 'exploitative'.⁵² Connell counteracts that their arrangement 'was agreed', but the asymmetry of power between them makes the morality of the situation at least dubious.⁵³ The tension between Connell's love for Marianne and his 'effortless tyranny over her', as he described it, is unsettling and never resolved.⁵⁴ The reader is left to decide whether Connell is an alternative to the gaggle of toxic men in her life or a different type of abuser. It is even suggested that Marianne's toxic relationship are an attempt to imitate her bond with Connell: 'With Jamie it's like I'm acting part, I just pretend to feel that way, like I'm in his power', she tells him, '[b]ut with you that really was the dynamic'.⁵⁵ The ambiguity of their situation feeds into the current mediatic debate over abusive sexual behaviours, sparked by their aforementioned MeToo movement. The campaign calls into question whether it is possible to give consent in a situation of asymmetrical power, and examines the so-called grey areas and preconceptions surrounding sexual consent. From her teenage years onwards, Marianne is unable to express discomfort in situations where her consent is undermined: when she is groped by an adult stranger, she apologises profusely, saying that she has 'had too much to drink.' Some classmates tell her that it was not her fault, but others insist that the groping was 'just a bit of fun'.⁵⁶ The normalisation of sexual harassment is a form of violence which is sadly a common experience for women, as the MeToo campaign has recently brought to light. However, another way in which patriarchal myths misrepresent sexual abuse is the idea that men cannot fall victims to it. This misconception is addressed through Connell's experiences of sexual abuse which, like Marianne, he has difficulty acknowledging as such.

As a schoolboy, he is the object of a teacher's advances, which makes him feel 'embarrassed and annoyed', but he 'can't tell people about it because they'll think he's trying to brag about it'.⁵⁷ As a faculty member, Miss Neary is in a position of power over him, which she abuses by making advances against which he feels that he cannot protest. To his peers, however, this coercive situation appears like a conquest. Sexist prejudices thus hinder Connell from defending himself against harassment, just like Marianne is conditioned to apologise for her own assault. Thus, the patriarchy is shown to exacerbate the defencelessness of the vulnerable, regardless of gender. When Connell is no longer in secondary school, Miss Neary tries to have sex with her former pupil, who is too drunk to 'push her hand away'.⁵⁸ Connell's inability to withdraw consent

makes her behaviour approach illegality, but Connell refuses to acknowledge that 'she did anything that bad'.⁵⁹ In recounting the story to Marianne, he admits that 'feels fucked up about it', but claims that he is just 'being dramatic', having internalised a narrow definition of sexual assault.⁶⁰

In short, the intersection of the protagonists' gender and class identities reveals the complexity of the power dynamics that govern society. Rooney's characters are privileged within some hierarchies, such as class, and oppressed in others, such as the patriarchy, but they oscillate between positions of power and powerlessness. Oppressive systems are shown to be ultimately detrimental to everyone, regardless of their position in them. The political salience of Rooney's novels lies in delving into controversial topics like the ongoing impact of class inequality and patriarchal myths about consent, as well as her nuanced depiction of societal inequalities.

If Rooney favours a shrewd observation of society over explicit political statements, Thomas' novel takes a clear stance on the controversial issue of police brutality. In the following section, I will discuss how the novel relates to an evolving understanding of political activism in contemporary society, both in the journey of the main character and because of the author's stated intention to change the narrative surrounding police accountability.

The Hate U Give is a young adult novel by African American author Angie Thomas, set in the fictional and predominantly black neighbourhood of Garden Heights. The protagonist, sixteen-year-old Starr, witnesses the shooting of her childhood friend Khalil by a police officer. Khalil is also sixteen years old and unarmed, but because he has been involved in drug dealing and gang activity prior to his death, he is labelled as dangerous by the media. Starr is faced with the decision of either testifying to a grand jury and appearing on a televised interview, thereby exposing herself to public controversy, or forfeiting the opportunity to tell her version of events. The novel was published in 2017 in the United States, mere months after the election of Donald Trump inspired a surge of activism especially among millennials, as discussed above. Trump is often accused of racism by his detractors, and his election has been interpreted as the triumph of xenophobic rhetoric in United States politics.⁶¹ In his first year in office, Trump appeared to endorse the use of force by law enforcement on people in custody, telling an audience of police officers: 'please don't be too nice' to 'these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon'.⁶²

As Thomas explains in the author's note at the end of the novel, her writing aims to make the narrative surrounding police brutality more sympathetic to the victims at a time when 'injustice, prejudice, and racism rear their ugly heads again in this political climate both in the US and abroad'.⁶³ In the closing lines of the novel, Thomas links its fictional events to authentic instances of police brutality by mingling Khalil's name with those of real victims.⁶⁴ Thus, Starr's promise to 'never give up' and 'never be quiet' about police violence encourages the reader to interrogate their own responsibility to combat injustice, and her growth into an outspoken and engaged citizen is presented as exemplary.⁶⁵ I would argue that her clear position is facilitated by the novel's belonging to the category of young adult fiction. Since it is primarily directed at teenagers, Thomas' work takes on a didactic tone that allows her to explicitly state the values which she seeks to impart: first and foremost, protecting the

truth against people who seek to bury it. 'What's the point of having a voice if you're gonna be silent in the moments you shouldn't be?' reflects Starr, synthesising the moral of the story.⁶⁶

In *Normal People*, the truth is presented as subjective. The close third-person narration helps the reader sympathise with both point-of-view characters, while maintaining the critical distance necessary to recognise their respective blind spots and biases. Thus, Rooney emphasises how competing narratives are equally believable, and portrays objectivity as unobtainable. Thomas, by contrast, presents the truth as objective; competing narratives are presented not as an inevitability of the human condition, but a result of powerful institutions twisting factual information. 'I didn't know a dead person could be charged in his own murder', comments Starr about the media's bias against Khalil. It becomes her responsibility to share the truth that the media either ignores or chooses to overlook: that Khalil was defenceless when he was murdered, and moreover, that he was 'more than any bad decision he made'.⁶⁷ However, Starr's efforts are frustrated by an unjust establishment, and she runs the risk of resorting to illegal means to vent her exasperation.

An important theme in Thomas' novel is interrogating the motivations behind the radicalisation of youth. Through Starr's first-person perspective, the author pushes the reader to feel her anger and pain, even in its most extreme manifestations. 'My anger is theirs, and theirs is mine', reflects Starr as she watches a demonstration about Khalil's death turn into a riot. Although Thomas frames rioting as useless and ultimately damaging to black communities, she also suggests that the desire to riot stems from righteous anger, which is difficult to turn into productive action when lawful avenues systematically fail to impart change. 'I did everything right, and it didn't make a fucking difference', thinks Starr upon learning that despite her testimony and interview, her only means of pushing her cause forward, the culprit was not convicted.⁶⁸ The futility of her efforts make her feel so disempowered that she is seized by a desire to '[h]it somebody. Burn something. Throw something'.⁶⁹

A 2017 study by the University of Colorado has suggested that 'Black and Brown Millennial activism' tends to be oriented towards 'system change' rather than 'system maintenance', i.e. protesting societal inequalities rather than working to preserve the positive aspects of society.⁷⁰ According to this research, their engagement takes forms that are often labelled as anti-social in the United States, such as rallies, and this causes the misconception that young people from non-white backgrounds are less civically minded than their white counterparts.⁷¹ Thus, black millennials such as Starr face the double jeopardy of being profiled as members of anti-social minorities in a generation already perceived as politically inept. However, behind Starr's disruptive behaviour, we see the frustrated desire to change a system that she discovers to be biased against her. A study of youth political engagement within the European Union goes even further than the University of Colorado, including illegal actions such as rioting as forms of activism.⁷² These arguments suggest that the primary criterion to define activism is whether people act in response to a perceived need in society, regardless of the legality or constructiveness of the action.

Since millennials have recently been accused of being politically fanatical, Thomas' uncompromising stance on a controversial issue, and her portrayal of rioting as understandable though not advisable,

can at first glance corroborate this stereotype. However, the author does not gloss over the contradictions of the issues that she portrays, showing that her partisanship does not equate to obtuseness. For example, Starr wrestles with the knowledge that Khalil was a drug dealer, describing his behaviour as 'disappointing' and stating that he 'knew better' than to become involved in such a vicious cycle.⁷³ Another debate, voiced in the arguments between Starr's parents, is whether the right to protect oneself from violence trumps the duty to better their community. 'We can change stuff around here, but instead we run?' contends her father, to which her mother counteracts that she would rather enable her kids to 'enjoy life' by sheltering them from the violence of their neighbourhood.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the novel's happy ending resolves these issues in a curiously uncomplicated manner. Khalil is revealed to have been forced into drug dealing by a villainous gang leader and Starr's family moves into a more stable neighbourhood but keeps owning a business in Garden Heights, which allows them to both distance themselves from and contribute to their community. Rather than a simplistic political outlook, however, I would attribute this contrived solution to the conventions of young adult literature, which typically involves a happy ending. Furthermore, given the exemplary nature of Starr's journey, it is fitting that Thomas should provide her with an escape from the toxic environment of her neighbourhood that does not compromise her integrity. By doing so, she instills a sense of hope into the novel, which is crucial to inspiring political engagement. A lack of hope arguably contributes to the political paralysis of Rooney's characters. By the end of *Normal People*, Marianne is disillusioned by the idea to 'stop all violence committed by the strong against the weak', feeling that she '[isn't] at all powerful, and she [will] live and die in a world of extreme violence against the innocent.'⁷⁵

Rooney's work tackles political issues with an oblique slant that highlights their complexity, but refrains from proposing ways to resist oppressive systems. Conversely, Thomas' partisan stance allows her to convey the hopeful message that 'your voice matters', and she presents us with an exemplary protagonist who grows into a conscious citizen.⁷⁶ I would argue that the approaches of both these millennial authors are equally helpful in political discourse: nuance is essential for thoughtful discussion, but adopting a clear position and spreading a hopeful message allow literature to participate in cultural discourse with the aim of exerting change.

This essay has examined the discourse surrounding millennial political behaviours and the ways in which two millennial writers engage with politically relevant issues. Its overview of the circulation of the term 'millennial' from its first recorded use to the present has exposed the contradictions and negative stigma attached to this label. Despite the perception of millennials as either too self-absorbed to care about politics or overly enamoured with their own political views, my close readings of *Normal People* and *The Hate U Give* have revealed just how much insight novels by millennials can offer on current society and politics. *Normal People* provides a nuanced portrayal of how class and gender dynamics intersect, creating oppressive systems in which both the privileged and the downtrodden ultimately suffer. Rooney's portrayal of class mirrors the notion of 'class identity', which adds to the established Marxist notion of 'class consciousness' by reflecting on the quotidian

experience of class belonging. With regards to gender, her novel raises questions that are extremely relevant to current societal debates, such as male sexual assault and the redefinition of consent. Meanwhile, *The Hate U Give* makes a deliberate effort to participate in the current discourse on police brutality, and Starr's growth as an activist corroborates the argument, brought forward by recent studies, that a new understanding of activism is required to appreciate millennial political engagement. Thus, this essay's analysis has shown how the study of millennial authors can yield unique insight on how young people experience, think about, and actively engage with political and societal problems.

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- ⁷¹ Logia, Lightfoot and Contreras, p.254
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The *Other* Special Relationship: US-Israel Relations and the Unsettling of National Myth

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The 'special relationship'. For many, no phrase can more appropriately encapsulate the history, intimacy, and seemingly unabating centrality of Anglo-American relations. Even those who lament the prosaic use of the phrase as 'cliché' refuse to discredit the supposed 'unusual' nature of 'bi-lateral bond'.¹ Yet, as even the US Department of State is forced to acknowledge, it would be erroneous to describe US-UK diplomatic relations as anything other than occasionally turbulent.²

The very need for diplomacy between the two nations was born out of the American Revolutionary War against the rule of the British Empire. And this post-independence diplomacy lasted less than three decades before severed by the War of 1812.³ Even since Winston Churchill christened US-UK relations as the 'special relationship' on 1946, there have been threats of economic sanctions, refusal to support war efforts, and vocal condemnation of foreign policy moves between the Euro-Atlantic allies.⁴ In more recent years, Barack Obama's presidency was perceived by many to complicate the 'special relationship' by focusing American interests towards mainland Europe.⁵ The election of Donald Trump in November 2016, however, signified a diversion from this course. An ambassadorial standoff in July 2019 aside, Trump's effect on Anglo-American relations can be summarised as a reversal of Obama's 'back of the queue' policy.⁶ Whilst this initially, and ironically, took the form of publicly undermining the U.K. Parliament during Brexit negotiations, the election of Brexiteer, Boris Johnson in 2019 has made Trump's decision appear a masterstroke in terms of re-centering Anglo-American relations.

Nevertheless, this is not the only instance of unorthodoxy in Trumpian foreign policy. Perhaps the most unexpected foreign affairs adjustment of President Trump's tumultuous first term in office, and arguably the one that will prove to have the largest geopolitical ramifications, was his decision in late 2017 to formally recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. However, this, unlike the apparent Trump-Johnson united front, was not significant because it embodied a period rapprochement but, rather, because it was a particularly loud vocalisation of a long-held US affinity for the Israeli state that extends beyond it simply being 'the equivalent of a US aircraft carrier in the Middle East'.⁷

Following the declaration, the White House was inundated with criticism. The move was considered by many to 'significantly undercut the US's credibility as a neutral party' between Israelis and Palestinians.⁸ Such criticism was born out of the federal government's traditional refusal to accept Israeli sovereignty over the city. Since the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, in which West Jerusalem was seized, Israel has claimed the city as its true capital (further references to this text will be made in parenthesis following its quotation).⁹ The

United States meanwhile lent its support to United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 181 and 194, in 1947 and 1948 respectively. Both resolutions declared that Jerusalem should be under international governance and remain a 'corpus separatum' from both Israeli and Arab territories (ibid.) President Harry S. Truman would go on to oppose Israeli attempts to move the capital from Tel Aviv in 1949 and the US would join 56 other U.N. member states in urging Israel to withdraw its forces from East Jerusalem following its annexation during the Six-Day War of 1967.¹⁰ Since then 'subsequent US administrations have adhered' to the policy that 'the future of Jerusalem should be the subject of a negotiated settlement [...] and not [...] of unilateral actions'.¹¹ Trump's decision, therefore, is considered prejudicial to any potential Israel-Palestine negotiations in a way that previous administrations sought to avoid.

At the same time, and as Trump himself has repeatedly made clear, every successful presidential candidate since 1992 has made explicit reference to their own personal recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.¹² Furthermore, whilst 'previous presidents [...] have failed to deliver', Congress has been consistent in its support of Israeli claims to the city.¹³ The Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 being perhaps the most explicit instance of congressional support.¹⁴ Congress too has repeatedly been near unanimous in defending and support Israel as a whole. In 1977, every member of the US Senate, bar one, voted in favour of prohibiting US companies from boycotting Israel.¹⁵ On top of this domestic and diplomatic support, the US has a long history of military cooperation, economic trade, and financial and humanitarian aid-giving with the Israeli state. Consider this in tandem with the US's forgiving response to the 1967 *USS Liberty* incident, in which Israeli air and naval forces mistakenly attacked a US naval ship, and it would seem that President John F. Kennedy's declaration that the US and Israel are the true 'special relationship' holds significant weight.¹⁶

However, whilst historical observation illustrates that, despite claims of neutrality, the US continuously 'end[s] up taking the Israeli position' in Arab-Israeli tensions, I claim that this seemingly unconditional bi-lateral allegiance is not as beneficial to either party as at first it would seem.¹⁷ This essay makes clear that the intricacies of the US-Israel relations contradict both countries' national mythologies. Through consideration of philosophical historiography concerning the concept of national myth, this paper nevertheless avoids the trap of myopically seeing these contradictions as a direct threat to American-Israeli hegemony in the Middle East. Instead the *success* of these national mythologies *in spite of* of fundamental contradictions is cited as a potential threat to their ability to continue to whitewash US-Israeli policy in the region. The success of both the US and Israel's national mythologies in capturing the imagination of their citizenry (including those critical of the state) provides ideological weaponry to those who seek to undermine the foreign policy goals that these same myths have historically

facilitated. I contend that nowhere is this irony more apparent than in the cooptation of US myths of personal liberty by activists of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign within the United States.

The Myth is the Public Dream

A national myth can be defined an often-fictionalised narrative concerning the history or origins of a nation-state. They are the foundation of every modern national identity.¹⁸ Whether one perceives this phenomenon of myth-making as a mobilisation technique in the wake of eighteenth-century nationalist movements, or as a psychological response to the 'longing for a return of the feeling of oneness [...] experienced in the womb', the success of this mythmaking is reliant on one's internalisation of the myth without acknowledgement of its contrived nature.¹⁹ It is with this mind that I will identify several of the prevailing national myths in the US and Israel — two countries which, in their relative adolescence, are particularly reliant on myth as justification for existence.

One of the functions of myth-making has been to manufacture 'a rightful sense of belonging' for people without historical ties to the land in question.²⁰ Just as this was true of various European diasporas in nineteenth-century America, Israel's school of 'New Historians' assert that it is also true of Zionist settlements in historic Palestine. * Ilan Pappé has argued that the specific nature of this settlement has made it necessary for Israel to promote a 'historical account' that 'subtly cast[s] doubt on the Palestinians' moral right to the land' (further references to this text will be made in parenthesis following its quotation).²¹ The first myth that has served this purpose is that 'Palestine was an empty land' until Zionist settlement in the late 1800s.²² While the first historical accounts of any land known as Palestine date as early as the second-century, the first non-Biblical account featured on the Israeli foreign ministry's website is referred to as 'foreign domination'.²³ The representation of essentially continuous Arab and Ottoman dominance from the seventh-century until the sixteenth is that this was largely absentee rule that the only permanent inhabitants of modern-day Israel were approximately 10,000 Jews scattered between Jerusalem and Safed.²⁴ By the eighteenth-century, according to the foreign ministry, the land was even more sparsely populated. The few natives had fled the high taxes of the Ottomans and 'swamp and desert had encroached on agricultural land'.²⁵

Ottoman records, however, show that in 1878 Palestine was home to 462,465 citizens, only three percent of whom were Jewish.²⁶ Meanwhile, the notion that 'it was only after Zionist "made the desert bloom" that [Palestinians] became interested in' claiming the land as their own is just as contrary to historical records.²⁷ Israel's own scholarship shows that for centuries 'Palestine, rather than being a desert, was a thriving Arab society — mostly Muslim, predominantly rural, but with vibrant urban centers' (Pappé, p. 6). Even those Zionists who always acknowledged a pre-existing population justified their claims of 'a land without a people' by asserting that the inhabitants were not 'constituted politically as a nation'.²⁸ However, as with much of the rest of the world, the nineteenth-century

had seen the birth of a fledgling Palestinian nationalism. Indeed it is ironic that nationalist concepts were 'imported' by American missionaries, and so successfully that the period saw calls from the Palestinian elite for a religiously pluralistic and united Arab state in the model of the US (Pappé, p. 7, 8). Nevertheless, the myth prevails. The world over, this 'assumption that the promised land was empty [...] is [...] alive and kicking'.²⁹

This primary myth directly interacts with another stalwart of Israeli foundational mythology. If Palestine was a land without a people, then the Jews were a people without a land. Proponents of organised Jewish settlement in Palestine have long relied on the notion of return from exile. The Israeli Proclamation of Independence states that '[t]he Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish People [...]. After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people [...] never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it'.³⁰ Though histories of exile are 'deeply embedded in Jewish tradition', the exile specifically referenced by the Israeli state is that which was perpetrated by 'Titus of Rome' in 70 CE.³¹ As a result, supposed genealogical descent from Jerusalemite deportees from nearly two millennia before the founding of Israel is claimed as justification for Zionism.³² However, Israeli historian, Shlomo Sand, contends that 'the Romans never deported entire peoples' and that, in the same period, the number of Jewish people across West Asia was already in the millions.³³ In this one fell swoop, not only is the notion of mass exile from Palestine problematised but so is the imagining of modern-day Israel as a specific ancestral homeland.

Nonetheless, the questioning of genealogical connection between Zionists and the Jewish communities caught up in the Siege of Jerusalem does not invalidate all claims of Jews as without a land. It is true that yearning for a Jewish homeland was often a material response to intense antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe. In fact, the persecution of European Jewry, epitomised by the vicious pogroms within the Russian Empire in 1881, is what 'transformed' spiritual notions of exile into a 'political program' (Pappé, p. 24). It is no coincidence that the first wave of Zionist settlements in Palestine began just a year later in 1882 (Ibid.). In this, one begins to see how national myths are not always complete falsehoods, but are often half-truths that are distorted to serve contemporary political aims.

The US — despite being touted as the 'first new nation' and home of exceptionalism — shares both the broad claims and questionable authenticity of Israel's national mythology.³⁹ The Pilgrim Fathers, whose story serves as the cornerstone of American history, were themselves the victims of religious persecution.³⁴ They, like the European Jewry, were a people without a land inasmuch as they found themselves targeted by the state regardless of their citizenship. For instance, under the *1593 Act against Seditious Sectaries*, Protestant separatism in England was outlawed and its leaders executed.³⁵ However, the Pilgrims, including future Governor of the Plymouth Colony, William Bradford, did not flee to the 'New World', at least not at first. When they made the decision to 'flie and leave their howses and habitations' in England, their chosen destination was, in fact, Northern Europe. It was in the Netherlands that the Puritans found 'their spirituall comfote'.³⁶

Their decision to further remove to America was motivated not by a desire for religious freedom then, but rather by anxieties over

*Historic Palestine is a commonly-used term to reference the pre-1948 borders of the British Mandate of Palestine.

employment prospects and English language preservation.³⁷ Therefore, the first major English colony in the present-day United States was not simply the home of religious dissidents unwelcome across Europe. While Ameen Rihani was ignorant to assert that Jews in Europe had 'equal rights and equal opportunity, to say the least' and were, consequently, not without a land of belonging, his statement nevertheless applies quite appropriately to the Pilgrim Fathers in the Netherlands.³⁸ This is illustrative of a fundamental similarity between US and Israeli national mythology. Just as spiritual notions of homelessness were extrapolated to genetic lineage with victims of Biblical stories of exile in order to justify the Nakba^{*}, American mythology has whitewashed the genocidal foundations of a settler-colonial state as a Winthropian 'city upon a hill' by exaggerating histories of religious persecution.

Though much could be made of the parallels between 'making the desert bloom' and American notions of agrarian Manifest Destiny, the importance of these foundational myths to this essay is less the specifics of their similarities and more about how these similarities helped formulate and strengthen affinity for the other. A shared hope of nation-building as response to 'exodus', for instance, provides essential context to American Founding Father, John Adams', 'wish' for 'the Jews' to be 'again in Judea as an independent nation'.³⁷ His solidarity being declared long before American foreign policy was anywhere near 'sophisticated' enough to be concerned with West Asia. These shared foundational mythologies also provide the basis for much more contemporary solidarity between the two nations. The shared US-Israeli response to Operation Cast Lead in early 2009 serves to illustrate this point.

In response to the massacre of over 1400 Palestinians, a 'tendentious analogy' was propagated that the Israeli offensive was no different than how the US might react should Mexico attack the state of California.³⁹ This analogy stifled criticism of military aggression by alluding to the Mexican-American War that continues to serve as a symbol in the American psyche of the US being a shining light in a hostile region.⁴⁰ As a result, contemporary Israeli aggression expanded beyond mere self-defence and instead took on a more symbolic quality, tasked now with protecting an equally bright shining light in an equally hostile region. In turn, not only was the psychological connection between the US and Israel further cemented but, by being able to point to a geopolitical parallel, their respective national mythologies were reinforced as grounded in common experience rather than myth. However, whilst these foundational mythologies are reinforced and authenticated by US-Israel relations in spite of their lack of historical veracity, other national myths are much less compatible.

Antisemites, Zionists, and Liberty-Loving Imperialists

Perhaps the most contentious myth concerning Israel is that Zionism is fundamentally representative of the Jewish faith. The implication naturally being that any opposition to Israel is motivated by, or at least allied with, antisemitism. Positive US-Israel relations would therefore serve as proof of America's own claim that it is committed to the cause of equality and liberty the world over by standing with

*Nakba (*al-Nakba*), literally meaning 'catastrophe', is the term used by Palestinians to refer to the mass exodus of Arabs caused by the 1947–49 Palestine War and the ensuing founding of Israel.

the Jewish people. These myths, like those outlined above, are no exception to Ernest Renan's classification of all national mythologies as antagonistic to objective historicity.⁴¹ Nevertheless, unlike those preceding myths, these tenets of national mythology are actually contradicted and weakened by the intricacies of modern-day US-Israel relations.

As alluded to above, representation of Zionism as synonymous with Judaism is ahistorical nonsense. From the earliest days of political Zionism, Jews across the spectrum of religiosity have declared themselves opponents of its philosophy. Whilst rabbinical leaders rejected calls for an arbitrary Jewish homeland as something alien to the teachings of the Jewish faith, 'secular Jews feared that [Zionism] would [...] increase anti-Semitism' (Pappé, p. 24). Contemporary American-Israeli relations illustrate both these suspicions to be rather prophetic.

The lack of initial support for Zionism within Judaism meant that in its earliest days it was largely the pet-project of Christian thinkers in Europe. Though 'the roots of modern-day Zionism can be found [...] in the eighteenth-century Jewish enlightenment movement', the key to its transformation from revivalism to traditional Jewish culture into an internationally-backed colonisation movement was its compatibility with Christian Reformist concepts of eschatological rapture.⁴² Britain, Zionism's oldest state backer, adopted the cause into its official imperial policy in the 1840s by alluding to 'the return of [Jerusalem's] banished children' being necessary for the second coming of Jesus.⁴³ Before that, Lord Shaftesbury, a leading British politician of the day, lobbied his father-in-law and then British foreign minister, Lord Palmerston, into facilitating the funding of Jewish settlements in Palestine via 'the Anglican bishopric centre and cathedral in Jerusalem'.⁴⁴ Palmerston's ultimate approval was rooted, at least partially, in the belief that it would render him 'an instrument of good' for God's 'divine scheme for the end of time'.⁴⁵ This religious motivation, however, carried with it an underlying antisemitism. Whilst Shaftesbury believed Jewish 'return' to 'Judea and Galilee' to be 'vital to Christianity's hope of salvation', he simultaneously described the Jews as 'stiffed necked, dark hearted people'.⁴⁶ Older Christian Zionism too was based as much in a desire to rid Europe of the Jews as it was to fulfil scriptural prophecy (Pappé, p. 12). Though shifting geopolitical tides has seen Britain replaced by the US as Zionism's most powerful ally, nevertheless anti-Jewish sentiment remains integral to the conception of the Israeli state.

'Since Ronald Reagan's 1980 victory [...] Republican presidential candidates have benefited from the enthusiastic support of evangelical Christian voters,' and President Trump is no exception.⁴⁷ The fact that about one in four American adults belong to an evangelical Christian denomination, coupled with the huge numbers of these evangelicals in swing states such as North Carolina, means that evangelicals were essential to Trump's election victory in 2016.⁴⁸ Whilst this naturally implicates Christianity as a major influence on subsequent presidential policy, this influence is only exacerbated by the literal presence of evangelicals in Trump's top team, the most senior of these being Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

*'Eschatology' refers to the branch of Christian theology concerned with 'last things' – death, the afterlife, the end of the world, and the rapture.

Though it would be erroneous to consider Protestant Reformists in Britain's past and present-day American evangelicals as fundamentally susceptible to ecumenicism, they do share spiritual affinity for Israel. The evangelicals, like those Christian Zionists of old, root their support for Israel firmly in scriptural prophecy of the second coming of Christ. Pompeo has been open about how decisions to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and declare sovereignty over the Golan Heights are an essential part of the 'never-ending struggle' until 'the rapture'.⁴⁹ In response, Israeli Prime Benjamin Netanyahu 'has embraced evangelical support [...] as more reliable' than that of the global Jewish population.⁵⁰ The Israeli acceptance of evangelical support, however, contradicts myths of 'Zionism as Judaism' in ways that, unlike antisemitic nineteenth-century Christian Zionism, cannot be wilfully 'forgotten'.⁵¹

The opening of the long-awaited US embassy building in Jerusalem illustrated this contradiction plainly. The prayer that commenced the opening ceremony was delivered by an evangelical pastor who had previously claimed that Jews were destined for hellfire.⁵² Netanyahu himself avoids highlighting these apparent contradictions, passing no comment on Trump's refusal to condemn the use of swastikas and antisemitic slogans, while remaining silent following the infamous neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville in August 2017.⁵³ The fact that 'Netanyahu's [relationship with Trump] provide[s] evidence of other priorities' than opposing global antisemitism invalidates Israeli claims of being a bastion against such persecution.⁵⁴ It certainly problematises the claim that anti-Zionism is tantamount to antisemitic prejudice which has long been utilised as a means of deflecting international condemnation of Israeli actions. In this, one can see an example of contemporary US-Israel relations threatening the accepted authenticity of a national myth that has long facilitated imperialist foreign policy.

In turn, this contradiction naturally invalidates US claims of support for Israel being born out of historical support for Jews. It has been long propagated that America, and was, a benevolent guardian of the Jewish people. Whether this manifested as the early twentieth-century 'melting pot' rhetoric of assimilationist Jews such as Israel Zangwill, as the post-Holocaust Martin Niemöller-esque promotion of the Church as bulwark against Nazism, or post-1960s Madison Avenue 'celebration' of cultural pluralism, the overriding claim remained the same.⁵⁵ Such is the prevalence of this notion that the evangelicals are far from alone in their affiliation to the Israeli state. In fact, whilst many liberal Zionsist Jews have made their opposition to evangelical support for Zionism known, endorsement by apparently secular American politicians has often been applauded as welcome validation.⁵⁶

2020 Democratic Presidential Nominee Joe Biden is perhaps the most recognizable of those broadly accepted as Zionist allies. Biden even gave the eulogy at former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's 2014 funeral. In doing so, he was seen to jovially reference Sharon's nickname 'The Bulldozer' – a nickname derived from heading brutal Israeli military operations and overseeing the destruction of the Jenin refugee camp in 2002.⁵⁷ Whilst celebration of a man directly implicated in human rights abuses is undeniably contradictory to support for Israel being motivated by an inherent desire to defend the persecuted, some of Biden's other statements on Israel begin to

illustrate the true motivation behind this 'liberal' US-Israel solidarity.

When Biden took to the floor of the senate in 1986 to declare Israel 'the best three billion dollar investment' the US makes, while he may have underestimated its true cost, he did *not* underestimate the role Israel played, and continues to play, in 'protect[ing US] interests'.⁵⁸ One can see how, just as Napoleon Bonaparte sought to exploit nineteenth-century notions of Jews being 'the legitimate masters of Judea' in order to aid 'his attempt to occupy the Middle East', the US similarly utilises the contemporary realisation of this proto-Zionism to the same ends (Pappé, p.12). As Biden himself stated at the time, it seems 'were there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel'.⁵⁹ Not only does this discredit claims of US-Israel relations being a manifestation of innate philo-Semitism, but it also problematises the larger myth from which professed Judeophilia traces its roots – that American is selflessly dedicated to the cause of both personal and national liberties.

Though Alfred McCoy contends that Washington, DC is ignorant to the 'basics of geopolitics', I suggest that these 'interests', that Biden cites Israel as protecting, are evidence of US adherence to foundational geopolitical theory (further references to this text will be made in parenthesis following its quotation).⁶⁰ Despite being first published in 1904, Halford Mackinder's 'Geographical Pivot of History' model remains 'an indispensable guide' to analysis of contemporary geopolitics (*ibid.*, p. 28). Mackinder was the first to present Europe, Africa, and Asia as not being separate continents, but rather a 'World-Island' with a 'heartland' extending 'from the Persian Gulf to the Siberian Sea' (*ibid.*). So vast is this 'heartland', Mackinder continues, that control of it – and control of the world, in turn – is reliant upon one's base of power being in the 'rimlands' (*ibid.*, p. 29). Thus President Truman's commitment to 'the shaping of a new international order' following the close of the Second World War, despite America itself being 'inconsequential marginalia', necessitated the forging of footholds in these areas (*ibid.*, p. 28, 30). With this in mind, one should not be shocked to learn that at the very centre of these 'rimlands' lies Israel and West Asia.

Just as British and Roman empires of the past had once encircled entire shipping regions in order to establish dominance, so too has American sought to encircle the heartlands of the World-Island (*ibid.*, p. 31). The Birth of Israel then, itself a sort of geopolitical tabula rasa, consequently provided the US with a major opportunity to establish a power base right on the edge of those heartlands. US lip service to notions of a Jewish homeland, therefore, could be considered simply one facet of American Empire's vast campaign of soft power. Rather than building imperial fortifications along invaded coastline, the US might build theoretical fortifications of popular support within spheres of influence.

Nevertheless, one aspect of imperial policy that has not changed is the innate desire for the empire to grow. With Israel secured through psychological and material dependence, the natural progression from 'rimlands' to towards the 'heartland'. As the southernmost boundary of said 'heartland', and as perhaps the most openly hostile country towards Israel, this progression naturally points towards Iran. Is it with this in mind that one begins to understand both

the US' antagonistic approach to the Islamic Republic and Israel's intimacy with the conceptualisation and realisation of this approach.

Take, for instance, the most egregious escalation of Iran-US tensions since the hostage crisis of 1979-81. The extrajudicial killing of Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020 by US drone strike was considered by many as 'an act of war'.⁶¹ Soleimani was not only the second most powerful figure of a sovereign nation, but one that was hugely popular.⁶² Much of his popularity arose from the fact that, under his leadership, the Quds Force played a major role in the defeat of ISIS in the region, and thus came to symbolise Iran's post-revolution self-sufficiency. In this, one can see how the motivations and intricacies of America's Middle Eastern policy are contradictory to its own claims of dedication to the cause of self-determination.

Soleimani was not, for the most part, deemed an oppressive despot within Iran. In the region, his death was instead celebrated almost solely by ISIS and Israel.⁶³ In fact, Israel were alone amongst US allies in having advance notice of the assassination plan — being made aware even before Congress.⁶⁴ Whilst this has led to debate as to whether Israel dictates US policy in West Asia, or if Israeli military intelligence is just a key part of these operations, the importance of Israel to such an imperial action is itself indicative of the real motivations behind America's affinity with the state.⁶⁵ Therefore, US-Israel relations are fundamentally wrapped up in contradiction with the American myth of benevolent imperialism.

Concurrently, the domestic reaction to Soleimani's 'assassination' illustrated the inextricable links between the stifling of both international and personal liberty. In the aftermath, 'Instagram and its parent company Facebook' immediately began removing posts that expressed sympathy for Iran.⁶⁶ Citing compliance with US sanctions, Facebook disregarded the 'free speech protections' of its users under pressures from the US government.⁶⁷ What is ironic here is that many of the justifications for the slaying of Soleimani, and the maintaining of sanctions on Iran, were, and are, rooted in claims of the Islamic Republic as being fundamentally opposed to the deepening of democracy. Many supporters of the assassination pointed towards the role of Soleimani's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in shutting down domestic protest as a means of avoiding questions of legality over the killing.⁶⁸ Naturally, this raises questions of how the US can justify its Middle East policy as being reactive to encroaches on liberty in the region it is, itself, implicated in these same denials of freedom, both domestically and internationally. The relevance of this to US-Israel relations being that support for Israel is often justified not only as a defence of the Jewish people, but also as a defence of 'the only democracy in the Middle East' — by proxy justifying imperial action against the rest of West Asia as enemies of democracy. The method of Soleimani's assassination is also indicative of this contradiction, one which lies at the heart of US national mythology. The modern drone can be seen as the most successful product of 'the world's largest laboratory for airborne thanato-tactics' — the Palestinian Territories.⁶⁹ The drone is simply the most recognisable product of a long line of weapons development that has been contingent on the ability of the Israeli military to 'battle-test' new 'gadgets and doctrines' on Palestinian civilians.⁷⁰ The US, in turn, relies on Israeli occupation of Palestine to help maintain its own military superiority. The drone itself is also

essential to the functioning of US foreign policy because it carries with it a unique ability to facilitate 'psychological distancing' from the victims of imperial policy amongst the US citizenry.⁷¹ This concerted effort to mystify the human cost of US policy in the Middle East, in tandem with its reliance on colonial oppression, is indicative of the falsity of claims US military involvement in West Asia being moralistic.

Israel's pioneering of the drone, like the utilisation of it in the killing of Soleimani, also has serious domestic implications. Israeli drone technologies, and companies involved in their development, are directly implicated in the cultivation and use of surveillance and spyware at and within US borders. Haifa-based company Elbit Systems are not only party 'to a Special Security Agreement with the US DoD' but have also received two contracts with a combined of \$171 million to install 'a virtual wall of 24/7 surveillance towers in the US [...] including on indigenous Tohono O'odham Nation Land'.⁷² In this, one can see how US adoption of apartheid-tested technologies not only raises serious questions about personal liberty in American in general, but also is facilitating the continuation of apartheid against the same people that foundational US myths work to render invisible. Israeli company AnyVision too has successfully used its 'field experience' to sell facial recognition technology to the FBI for its Next Generation Identification program that has been declared a 'human rights risk'.⁷³ Such is AnyVision's 'complicity in Israel's occupation and repression' that it has become one of the largest targets of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign.⁷⁴ It is in this targeted activism that the most potent effects of US-Israeli relations contradicting US national myths can truly be seen.

Myths Which Are Believed Tend To Come True

It is apparent that the national myths of both the US and Israel are fundamentally problematised by the intricacies of US-Israel relations. Whilst one can observe how these myths have brought the two nations together as geopolitical bedfellows, the nature of these relations from that point on has pointed to a lack of veracity in these very same myths. Nonetheless, it would be shortsighted to say that this falsity directly threatens the hegemonic status achieved by both nations via the weaponisation of these mythologies.

Whilst this essay has served as the sort 'academic study of history' that Renan suggests 'poses a threat to the capacity of the nation to hold together', it is apparent that he was incorrect in his assertion that this would inevitably dismantle the nation built on mythological identity (further references to this text will be made in parenthesis following its quotation).⁷⁵ Instead, in his consideration of Gramscian concepts of hegemony, Eric Hobsbawm makes the essential point that national mythology formation is 'inevitably characterised by conflicts of interests' (*ibid.*, p. 293). The 'powerful groups' in a society able to 'freely use myths to serve their own domination' (*ibid.*). They then use their control over national mythology in 'buttress a given collective identity and thereby legitimate a set of sociopolitical relations' (*ibid.*). In other words, the formation of national mythology is never communal and is, instead, top down. Once a myth is in place it has already served the purpose of cementing a societal hierarchy that cannot simply be overthrown by acknowledgement of its contrived nature. In Gramscian philosophy,

the only way to overcome these myths and the policies that they facilitate is for those opposed to the ruling class to form a separate base of myths that can compete for hegemony over the society's 'common sense' values.⁷⁶

This process, for pro-Palestine activists in the US, has not yet occurred. The current coalition of US citizens sympathetic to the Palestinian cause — predominantly Muslims and African-American radicals — does not adequately encompass a large enough cross-section of the non-ruling class to threaten the hegemonic status of US-Israel affinity. Meanwhile, so successful has American myth-making been that even those critical of US policy have failed to explicitly remark on the false foundations of the American state. A few relatively fringe movements aside, US progressives have never appropriately acknowledged the US as a settler-colonial state. Even those few American political figures considered 'socialist' have made a point of refusing to discredit claims of US exceptionalism and, instead, suggested that America has gone wrong somewhere along the way.⁷⁷

As a result, any hope of expanding pro-Palestinian sympathies amongst the US population is ironically reliant on not discrediting the myths that sparked US-Israel relations. Simply asserting that widely believed national myths are false does little but alienate potential allies who currently believe them. Instead, in place of a fully formulated alternative mythology, one must illustrate how the actions of the hegemonic class are contrary to the myths that helped grant them a position of hegemony in the first place. But plainly, the role of pro-Palestine activists in the US is not to illustrate the fiction of American national myths, but rather that US-Israel relations are incompatible with said myths: something that the BDS Campaign has done expertly.

In an interview with American journal, for instance, de-facto leader of the BDS movement, Omar Barghouti, made sure to emphasise parallels between contemporary Palestinian activism and historical notions of US freedom. By identifying BDS as both a continuation of Martin Luther King, Jr.-style activism and as fitting with libertarian criticisms of government misuse of 'tax dollars', Barghouti successfully placed BDS as compatible with both wings of America's mainstream political landscape.⁷⁸ He also made certain to define BDS as a movement as much in the defence of free speech and personal liberty in the US as in support of Palestinian self-determination.⁷⁹ In a reversion of Israeli myths of Zionism as Judaism, this, by implication, renders support for Israel and its policies as fundamentally opposed to American notions of freedom. Whether one considers themselves a supporter of Palestinian rights or not, opposition to BDS becomes incompatible with one of the most fundamental myths of American national identity — to support of freedom.

This is something that BDS has successfully weaponised in the legal battle for pro-Palestine activism. Since 2015, BDS has come under attack from various government bodies across the US. As of January 2020, 28 US states have implemented anti-BDS legislation in a concerted effort to protect US-Israel joint interests.⁸⁰ In response however, BDS has won a series of legal challenges against such legislation by citing the First Amendment.⁸¹ In Texas for example, BDS activists tapped into libertarian notions of theft through taxation by criticising the state's request that recipients of natural disaster

aid were only eligible if they pledged to avoid boycotting Israel.⁸² In doing so, they were not only successful in forcing the state to withdraw this condition from aid-giving, but also manifested significant public support that led to an amendment of the original Texas anti-BDS law.

This weaponisation of American national identity against pro-Israel sentiment in the US is not only interesting because it illustrates the potential of such a pragmatic approach, but also because the BDS movement is widely considered the biggest threat to US-Israel hegemony in the Middle East. Such is this threat that high-ranking Israeli politicians have publicly declared their interest in 'targeted civil eliminations' against BDS leaders.⁸³ In response to the success of BDS, Israel has been forced to show its true colours by condemning international governments and even barring elected representatives from its traditional allies who fail to adequately quash it, with even the US being no exception.⁸⁴ In doing so, Israel's traditional means of self-preservation — establishing positive relations with governments in spite of public disapproval — has become compromised. The historic parallels with the collapse of apartheid South Africa only exacerbated as a result.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it is in this threat of exposure that one begins to see the looming collapse, or at the very least the reconstruction, of US national mythology and US-Israel relations. After all, while the success of American myths of liberty and personal freedom are apparent, in spite of their contrived nature, it is only their broad moral teaching that become canonised, and rarely ever the policies that they ultimately justify. In understanding this crucial distinction, BDS has been able to re-purpose these myths and overcome attempts at censure and criminalisation. In doing so, not only is a very real material threat to Israel enshrined as inherently compatible with American national identity, but the foundations are thus laid for the development of an alternative pro-Palestine hegemony in the Gramscian tradition.

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Torrin Hoynes American Studies

This is an (American) Man's World: Anti-feminist Jurisprudence in the American Legal and Political Sphere from 1923 to the Present Day

TILLY BRUDER, American Studies

There are few things which present greater obstacles to the improvement and elevation of woman (...) than the laws which have been enacted to destroy her independence and crush her individuality; laws which, although they are framed for her government, she had no voice in establishing, and which rob her of some of her essential rights.¹

- Sarah Grimke, 1837

In December 1923, Alice Paul of the National Women's Party contested the premise that the 19th Amendment was adequate jurisdiction for gender equality. She modified the proposed Equal Rights Amendment of 1921 to read: 'Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction'.² Despite the ERA being introduced in every congressional session between 1921 and 1972, it rarely reached the floor of either the Senate or the House for a vote. Since 1923, American law has facilitated legal advances for other minorities, whilst jurisprudence that furthers and enables women's rights has lagged behind. In instances where it would appear that congressional amendments and Supreme Court rulings have acclimatised gender equality in American law, subsequent backlash to such jurisdictions has at best diluted, and at worst reversed the intended impact. Thus, whilst efforts towards positive progress have been made, as Barbara Brown asserts, 'Major remnants of the common law's discriminatory treatment of women persist in the laws and institutions of all states'.³

The primary purpose of this essay is to expose an inherent anti-feminist jurisprudence in the American legal and political sphere, by scrutinising feminist legal theory alongside a selection of congressional amendments and Supreme Court rulings from 1923 until the present day. These theories will support this thesis by being used to objectively contextualise and consolidate examples of anti-feminist jurisdiction. The secondary objective of this thesis is to prove that subsequent manifestations of anti-feminist attitudes in the American psyche have resulted in problematic societal implications for women. It is my belief that US law is inherently male-oriented, of which the consequences are two-fold; firstly, acts which are passed with the intention of legally entrenching women's rights have been delayed, contested and diminished in courts of law; and secondly, that the differential treatment of women in the legal sphere has resulted in 'other, less-tangible forms of discrimination, including the imposition of demeaning stereotypes of feminine behaviour', as written by Estelle Freedman.⁴ Indeed, jurisprudence by definition ranges from hard evidence grounded in legal doctrine to soft evidence such as behaviour and attitudes, which in turn are perpetuated by the former.

The slow pace of development towards gender equality in US statute and federal law is, as this study will argue, the direct result of the failure of the constitution to acknowledge women as deserving of a legal status that is both equal and uncompromised. Fittingly, journalist Vann Newkirk writes, 'a system cannot fail those it was never designed to protect'.⁵ This fundamental flaw in the system has pervaded the American psyche and encouraged the perpetual subordination of women in both the legal sphere and in society.

As America dealt with the Great Depression, the Second World War, and its economic consequences, there was no relevant legal activity between Alice Paul's reworking of the ERA in 1923 and *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965. This thesis will therefore be organised thematically, rather than chronologically, beginning with an interrogation of the Equal Rights Amendment and its continued presence in congressional debate since 1923. This study will then investigate, under separate headings, contraception and abortion rights, employment and the workplace, and rape cases and sexual assault.

This thesis tracks an omnipresent anti-feminist cycle in US law, which denotes that legal proceedings intended to amend gender imbalance inevitably end up failing the women involved. The ultimate purpose is to expose the presence of anti-feminist jurisprudence in American legal proceedings, and the implications and consequences of an inherently male institution.

THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

In the theoretical foundation for my enquiry, *Introduction to Feminist Jurisprudence*, Hilaire Barnett establishes that, 'so ingrained has prejudice and discrimination against women been throughout history that the patriarchal order appears a 'natural' (and therefore 'right') ordering'.⁵ The severity of the backlash that the ERA has received since its introduction appropriately reflects this theory, with Republican activists rebelling against the suggestion of increased agency for women by stating that they were, 'for Mom and apple pie'.⁶ The American public exaggerated the contents of the ERA and were afraid of its passing, as though doing so would force reluctant housewives out of their homes and belittle male authority in one fell swoop. Public opposition, however, is simply the tip of the iceberg.

The most crucial thing to consider about the ERA is that it is primarily impeded by legal and political actors. Its passing would ensure that legal bodies must acknowledge the comprehensive equality of women in the context of any and all legal proceedings after its ratification. Other pieces of legislation introduced since 1923 have been selective in their intentions, meaning that their contribution towards the genuine assimilation of women as equal under US law is marginal. As Allison Lange explains, 'the Civil Rights Act, Title IX and the Equal Pay Act all offer protections against discrimination. But these are pieces of legislation. New laws and Supreme Court

rulings can diminish their power.⁷ Individual laws made under various headings are not sufficient in their impact because they pledge to limit aspects of sex discrimination without committing to uncompromising gender equality. This provides a loophole that allows US law to appear to promote equality, while, as Barbara Brown points out:

The problem of formally neutral laws which may have a discriminatory impact arises under any law which attempts to eradicate discrimination based upon a single prohibited factor in a context where many other factors may legitimately be taken into account.⁸

The inherent male orientation of the institution is exposed when we consider these ‘attempts to eradicate discrimination’ as efforts to rescind long-standing disfavoured laws.

In what can be considered a theory at odds with this thesis, Lynn Henderson asserts that, ‘the discourse of law can always be turned against women.’⁹ Henderson’s interpretation of the open-ended manipulation of legal and political discourse ‘against women’ is arguably misplaced; and this study upholds that such discourses have always been inherently male. It is not a case of turning legal rhetoric ‘against’ women, but rather of acknowledging it as a product of the entrenched patriarchal attitudes of law-making bodies and the individuals who operate within them. Thus, the explicit spelling out of equal rights for women in the constitution would uproot the foundationally superior legal standing of men, who continue to be granted the rights and freedoms of which women are deprived.

Nevertheless, in March 1972, the ERA was approved by the Senate and sent to the states. It was ratified by thirty within a year, but by the 1979 deadline only 35 out of the necessary 38 had supported its passing. Congress extended the deadline by three years, but no additional states came forward to ratify it. A combination of legal apathy and public denunciation of the ERA has prevented its passing for almost a century. Reminiscent of Alice Paul’s objections to the 19th Amendment, the inadequacy of other, less rigid legislation stems from the limitations of their reach – such laws fail to address women as deserving of uncompromised equal status in the legal and political sphere. Indeed, as Brown asserts,

‘the adoption of a constitutional amendment will have effects that go far beyond the legal system. The demand for equality of rights before the law is only a part of a broader claim by women for the elimination of rigid sex role determinism.’¹⁰

The passing of the ERA would likely have a domino effect across all facets of society, which currently challenges and discriminates gender equality. This would explain why opposition has been so significant. MacKinnon denotes that, ‘gender, elaborated and sustained by behavioural patterns of application and administration, is maintained as a division of power.’¹¹ The ERA and its equality-ensuring premise unsettles this hierarchy, making sustained stereotypes difficult to uphold. Thus, the Equal Rights Amendment is a fitting preface for this study in that its continuous rejection is a synecdoche of anti-feminist jurisprudence in the American legal and political sphere.

As of 2020, twenty-five states have adopted their own version of the amendment under statute law, most of which pertain to equal

treatment in employment. In order for the ERA to be codified under US federal law and be comprehensive in its impact, ongoing legal challenges to the ratification process and its technical 1982 deadline must be resolved.

ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION

Roe v. Wade in 1973 was a landmark Supreme Court decision, dictating that the constitution would protect a pregnant woman’s liberty to choose to have an abortion, ‘without excessive government restriction.’¹² However, this thesis will argue that resentment to *Roe v. Wade* was so significant that it had a detrimental impact upon other potentially ‘pro-feminist’ legislation for the rest of that decade and beyond. It became increasingly clear that its ruling in favour of a woman’s right to choose had significantly impacted upon both elite political and legal actors as well as the wider American psyche. Crucially, as Hilaire Barnett theorises, ‘a legal doctrine that appears promising and effective as a tool for immediate reform may limit the future capacity of law to meet women’s needs.’¹³ It is my belief that subsequent legal proceedings were conducted with the intention of compensating for the perceived failings of *Roe v. Wade*, a behaviour which perpetuated the injustices faced by women across America, especially, but not exclusively, when it came to accessing legal abortions and contraception. After 1973, it became more difficult for women to access safe abortions, even if they were legally available. Additional regulations as well as financial and geographical difficulties have imposed upon the intended effects of *Roe v. Wade*, and, as Margaret Talbot situates,

since the nineteen-nineties, states have enacted hundreds of new restrictions on the constitutional right to abortion, from obligatory waiting periods and mandated state counselling to limits on public and even private insurance funding.¹⁴

Such restrictions are collectively responsible for the limitations surrounding legal abortions in the US, as well as for societal attitudes that shame and degrade the women who seek them. A 2016 study by the Guttmacher Institute found that 334 restrictions on safe, legal abortion were passed between 2011 and July 2016 by state lawmakers.¹⁵

In May 2016, Governor Mary Fallin of Oklahoma vetoed a bill that would impose felony charges on doctors who performed abortions. However, this was not with the progressive intention that one might assume. Governor Fallin did not veto the bill that would imprison Oklahoma doctors for up to three years if they performed an abortion because she wanted to protect a woman’s legal right to one, but rather because she resented wasting an opportunity to genuinely challenge *Roe v. Wade*. Fallin professed her certainty that the bill would be struck down by the courts, instead positioning that the most effective way to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was through, ‘the appointment of a conservative, pro-life justice to the United States Supreme Court’.¹⁶ It is clear that ongoing controversy surrounding US abortion laws illustrates a perpetual disdain for women’s right to choose. As Carol Sanger situates, unlike other medical procedures, ‘abortion has a social and political economy of its own’.¹⁷

Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey in 1992 is exemplary of legal restrictions being implemented under the guise

of a larger claim that purports to support abortion. In *Casey*, the Supreme Court affirmed the basic ruling of *Roe v. Wade* that the state was prohibited from banning most abortions. However, the Court also overturned the original framework of *Roe v. Wade*, which constituted that an abortion may legally be performed before the third and final trimester, at which point the foetus became 'viable'. *Casey* upheld that states may regulate a woman's access to the procedure by, 'outlawing abortions of viable fetuses'.¹⁸ Since 1992, a number of states have consequently implemented abortion restrictions that apply during the first and second trimester of pregnancy. This viability analysis has since facilitated harmful jurisdictions that place a timeline upon access to abortion, and has allowed states to regulate, and even proscribe, abortion, 'except where it is necessary, in appropriate medical judgment, for the preservation of the life or health of the mother'.¹⁹ In this moment, Naffine's theory surrounding, 'law's construction of women and their role as something other than the legal person' is effectively contextualised.²⁰ The unborn foetus is prioritised above a woman's legal right to choose because of the 'potentiality of human life'.²¹

Ultimately, access to legal abortion in the US continues to be impeded, with Alabama's state senate passing a near-total ban on abortion in May 2019, thus making it a crime to perform the procedure at any stage of pregnancy. This legislation, which passed by a vote of 25-6, made it a class A felony for a doctor to perform an abortion in the state, punishable by ten to ninety-nine years in prison. As Emma Brockes posits, those who are against the right of women to choose, 'will carry on chipping away at *Roe*, understanding that as a tactic this may be more effective than confronting it head on'.²²

Contraception is equally pertinent to the issue of anti-feminist jurisprudence in US law, as women's access to birth control has been limited. In the landmark ruling of *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965, the Supreme Court invalidated the law that prohibited women from 'using any drug for the purpose of preventing conception', on the grounds that it violated the right to marital privacy.²³ The case in question concerned a Connecticut law that criminalized the encouragement or use of birth control. However, subsequent attitudes towards women taking contraception as a result of this ruling were similar to that of *Roe v. Wade* - as Elaine Tyler May points out, 'although some men found it liberating to be free of the possibility of impregnating their partners, others found the power and autonomy it gave to women threatening to their masculine egos'.²⁴ One specific manifestation of this attitude, which has resulted in problematic societal implications for women, is the lack of cover for contraception in company health policies.

On June 30th, 2014, the Supreme Court ruling in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* denoted in a 5-4 decision that the US government could not require certain employers to provide insurance coverage for birth control if they conflict with the employer's religious beliefs. Hobby Lobby representatives expressed the belief that some types of birth control, 'amount to abortion'.²⁶ Crucial to this neglect of women's reproductive health is that male health is far more widely accommodated. Whilst, as Sylvia Law points out, 'most employment-based health insurance programmes in the United States exclude payment for contraceptives', Viagra is widely covered on company healthcare schemes.²⁶

A 1994 study by the Guttmacher Institute showed that the majority of insurance plans have traditionally covered 'male drugs'.²⁷ As Angela Chen points out, 'the argument for Viagra coverage is that it's a medical drug that treats a medical condition, whereas contraceptives are considered 'lifestyle drugs' that are not medically necessary'.²⁸ Thus, the decision of the Supreme Court to uphold Hobby Lobby's rights to religious belief as a preventative against covering contraception fails to be comprehensive in equally applying to men, prescribing that one is a necessity and the other a choice. As Lynne Henderson establishes, 'law has defined and regulated women's sexuality' while allowing men to remain unrestricted.²⁹ As a result of the refusal of legal bodies to uphold company insurance coverage of contraception, financial difficulties have also impeded a woman's ability to prevent pregnancy, or indeed women who take oral contraceptives for medical purposes, such as to prevent uterine bleeding. Sylvia Law illustrates that, 'women spend approximately sixty-eight percent more in out-of-pocket health care costs than men. (...) The costs of prescription contraceptives, excluded from general insurance coverage, account for the largest portion of this disparity'.³⁰ This investigation of abortion and contraception in the US has exposed not only an inherent anti-feminist jurisprudence in the American legal and political sphere, but also subsequent manifestations of anti-feminist attitudes in the American psyche that have perpetuated societal and financial problems for women.

EMPLOYMENT AND THE WORKPLACE

Employment laws in the US, described by Lise Vogel as, 'heterogeneous, uncodified and stingy' insufficiently support women in the workplace, and in failing to do so continue to facilitate the manifestation of anti-feminist behaviour and attitudes in professional environments.³¹ Despite various jurisdictions that have attempted to undo gender-based stereotyping, US law-making bodies have, thus far, appeared apathetic towards making genuine progress in establishing working women as equal to their male counterparts. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, for example, was passed as a direct response to a Supreme Court decision in *General Electric Company v. Gilbert* in 1976, in which the Court had held that pregnancy discrimination was not a form of sex discrimination under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Not only does its reach fail to be comprehensive, with employers of fewer than fifteen employees exempt from the rule, but the whole premise of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was to amend a previous law denoting that pregnancy-related discrimination in the workplace was not unconstitutional, highlighting the male-oriented perspective of US law. To this day, there are no statutory rights in America for maternity leave - women can only take time off at their own expense. Indeed, Hilaire Barnett observes that, 'there remains a deep social and political resistance to women abandoning or giving less priority to the traditional mothering role'.³² This theory would explain the continual lack of legal support for women in the workplace - if women choose to hold a job alongside their 'duties' as a mother, then balancing the two is their choice and thus a path they can navigate without support from the employer. As a result, Barbara Brown points out that:

today most women have little choice about whether or not to give up full-time jobs outside the home in order

to care for any children they bear (...). This lack of choice is one important reason why women predominate among the housekeepers and child rearers of our society.³³

Such a deep-rooted resistance toward women pursuing more sought-after jobs traditionally reserved for men, rather than embracing their circumscribed role as mothers and housewives is manifestly a result of the law being an inherently male-oriented institution.

In June 2011, the Supreme Court ruled in *Wal-Mart Stores v. Duke* that a group of 1.5 million women could not be certified as a valid class of plaintiffs in a class-action lawsuit for employment discrimination. Lead plaintiff Betty Dukes, on behalf of all of Wal-Mart's female employees, alleged gender discrimination in pay and promotion policies and practices, stating that, 'local managers exercise their discretion over pay and promotions disproportionately in favour of men'.³⁴ Wal-Mart denied these allegations, instead presenting instances of Betty Dukes coming late off her lunch break as justification for her lack of promotional opportunities. In the 5-4 decision, the majority argued that the alleged victims, 'have little in common but their sex and this lawsuit'.³⁵ Thus, the ruling of the Court failed to protect women in large corporations from continued discrimination in the workplace, under the guise of marginal indiscretions as sufficient justification for lack of opportunities and other unjust treatments.

A 2019 study found that 25% of women in the US report discrimination at work, with the most common incidents of unfair treatment involving:

Not receiving credit for one's work (44 percent), not having concerns addressed or taken seriously (43 percent), co-workers saying derogatory comments to or in front of the worker (38 percent), feeling ideas or input are generally ignored (34 percent), not being given projects that provide worker with more visibility in the company (31 percent) and being overlooked for a promotion (26 percent).³⁶

Such behaviours are responsible for pushing women out of professional roles and back into the home, or into clerical, non-managerial work where they are deemed to 'belong'. As Vicki Schultz contextualises this, 'to the extent that foremen and co-workers succeed in undermining women's job performance, they convert the notion that women are not cut out for non-traditional work into a self-fulfilling prophecy'.³⁷ The failure of the Supreme Court to acknowledge the individual cases of the female Wal-Mart employees behind Betty Dukes, who suffered discrimination in the workplace but who were dismissed on the grounds of their group size being too large, has perpetuated problematic treatment of women in the workplace. Nina Martin contextualises the ripple effect of *Wal-Mart Stores v. Dukes*' dismissal in situating that, 'the ruling upended decades of employment discrimination law and raised serious barriers to future large-scale discrimination cases of every kind'.³⁸ The widespread disdain towards women taking on increased responsibilities or managerial roles is a belief system that is established and upheld by the legal establishment, and which infiltrates women's working environments dominated by male CEOs, managers and co-workers. Speaking on discrimination cases in courtrooms across the

US, Schultz establishes that, 'almost half the courts to consider the issue have attributed women's disadvantaged place in the workplace to their own lack of interest in more highly valued non-traditional jobs'.³⁹ If we are to accept that the common denominator of the Court's dismissal of women's rightful and equal opportunities in the workplace is in fact a foundational archaic assumption that they are simply not interested in jobs outside the realm of 'traditional roles', then the argument that the differential treatment of women in the legal sphere has resulted in, 'other, less-tangible forms of discrimination, including the imposition of demeaning stereotypes of feminine behaviour' is consolidated.⁴⁰ Thus, the way in which men benefit from the promotions and perks that women are habitually denied exemplifies MacKinnon's theory that, 'law's perspectivity is in fact a strategy of male hegemony'.⁴¹

The matter of fair and equal pay is equally key to the pursuit of anti-feminist jurisprudence towards women in the workplace. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009 stated that the 180-day limit for filing an equal-pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination would now reset with each new paycheck affected by that discriminatory action. In theory, the Act furthers the equality of women by facilitating the challenging of unfair pay. However, a 2019 study showed that women working full-time in the US are paid 82 cents to every dollar earned by men.⁴² The Act appears to support equality in pay by allowing female employees to challenge pay discrimination, but fails to ensure that employers are legally prevented from paying their female employees less than men in the first place. Ngaire Naffine argues that 'by maintaining the appearance of dispassionate neutrality, law is able quietly to go about its task of assisting in the reproduction of the conditions which subordinate women'.⁴³ Indeed, Barbara Brown speaks to the perpetual gender pay gap in America with her observation that, 'past discrimination in education, training, economic status and other areas has created differences which could readily be seized upon to perpetuate discrimination under the guise of functional classifications'.⁴⁴ The subordination of women in various faculties within American society has facilitated patriarchal frameworks in the workplace, predominantly by capitalising on differences in education and training in order to justify such disparities.

The 1978 Supreme Court case, titled *City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power v. Manhart*, ruled that an employer may not use the fact that 'women live longer than men' to justify a policy that required female employees to make larger contributions than men to a pension plan, only to receive the same monthly pension benefits when they retire. The financial burdens of women in the US as a result of such skewed policies are exemplary of the problematic treatment of women in society as a whole. Although the Supreme Court upheld this treatment as unconstitutional and refunded a number of the female employees involved, we are led to wonder why these rulings ever have to happen in the first place. Schultz theorises that, 'the general attitude of the legal system seems to mirror that held by many male workers and managers: if women want to venture into a man's work world, they must take it as they find it'.⁴⁵ This supports the contention that, even in instances where it would appear that various rulings and amendments have furthered and encouraged the acclimatisation of women's equality in American law, subsequent backlash to such jurisdictions has at best diluted,

and at worst reversed the intended impact. Ultimately, as Katherine Bartlett summarises:

Women seem to require changes in law if they are to compete with men in the workplace (...). When these changes are viewed as unfair advantages or affirmative action, however, they end up perpetuating stereotypes about women, which in the long-run limits women's opportunities.⁴⁶

RAPE CASES AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Some of the most striking examples of anti-feminist jurisprudence in the US are found in legal cases pertaining to rape and sexual assault. In this section, this thesis will examine decisions made by judges in cases involving a female victim and a male defendant, alongside feminist legal theory. These theories are objective in their claims, and thus will allow me to contextualise and consolidate examples of rape jurisdiction as being male-oriented. Such cases expose the anti-feminist propensities of US judges, and the subsequent failure of the constitution to protect and defend women who have been a victim of sexual misconduct. Ngaire Naffine's perception of a, 'deep-seated male orientation in law which infects all its practices' is reflected by the reluctance of judges to damage the future potential of the male offender with a heavy sentence, and a tendency to use perceived misdemeanours of the victim, such as previous sexual activity or alcohol consumption, as evidence that a softer sentence is appropriate.⁴⁷

In 2011, Sir Young of Dallas, who was eighteen at the time, pleaded guilty to raping a fourteen-year-old girl. In her consideration of the case, Judge Jeanine Howard stated that the victim, 'wasn't the victim she claimed to be', referring to the fact that the girl had had three previous sexual partners, and had previously given birth, as mitigating factors.⁴⁸ Other evidence used to prevent the heavy sentencing of Young was the fact that the two had texted 'consensually' in the past, and that their previous sexual relationship lessened the likelihood of the incident in question being impermissible, despite the fact that the victim had repeatedly told Young no, and to stop, before and during the rape. Judge Howard sentenced Young to five years' probation, claiming that he, 'was not your average sex offender', and questioned whether the girl had embellished her story.⁴⁹ Such invalidation of the 'likelihood' of the victim's statement, 'restricts the sexual activity of young women and reinforces the double standard of sexual morality' as Frances Olsen asserts.⁵⁰ Judge Howard's perception of Young was ultimately misplaced - in 2016, Young became a wanted fugitive for a separate sexual assault charge.

Furthermore, Texas statutory rape laws are, 'premised on the assumption that minors are incapable of giving informed consent to sexual activities.'⁵¹ In spite of this, the victim's previous consensual text messages were used as evidence against her testimony. The harmful discourse created by Judge Howard surrounding the victim not being 'typical' was ultimately responsible for the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl going largely unpunished. Speaking on the case, Scott Berkowitz, founder of RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network) stated that he, 'can't imagine how the girl's previous sexual history could be relevant to whether or not Young

committed a crime.'⁵² The decision made in favour of a short probationary period as opposed to a prison sentence typical of the rape of a minor exposes Judge Howard's inherent anti-feminist inclination.

In 2012, Jose Arriaga Soto of Minnesota pleaded guilty to beating and raping a woman. While a twelve-year sentence was recommended, Judge Jeffrey Remick reduced it to thirty years of probation, believing that Soto was, 'the perfect candidate for counselling.'⁵³ Given the violent nature of the assault, which lasted two hours and involved two men, the tame nature of the sentence given is especially questionable. Naffine argues that:

Despite their protestations of value-neutrality, those who interpret and administer the law do not always treat those who come before them in an equal and dispassionate manner. In reality, opinion and belief have shaped the responses of law's representatives, and often those beliefs have been profoundly sexist.⁵⁴

Judges given the power to exercise their own beliefs in a system that professes itself to be 'value-neutral' are permitted free reign over the lives of the individuals involved, with the experience of the female victim being at best, ignored, and at worst, questioned as to whether it really happened as they claimed it did.

A similar outcome occurred in 2014, when David Wise of Indianapolis was convicted of six counts of felony rape, after his wife reported that he had been drugging and raping her for years while she slept. Judge Kurt Eisgruber sentenced him to twenty years; however, he ruled that twelve of those years were suspended, and that the other eight were to be spent in home confinement, which meant zero days in prison. Judgements such as this one set a precedent for how 'punishable' sexual assault is, with the defendant in this case not going to prison at all. As Catharine MacKinnon has said, 'rape, from women's point of view, is not prohibited; it is regulated.'⁵⁵ The victim also provided evidence of Wise having filmed her assault on his phone. The degrading nature of the case, alongside the element of marital trust and the prolonged six-year span of assaults, are all indicative of the traumatic nature of the case in question. The long-term effects of Wise's actions on his wife were to be significant. However, as MacKinnon theorises, 'dignitary harms, because nonmaterial, are remote to the legal mind.'⁵⁶ Ostensibly on account of the victim's lack of visible bodily harm, the case was viewed in a different light because it was 'non-violent', and Wise was handed a lighter sentence as a result. The decision of Judge Eisgruber is another example of the inherent anti-feminist propensities in sexual assault cases this study is exposing.

A further example is the case of *People of the State of California v. Brock Allen Turner* in 2015, a highly publicised case in which the Santa Clara County Superior Court examined the case of Stanford University student athlete Brock Turner, who was convicted of three counts of sexual assault of Chanel Miller while she was unconscious. In her victim impact statement, though she remained anonymous at the time, Miller declared that, 'the (...) recommendation of a year or less in county jail is a soft time-out, a mockery of the seriousness of his assaults, and of the consequences of the pain I have been forced to endure.'⁵⁷ Despite Turner's convictions and Miller's plea to acknowledge the severity of his actions, Judge Aaron Persky favoured Turner with a short sentence because he believed, 'a prison

sentence would have a severe impact on him.⁵⁸ Turner was thus sentenced to six months in jail followed by three years of probation. The decision of Judge Persky once again separated the defendant from his crimes, of which he was unmistakably found guilty, and in doing so also disregarded Miller's statement detailing the lifelong impact the assault would have upon her. Ngaire Naffine makes the argument that:

While law (...) professes itself to be rational, dispassionate, value-neutral, consistent and objective, it is in fact none of these things. The reason is that law defines these terms in a very particular and masculine way – one which omits and devalues the qualities associated with the experience of women.⁵⁹

As I have maintained throughout, the male-oriented discourse of American law is, as Naffine dictates, the product of a long-standing patriarchal perspective. It is therefore unsurprising that legal actors such as Judge Persky possess, subconsciously or otherwise, a degree of anti-feminist proclivity, which affects their decision-making in court. Naffine's perception of 'devaluing the experiences of women' is here most markedly demonstrated. In the same way that abortion laws prioritise an unborn foetus because of its potential while the pregnant woman is denied legal protection, Judge Persky attributed more value to the promising future of Brock Turner than Chanel Miller's right to justice.

Public outrage in the aftermath of *People v. Turner* prompted the California State Legislature to pass two bills that would change state law on sexual assault, one of which implemented a mandatory minimum three-year prison sentence for sexual assault of an unconscious intoxicated person. Previous law had exclusively provided a mandatory minimum sentence when a defendant used force, but no sentence was in place if the victim was unconscious or unable to resist. The fact that state legislature was amended as a direct response to Turner's inadequate sentence highlights an undeniable flaw in Judge Persky's decision-making, in that they were implemented as preventative measures against like-minded sentencing in future. However, such amendments were introduced too late for Chanel Miller, and Turner ultimately served three months of his six-month sentence.

The decision-making process and consequent rulings in the above rape and sexual assault cases epitomise MacKinnon's assertion that, 'women who charge rape say they were raped twice, the second time in court.'⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

Almost a century after it was first proposed by Alice Paul, the Equal Rights Amendment is yet to be ratified at time of writing. In May 2011, Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey and Representative Carolyn Maloney of New York stated that, 'until equal protection for women is explicitly spelled out in the Constitution, the courts might not guarantee it.'⁶¹ This is a fitting summary of what this thesis seeks to substantiate, both through the interrogation of feminist legal theory alongside US jurisprudence and an examination of its societal consequences. In 1983, Catharine MacKinnon wrote that, 'sometimes I think women and men live in different cultures', and this thesis has demonstrated that, in many ways they still do.⁶²

Women in America live in a repressed and regulated sector of society, while men continue to be elevated and enabled by the patriarchal structure of the law. The way in which this divisive application of the law influences all of its practices is, in turn, responsible for the discriminatory and oppressive treatment of women in society. Attempts to formally amend federal laws, which have systematically positioned women as unequal and inferior, have been limited in their impact – either as a result of societal backlash to 'pro-equality' jurisdiction, or simply because reversing belief systems that have for so long been imposed by the American legal institution cannot be resolved by exiguous and superficial amendments. Even in instances where it would appear that congressional amendments and Supreme Court rulings have furthered and encouraged the acclimatisation of women's equality in American law, as Barnett states, 'while the legal barriers to full equality are progressively dismantled, social and economic barriers remain'.⁶³

Throughout this thesis, the presence of patriarchal and anti-feminist proclivity in US jurisdiction has been demonstrated in various ways. In matters of abortion, anti-feminist jurisprudence is defined by the prioritisation of unborn foetuses over the rights and wellbeing of the mother under state law, as well as by the geographical and financial limitations placed upon access to a legal abortion. Contraception is denied funding by most company health policies while Viagra continues to be covered, so that women pay more out of their own pockets in order to access what is dubiously labelled as a 'lifestyle drug', even when being taken for legitimate health reasons. Women have long been defined by, and valued for, their 'natural' position in society as housewives, mothers, and low-skilled workers, and the consequential subordination of women in the workplace entails female employees continuing to be overlooked for promotional opportunities and professional progression. Laws intended to promote equal pay are inadequate, and women continue to be overworked and undervalued by employers. In rape and sexual assault cases, judges tend to value a male defendant's future potential and wellbeing before the protection and validation of the experiences of female victims. Rape sentencing is determined by the decision-making of legal actors who exhibit anti-feminist propensities, and the definition of sexual assault is contested, diminished and manipulated based on the sexual history, and thus perceived consent of the victim.

Anti-feminist jurisprudence in American legal and political history was, and continues to be, inherent and ubiquitous. In its formative years, the constitution was established by a group of men with a limited perception of how women should be acknowledged as equals. Perhaps this explains the law's fundamental male-oriented discourse. In any case, Barbara Brown outlines that, 'any plan for eliminating sex discrimination must take into account the large role which generalised belief in the inferiority of women plays in the present scheme of subordination.'⁶⁴ The eradication of patriarchal legal practices and subsequent societal behaviours must begin with a nation-wide acknowledgement that anti-feminist beliefs are not simplistic or surface level issues, but are in fact a multi-faceted and deep-rooted product of the fundamental inequality of women in the eyes of the law.

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⁵⁷Democracy Now, 'Chanel Miller Reads from Her Victim Impact Statement', *Democracy Now* (2019), <https://www.democracynow.org/2019/10/11/to_girls_everywhere_i_am_with> [accessed 1st May 2020].

⁵⁸*People of the State of California v. Brock Allen Turner* [2015] H043709. B1577162 (Santa Clarita County Superior Court).

⁵⁹Naffine, p.2.

⁶⁰ MacKinnon, 'Toward Feminist Jurisprudence', p.190.

⁶¹New York Times, 'March 22nd 1972: Equal Rights Amendment for Women Passed by Congress', *New York Times* (2012), <<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/22/march-22-1972-equal-right-amendment-for-women-passed-by-congress/>> [accessed 20th April 2020].

⁶²MacKinnon, 'Toward Feminist Jurisprudence', p.189.

⁶³Barnett, p.4.

⁶⁴Barbara A. Brown, p.883.

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