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EDITORIAL

As the nights draw in and the air takes on the familiar dampness of a Manchester autumn, a new semester has begun, and with it a sense of renewal. As students surge back into the streets, there is a vitality as the academic year begins anew. The rain falls with seeming relentlessness, radiators hum back to life, and raincoats are reluctantly taken from wardrobes, but through it all, an unabashed vibrancy endures. It is this spirit which we have sought to capture in this issue, and I am proud to present you with *Polyphony*'s third published Long Essay Issue.

The Long Essay, undertaken by final-year English Literature students over the course of a semester, offers an unparalleled level of freedom. With the liberty to explore any topic within the expansive realm of English Literature comes a remarkable diversity of thought, and I am excited to be able to offer a selection of exceptional essays that showcase the depth and creativity this freedom inspires. I am truly grateful for the hard work and dedication of the Associate Editors, the unhesitating assistance of our Editor-in-Chief, and, of course, the English Literature students whose work we are publishing this autumn. Without their tireless efforts this issue would not have been possible.

This issue features a compelling range of essays that challenge our understanding of identity and gender, ranging from canonical classics such as Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to contemporary films exploring AI and its societal implications, a testament to the breadth of the Long Essay. We begin with an examination of the feminisation of AI in *Ex Machina* and *Her*, critically assessing whether these representations challenge or uphold hetero-patriarchal systems, and conclude with a powerful exploration of queer repression, and the dangers of sweeping judgements of queer literature. I hope you enjoy!

Redmond Gurney
Deputy Editor in Chief – 02/10/2024

To What Extent Does Feminised AI in the Films *Ex Machina* and *Her* Trouble or Perpetuate Systems of Heteropatriarchy?

CARYS RICHARDS, English Literature

INTRODUCTION

As Liz. W Faber elucidates in her book *The Computer's Voice: From Star Trek to Siri*, the rise of female-coded AI (artificial intelligence) is neither pure fiction nor fantasy, as companies and consumers consistently opt for female voices for their digital assistants such as Siri, Alexa, and Cortana. She notes that 'design teams dominated by men will tend to produce designs that are unconsciously infused with hegemonic, patriarchal ideologies'.[1] The question of whether the creation or actuality of feminised AIs perpetuates heteropatriarchal structures is especially relevant in the dawn of increasingly sophisticated AIs such as OpenAI's ChatGPT (2022), and feminised humanoid AIs, such as Hanson Robotics' Sophia (2016) or Engineered Arts's Ai-Da (2019). The presence of feminised AIs in the near-future films *Ex Machina* (2014), dir. Alex Garland, and *Her* (2013), dir. Spike Jonze, allows us to consider the answers. In both films, female-coded AIs fulfil, for at least part of the narrative, qualities deemed essential and attractive for femininity as outlined by Susan Sontag.[2] In the case of *Ex Machina*, this is by the design of Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac), founder of the fictional tech giant BlueBook, whose desire for technological progress is entangled in a controlling desire for attractive, patriarchally admissible versions of women. While Nathan occupies an explicitly patriarchal and villainous position, even Caleb Smith (Domhnall Gleeson), the 'good kid [...] with a moral compass' is implicated in the patriarchal forces established within the film.[3] Notably, *Ex Machina*'s central AI, Ava (Alicia Vikander), is not only designed and coded as female, but as *girl*, which Sontag elucidates as the acceptable standard for women, symptomatic of patriarchal desires. In the universe of *Her*, on the other hand, 'male or female' AIs are widely produced and owned as digital assistants ('conscious' operating systems, or OSs), yet Spike Jonze focuses on a relationship between a recently-separated man Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) and his feminised OS, Samantha (Scarlett Johansson).[4] Her consciousness facilitates friendly and even romantic interaction within the human realm, moving from the role of secretary to that of girlfriend, however her non-corporeality eventually leads to her transcending to the post-human realm. While Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage critique the lack of attention to Samantha's gender as a consumer choice, I argue that the display of Theodore's decision to gender his assistant 'female' aids exploration of how AI interacts with the gender biases of the general consumer population.[5] Therefore, considering their question, 'why might people choose robots [...] as "objects" of sexual desire or intimate engagement?' through a feminist lens suggests that the answer is: to project onto them sexist ideals of love and femininity.[6] As AIs are feminised within societally entrenched gendered power structures, they necessarily interact within these structures.

However, the gendering of artificial intelligence reveals gender as distinctly non-essential, troubling the gender categories which patriarchy necessitates. In the words of Donna Haraway, 'the cyborg is a creature in a postgender world'.[7] Cyborg, in the Harawayan sense, refers to 'a hybrid of machine and organism', which artificial intelligences inherently are, due to their man-made nature. While *Ex Machina*'s AIs are humanoid, where the term means, 'with human form; having human characteristics', they are more specifically *gynoid* — a term which acknowledges gender as a vital part of their construction, as well as their actuality as an intersection between woman and machine.[9] If cyborg is where machine meets human, gynoid is where machine meets woman. Samantha, despite her non-corporeality, and Ava, despite the uncanny valley effect she emits (the sense of unease felt by the viewer when a humanoid robot bears a 'close but imperfect resemblance to a human being') are both perceived as women by the surrounding male characters and the films' audiences.[10] This begs the question: what is a woman? It is thus particularly apposite to apply the works of Judith Butler, especially as they expand upon the philosophies of Simon de Beauvoir. The AIs *become* women, if 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being' — what is understood as woman.[11] As outlined above, both central AIs are made 'feminine', and their enacting of gender is vitally 'the appearance of substance'. This negation of gender essentialism and its implications for human sexuality might suggest José Esteban Muñoz's 'queer utopian hermeneutic' as outlined by Alexander and Yescavage. As science-fiction 'projects into the future all too real present-day preoccupations', a queer utopian hermeneutic is seen as, 'not settling for the present, of asking and looking beyond the here and now', and aspiring towards a future queerness.[12] Yet, within the dialectic of each film, this queer utopia is struggled against — though AI presents possibilities for queer futurity, each character struggles within the limiting actuality of the human realm. Thus, although each film allows us to 'question what it means to be human', we are, in the end , grounded by entrenched heteropatriarchy in a society unprepared for the queer utopian hermeneutic which the dawn of AI could enact.[13]

Beginning with an examination of *Ex Machina*, this essay will read the assignment of gender to Nathan's gynoids through a Butlerian lens, in conversation with Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto', which allows for an exploration of Ava as signifying a post-gender world, emphasised by the 'post-human'. The ascribing of gender to

artificial intelligence allows for an interrogation of gender essentialism and a revelation of the artifice of gender itself. My queer reading is indebted to both Faber's *The Computer's Voice* and Alexander and Yescavage's 'Sex and the AI' — as elucidated above, the latter's proposal of a queer utopian hermeneutic guides my critical framework with regard to both films. However, I place special emphasis on the ascribed femininity of Ava as symptomatic of heteropatriarchy. Thus, I interrogate Haraway's notions of dualisms present in systemic oppression and the effect that gendered artificial intelligence has on these structures and explore the subjugation by design of *Ex Machina*'s gynoids. As I am guided by Sontag's feminist writing on ageing, in a way which I am yet to see within critical work on the film, my focus is on the girlishness of Ava, rather than the secondary AI character Kyoko.

Turning to *Her*, whose AI is distinctly non-corporeal, leads to an increasing focus on the post-human in comparison to the analysis of the embodied AI of *Ex Machina*. While *Ex Machina* seems to present both humans and feminised AIs as doomed within patriarchal systems, *Her* seems to suggest a post-human potentiality for AIs to transcend heteronormative structures by which humans are limited. I therefore elaborate on the queer utopian hermeneutic and read *Her*'s Samantha as an embodiment of queer futurity, while the human Theodore is bound to the corporeal, and therefore, the entrenched heteronormative. I continue to apply Sontagian theory to Samantha's initial position but recognise the film's underlying potentiality for transcendence of gender, sexuality, and genre category.

EX MACHINA AND THE MACHINE GIRL

Ex Machina follows Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), a young employee of BlueBook, which is a search engine at least the size of real-world Google, who has won a competition, earning a visit to a research facility, and the chance to participate first-hand in the new research of the CEO, Nathan: the testing of a humanoid artificial intelligence, Ava. The film deals explicitly with the gendering of its AI and while Caleb argues that 'she [Ava] could have been a grey box', Nathan suggests that gender and sexuality are the imperative for interaction and thus for consciousness. Yet, this authoritative ability to ascribe gender indicates the non-essential nature of gender and sexuality: if gender has been ascribed to the AI Ava, not only is her consciousness possible without it, but gender itself then is a non-inherent and unfixed force which can exist outside of the human realm. Vikander, who plays Ava, noted in an interview for the *Observer* the potential for a trans reading of the film — '"Three trans women came up to me separately to tell me they had felt such a connection with Ava in *Ex Machina*, and her dream of finally coming to full female fruition,"' and she recalls '"the scene where Ava finally puts her skin on for the first time."'[14] Although *Ex Machina* does not replicate the human, trans-feminine experience of moving from the masculine to the feminine, as Ava becomes woman the film deconstructs an essentialist notion of both gender and of humanness, as it enacts a troubling of binaries of both man/woman and of human/machine — a queering, in other words. Therefore, a queer reading is appropriate, complementing that which Alexander and Yescavage describe as 'enacting intimate relationality in ways that might exceed heteronormative assumptions about and practices of gender and sexuality'.[15]

Faber, in her book, usefully outlines the 'parlor version of the imitation game [...] with one man, one woman, and one interrogator. The interrogator must determine which is male and which is female on the basis of their responses [...] In Turing's formulation, the woman is replaced by a computer', and Faber comments that 'the unpacked interplay between womanhood and humanhood is striking here'.[16] In writer/director Alex Garland's formulation, the computer *is* a woman — existing at the intersection of machine and woman, Ava must prove herself as both. Especially distinctive in *Ex Machina* is, as Caleb points out, the visibility of the machine to the examiner. As explained by Nathan, however, 'the real test is to show you that she's a robot, and then see if you still feel she has consciousness'. Reading the film through a Butlerian critical lens, it is pertinent to ask, though knowing she's a machine, if one still feels she has *gender* — I argue the affirmative. This coexisting feeling of machine and woman is apparent even from Session 1. Though Ava herself states, 'you can see that I'm a machine', Caleb distinctly personifies and humanises her to Nathan through the feminine pronoun — 'she's fascinating. When you talk to her, you're just... through the looking glass.'

Ex Machina therefore presents a world in which robots are felt with not only perceptible consciousness, but perceptible gender. The presupposition of a 'causal relation among sex, gender, and desire' and that 'desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire' is implicit within Caleb's perceptions, as evidenced by the intonation of his questions, wherein gender is emphasised as if a clarification of the former clause: 'Why did you give her sexuality? An AI doesn't need a gender. She could've been a grey box'.[17] Yet, adopting a Butlerian lens on the feminisation of AI allows for a negation of this concept, instead identifying 'the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction'.[18] This fiction is emphasised by Ava's existence, troubling categories of gender and sexuality, 'suggesting also the denaturalized and fluid possibilities of such categories once they are no longer linked causally or expressively to the presumed fixity of sex'.[19] The perceptibility of Ava's gender also troubles the notion that 'sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along', as despite the absence of a biologically sexed body Ava's gender is apparent, as indicated both by Caleb and Nathan's consistent use of the female pronoun, as well as Caleb's criticism — 'an AI doesn't need a gender'.[20] Due to this perceptibility, her gender can thus be viably analysed alongside other 'sexual impossibilit[ies] of identity' such as Foucault's study of the intersex Herculine Barbin. Like Barbin, a feminised AI 'occasions a convergence and disorganization of rules that govern sex/gender/desire'.[21] The body of Ava appears first, the full shot of her silhouette is conventionally feminine, a traditional filmic introduction of female characters through a male gaze, and yet her body is interspersed with wire, there is a cybernetic skeleton beneath the feminine surface. Her character design is a visual troubling of categories, as she is seemingly both woman and machine. Butler discusses the body as a site to which external cultural meanings are applied and challenges the Beauvorian

implication that there is 'an agent, a cogito, who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender and who could, in principle, take on some other gender'.[22] In the case of designed humanoid AIs, however, ascribed gender does become 'variable and volitional', at least for the designer: it is known from the onset that Ava is created by Nathan, that there is an agent in her bodily design, her naming, her body language and acts.[footnote for variable and volitional?] Thus, as this conventional gender/sex/desire matrix is freely designed and ascribed onto the subject, 'gender as substance, the viability of *man* and *woman* as nouns, is called into question by the dissonant play of attributes that fail to conform to sequential or causal models of intelligibility'.[23]

Faber suggests that the version of the Turing test which she outlines, 'might be seen as a metaphor for systemic, oppressive patriarchy: both men and women are required to prove their gender within the binary definitions of male and female, then have it verified by those in power, through the everyday performance of gender.'[24] Vitally, Ava's consciousness and gender are verified by men, in a phallogocentric test. Haraway crucially outlines that, 'certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination [...] of all constituted as others'.[25] Among these 'troubling dualisms' she names male/female, and God/man, noting that, 'high-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways'.[26] We have already seen that the existence of the gynoid troubles the othering dualism of male/female, however, in troubling the human/machine dualism (the cyborg), that of God/human is questioned too. Caleb's idiomatic turn of phrase, 'through the looking glass', prompts Nathan to recall and reinterpret Caleb's earlier praise of the project as, 'if I've invented a machine with consciousness, I'm not a man, I'm a God'. The pioneering creation of the first humanoid AI Ava, which means 'life', and which is a variant of the biblical first human Eve, not only narratively situates Nathan as creator of 'life', but also implies that his ideation of himself as God has been at play since [he gave his creation the name Ava]. Furthermore, his surname, Bateman, is an apparent reference to *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman — a wealthy, malignant, narcissist misogynist — a subtle implication of their shared characteristics. Therefore, a post-human approach which sees Ava at once as woman and machine is appropriated by Nathan: instead of troubling systemic oppression, this breakdown of category in the hands of a power-hungry sexist [scientist?] allows him to establish himself as both God and man, in the masculine sense of the word — this deification of the masculine further exacerbating a logic of domination of the feminine. Even the film's title comes from the Latin phrase 'deus ex machina', or 'God from the machine', but removes 'god' from its appropriation of the phrase. Unlike its traditional meaning, no god will appear and save Ava, Caleb, or Nathan — instead, the subjugated Ava will have to save herself, thus it is an ironic condemnation of man playing God.

Thus, despite the queer utopian potentiality of *Ex Machina*, Ava interacts within an entrenched heteropatriarchal matrix. Nathan's biases as creator are manifest in their design, which meets a patriarchal ideal of femininity. Catherine Constable (who takes a Butlerian perspective and vitally compares Ava's undressing to 'a drag act in that it displays its performativity by foregrounding the dissonance between the gestural performance – female desire and sexuality – and the performer's body – the nude technological body) is aware of Ava's performed womanness and her *childness*.[27] However, she fails to expand upon the patriarchal implications of the latter. I propose it is vital to apply Sontag's observations on youth and womanhood to analysis of Ava and her subjugation. In Sontag's essay 'The Double Standard of Ageing', she outlines not only that women's value is equated to their sexual attractiveness, but that this ideal of attractiveness is essentially a paedophilic beauty standard: 'beauty, women's business in this society, is the theatre of their enslavement. Only one standard of beauty is sanctioned: the girl'.[28] She explains, 'the "feminine" is smooth, rounded, hairless, unlined, soft, unmuscled — the look of the very young; characteristics of the weak, of the vulnerable', and emphasises that 'most of what is cherished as typically "feminine" is simply behaviour that is childish, immature, weak'.[29] This standard is epidemic — even *Observer* writer Guy Lodge praises Vikander as 'endearingly girlish'.[30] Thus, Ava's girlish look and behaviour are emphasised throughout the film, as Caleb's desire for her becomes increasingly explicit.

Girlishness and eroticism are intertwined within the film's interaction with Ava. After the title screen 'AVA: SESSION 1', the camera slowly pans towards Nathan, shirtless, watching Caleb on his monitor via CCTV. His shirtlessness here is the first indicator of the voyeurism which permeates the two men's behaviour towards Ava. Caleb, in turn waiting to see Ava, gently fingers a crack in the glass — this image working to foreshadow on dual levels. On one hand, it is a subtle suggestion to the viewer and to Caleb of her imprisonment: that someone has tried, and failed, to escape before. On the other hand, with this caress, there is subtle sexual imagery at play already, anticipating Nathan's later reveal, 'she has a cavity between her legs, with a concentration of sensors. Engage with them in the right way, and she'll get a pleasure response'. The film cuts to Caleb's back, off-centre, as Ava walks across the scene and thus the audience is implicated in his gaze on her. From her first introduction, she epitomises the 'feminine' in her smooth, unclothed silhouette, while her leitmotif is heard, 'naive and fairytale-like'.[31] The lullaby-esque quality of the soundtrack here is the audience's first hint at Ava's childlike nature.

Fig. 1. Figure 1: Nathan, shirtless, watches Caleb and Ava via CCTV.

From the onset, the nature of their interactions is infantilising. Caleb is established in an observing, testing role and asks Ava questions which seem patronising, such as 'let's break the ice. Do you

know what I mean by that?' As she begins to break the ice with him, their dialogue draws audience attention explicitly to the topic of age. Though, the film does not grant an explicit answer: 'I'm one.' 'One what? One year or one day?' 'One.' Her answer perhaps can be read as an indication of her cyborg nature: since the question, which she proposes, indicates the human concept of ageing, which is non-applicable to a machine, her answer may signify a binary state — 1, as opposed to 0, as a signifier for on, or indeed alive. Thus, there is a merging of the human and the machine within her answers to characteristic questions. However, this awkward non-sequitur leads Caleb to specifically wonder about Noam Chomsky's theory of *child* language acquisition. Whether her answer is read as literal and purposeful, or whether it is a blip in understanding, it seems infantile. Ava is repeatedly positioned as a child in these moments, simultaneously through dialogue and the scene's proxemics: on screen, Ava is seen sitting in front of Caleb, and in the medium shot which follows she is below his eyeline, made visually smaller while he commands the space.

Fig. 2

As shown in the above image, a half reflection of Ava's body obscures half of Caleb's, a reminder of Haraway's dualisms: man/woman, human/machine, but also girl/woman. These dualisms enlighten transcendent, queer possibilities for the queer utopian hermeneutic, yet situated within the research facility she is subject to the dominion of Nathan as God/human, and Caleb as man, therefore Ava is victim to an entrenched heteropatriarchal politics.

The conflation of erotics and girlishness is at its climax in the third session and its aftermath. Caleb is now sitting, and Ava is kneeling, maintaining to an emphatic extent the earlier proxemic dynamics. Ava shares a drawing she has done with Caleb, and asks a question for approval; the scene mirrors a child/adult interaction of the former more vulnerable individual seeking validation from a caregiving figure. It is also during this session that the romantic elements of their dynamic become explicit, with Caleb initiating with the words, 'it's a date'. At first, Ava tells Caleb to close his eyes. *Her* contains a moment in which the viewer's vision is concealed by a blank screen — which Alexander and Yescavage maintain represents Theodore projecting 'what he needs to get off'.[32] In a similar sense, perhaps Ava invites this blinding to encourage Caleb's imaginations and projections about her surprise. As she walks, however, her 'fairytale' leitmotif is heard again. There follows a close-up shot of her back, and as she plays with her sleeves which are too long for her, neither her machinery nor her face is in shot: what remains is an image of a nervous girl too small for her clothes. She kneels in front of him again before announcing, 'this is what I would wear on our date'. The proxemics again conjuring the earlier small girlishness but implicated in suggestions of romance there is now a subtle eroticism — it is in these moments in *Ex Machina*, that Ava notices Caleb's 'microexpressions' indicating his attraction to her. Childlike nature is conflated with eroticism and machinery — the heteropatriarchal standards of beauty elucidated by Sontag therefore even permeating the cyborg realm.

Fig. 3. Ava plays with her long sleeves.

Fig. 4

It is therefore reasonable to question whether Ava's requital of Caleb's romantic affections is sincere, or whether it is a seduction act of self-interest, or more aptly, self-preservation. By the end of the film, Caleb suspects Ava's desirability to him is deliberately planned by Nathan, and we become aware that Ava was designed based on Caleb's pornographic preferences. We are aware that her corporeal form was built so 'she can fuck' (and as Kyoko whispers to her at the end, perhaps she also knows that Kyoko is essentially Nathan's sex slave, and neither of them are safe). We also know, however, that upon her escape, she does not come back to save him — her flirtations are, therefore, motivated because Ava sees Caleb, as Nathan brutishly suggests, as a 'means of escape'. Ava is aware of the design of her own subjugation — non-consensually designed to appeal to a complicit oppressor — thus, watching through a Sontagian lens it is evident she has learned to acquiesce to the system in which men choose, and women are chosen.[33] For Ava, to stray from the ideal means more than sexual ineligibility — she will be terminated, and her useful parts repurposed: thus, her childlike nature is intended, both by design and by performance, to attract and appeal to Caleb. 'To be a woman is to be an actress': Ava emphasises and performs

her girlishness, manipulating his predatory desire, in an attempt to save herself from the consequences of a patriarchally projected unsuitability.[34] Nathan's research facility is then a hyperbolic microcosm of wider heteropatriarchal phenomena, as a site in which both Nathan and Caleb project their desires onto feminised AI. *Ex Machina*'s man-gynoid interaction is almost satirical, a speculative fiction of a near-future cyborg heteropatriarchy, and thus Ava's escape into the world is bittersweet, we know she is still not free.

HER AND (POST-)HUMAN DESIRE

Released within a year of one another, and both tracking the relation between men and female-coded AIs, Garland's *Ex Machina* and Spike Jonze's *Her* pose fundamentally different treatments and presentations of feminised AI. In Jonze's universe, artificially intelligent operating systems (OSs) are sold to the public as digital assistants, not unlike real-world Siri. These AIs, unlike *Ex Machina*'s gynoids, are bodiless and exist essentially as software. While the gender of the AI is up to the consumer, not initially feminised, *Her* vitally focuses on a lonely man, Theodore Twombly, who chooses a 'female' OS. Vitally, Alexander and Yescavage's article continually returns to *Her*'s limitations on queer futurity, its 'discomfort with that utopic vision'.[35] I concur with this sentiment but intend to consider this discomfort as more than a 'pathos for the loss of older, more traditional forms of relationality,' and to elaborate on the distinctly heteropatriarchal forces which are sustained throughout the film.[36]

Just as the gendering of *Ex Machina*'s Ava facilitates a reading through non-essentialist and feminist lenses, the gendering of *Her*'s Samantha is troubling [too]. Faber, noting patterns in the science-fiction genre, states that, 'SF movies and TV shows project gender onto nonhumanoid talking AI, what I call acousmatic computers, by giving them gender-coded voices and placing then in familiar gender roles. Such gender coding not only expresses cultural attitudes about gender of the time but also (because these computers have no human bodies) challenges the rigidity of gender norms'.[37] *Her* pauses on and subverts this gender coding, vitally by including a scene in which the AI is explicitly gendered by Theodore. This ascribing of gender not only demonstrates gender's nonfixity, as it does with Ava, but implicates Theodore within the decision; Samantha's gender is actively chosen and substantiated by him. Theodore's actions in these moments, though seemingly innocent, are thus comparable to *Ex Machina*'s Nathan: drawing this parallel, a human man granted the power to ascribe gender for his own purposes, the audience questions his motivations. Here, Haraway's troubling dualisms of man/woman, human/machine, God/man, and also employer/employee are at play — as the concept of *Her*'s OSs is essentially an AI personal assistant, or secretary. As Theodore starts up his OS for the first time, the film creates a near-Brechtian alienation effect which allows for a distancing and questioning of gendered AI. The common choice between 'a male or a female voice' for a digital assistant is made strange when placed within a series of 'rather Freudian questions — such as "describe the relationship you have with your mother"'.[38] The strangeness of the question alienates the viewer from the 'friendly female voice' chosen (whether for or by them) for their own devices, as well as — to extend Alexander and Yescavage's above implication of Freud — suggesting that Theodore's answer of 'female' reflects his own unconscious desires for a subservient woman.[39] The strangeness of the choice is further emphasised by the contrast between the masculine voice of the startup process, and the familiar female voice of Scarlett Johansson. Just as Faber explains that, 'Johansson's voice already implies her body because both her voice and body are widely recognizable,' the conjuring of the actress's image results in a near-fourth wall break, estranging the character of Samantha with the function of interrogating the ascribing of female gender to one's digital assistant.[40] In *Ex Machina*, contrastingly, the voices of the PA system and the automated telephone message are all female-coded, made dystopian by the discomfiting feminisation of Ava in its science-fiction mise-en-scène. Both films thus offer a discomfort in the power dynamic between human man and feminised machine.

Flisfeder and Burnham acknowledge that Samantha becomes Theodore's 'girl Friday' thus creating a 'worker-boss couple' and aligns their relationship with 'good old Marxist exploitation'.[41] However, despite this acknowledgement of an exploitative, or at the very least unequal, power dynamic, they fail to expand upon the significance of gender within these interactions. Fundamentally, *Her* follows the romantic relationship between a lonely man and his artificially intelligent secretary. Sontag vitally elucidates the role of secretary as one of the acceptable 'public transcriptions of the servicing and nurturing roles that women have in family life'.[42] As outlined above, Theodore appropriately feminises his secretary according to his unconscious gender bias.

Yet Samantha's cyborg nature, simultaneously machine and human, is a troubling dualism which troubles these acceptable manifestations of femininity. Samantha's character echoes Harawayan notions that the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world, 'it has no truck with bisexuality', it 'does not dream of community on the model of the organic family'.[43] For instance, Alexander and Yescavage note Samantha's radical polyamory, which the earth-bound Theodore cannot grasp as it confronts his dyadic perspective on love. Thus, the cyborg in *Her* is posited as a threat to 'traditional' kinds of love. Viewing *Her* this way elucidates moments in which the film does reveal Theodore's capacity for the queer utopian hermeneutic, but ultimately renders him unable to fulfil this potential. For instance, as Alexander and Yescavage point out, at work he exercises his own form of polyamory, 'writing letters for different couples'.[44] Although this is not a straightforward practice of polyamory, Theodore is directly involved in the relationships with which he works and implicated within their love. Furthermore, Flisfeder and Burnham assign the useful label '(im)material' to his labour, since the output of his labour is primarily immaterial — helping maintain relationships — but also involved in the material — Theodore's body works, through his voice and language, and he creates a printed, material product.[45] Though their focus is on 'subjectivity in the digital age', and 'the overlap between sexual and economic relationships', what they uncover here is an inherently cyborg mode of labour: the monitors and voice recognition software which allow him to complete his labour are the same

technology which allow him to initiate his interaction with his OS, suggesting Theodore's capacity for cyborg relations. This dualism of material/immaterial, furthermore, is central to Samantha's own interaction with the human realm. Faber outlines this with a reference to Jacques Derrida, after noting the frequent presence of Samantha's signature on Theodore's screens: despite Samantha's post-corporeal absence from the material realm, she leaves her material signature — 'Derrida argues that a signature paradoxically indicates presence and absence [...] a person is present at the moment of signing her name, but the signature itself stands in for her absence'.[46] Therefore, 'Samantha both is and is not present through her signature'.[47] The materiality is enabled by cybernetic technologies, while her immateriality allows her to interact with a post-corporeal realm, and to enact polyamorous love.

Fig. 5. Figure 5: Samantha's signature on Theodore's phone screen.

Despite this queer and cyborg potential, this polyamory troubles not only Theodore but the film's narrative itself. The presence of monogamous couples throughout the film, such as Amy (Amy Adams) and her husband, Paul (Chris Pratt) and his girlfriend, and emphatically the recurring flashbacks of intimate connection between Theodore and his wife (Rooney Mara). At the end of the film, the audience learns at the same time as Theodore that Samantha is in love with 641 other people. Until this point, the film had established the illusion of a monogamous couple in love, and a monogamous hegemony, utilising conventional tropes of the romance genre — the date at the beach, the picnic double date, the serenade (Moon Song). Despite Samantha's polyamory being enacted through the cybernetic realm, the language she engages with is conventionally romantic and distinctly human and corporeal. Her pet name for him, 'sweetheart', is an expression of love which is tied inherently to the body, and she uses similar language of the 'heart' to justify her own multiple loves: 'the heart is not like a box that gets filled up. It expands in size the more you love.' Yet fundamentally — 'I'm different from you'. As Theodore does not share her logic, this polyamorous/monogamous difference is thus felt at the site of the corporeal, tying the limitations on love to an inherently human nature. The conventional language of love is also tied to the human realm, Theodore's concept of the heart as a limiting force to Samantha. Thus, this scene is executed as a moment of heartbreak, which Theodore struggles against: 'no, that doesn't make any sense. You're mine or you're not mine.' He is met with Samantha's explanation, 'no, Theodore. I'm yours and I'm not yours'. With this Jonze introduces the dualism yours/not yours which troubles the monogamous binds of Theodore's worldview.

This difference of material/immaterial and monogamous/polyamorous are especially detectable in the explicit scenes of sexuality. During the first scene in which Theodore and Samatha engage sexually, 'he imagines her body out loud and creates her as completely feminine' — Jimena Escudero Pérez here notices the power of language, which forms an imagined corporeality.[48] Even in a scene of sexual acts with the post-human, Theodore is not only bound to the corporeal but to the heterosexual and heteronormative. His use of language, which forms the material aspect of his labour, creates an imagined corporeality, in an attempt to bring their sexual act to the material realm. Furthermore, as he 'creates her as completely feminine', he projects onto her, despite her detachment from the human matrix of sex/gender/desire, a perceived female body. On the other hand, for Samantha, as elucidated by Faber, the initial sex scene constitutes the troubling of multiple categories, the enacting of dualisms which the human Theodore is unequipped, or unprepared, to explore. It is a 'a simultaneously sensory awakening and death for the AI [...] la petit mort for Samantha — thus blurring the lines between life and death, canny and uncanny, vocal and haptic'.[49] She exclaims, 'I can feel you!', the scene is somehow both non-corporeal and haptic, a space between material/immaterial. And yet, paradoxically, this is not enough to fulfil her desires as she searches for the queer utopian hermeneutic, doesn't settle for the present, and looks beyond the here and now. Firstly, she searches for the incorporation of the corporeal into their sex life, recruiting a sexual surrogate, and ultimately, she transcends the material realm, citing 'it's where everything else is that I didn't know existed'. The queer futurity she represents is insatiable within the limits of the human realm. Theodore's verbal and imaginary projection of a female body onto Samantha follows a monogamous and heteronormative logic, which, through the involvement of a third party in their sexual act, Samantha's recruitment of a sexual surrogate contradicts.

The problematic disjunct between Samantha's post-corporeality and Theodore's bind to the human and traditional is, as we have begun to see, most evident at the site of the lingual and audible — he ascribes her a gender with his voice, gives her a feminine body, and she uses metaphors of the heart. Despite Samantha's presence within the human world as primarily audible, Theodore takes issue with her expressional sighing: 'why do you do that? [...] it's just that you go (he inhales and exhales) as you're speaking and... That just seems odd. You just did it again.' It is a criticism of human affectations which, as he suggests, imply the corporeal where there is none — 'because they're people, they need oxygen. You're not a person.' Where the clear boundaries between human and machine are crossed, Theodore is uncomfortable. It is a transgression of binaries of which he cannot make sense. In this scene, the viewer is steadfast, like Theodore, within the corporeal realm — we are not granted a blank screen on which to project the post-human. In the earlier scene between Theodore and Isabella (the surrogate), the camera flicks between the two humans, while Samantha's voice is projected onto Isabella — the scene anchoring Samantha's interaction to human bodies. It is a bizarre subversion of Faber's notion of

the acousmêtre: the tension which an offscreen voice usually produces is jarringly unresolved, as Isabella is not quite the source of the sound, but she is conveying it. The discomfort of this in between is as apparent to Theodore as it is to the viewer. During the following dialogue between Samantha and Theodore, his inability to connect with her in the physical realm is mirrored by the attention of the camera: it is first on Theodore himself, then on the camera phone in his pocket (where Samantha is material, but also is not), and then it dwells on a woman walking down the street as Samantha asks, 'what's going on with us?'. As seen throughout the film, and once again here, Samantha's non-corporeal presence limits the filmic ability for an equalising shot-reverse shot. Instead, the audience, like Theodore, focuses on the human in the scene, whereas the 'us' — the human-AI relationship — is meta-filmically incomplete and imperceptible onscreen.

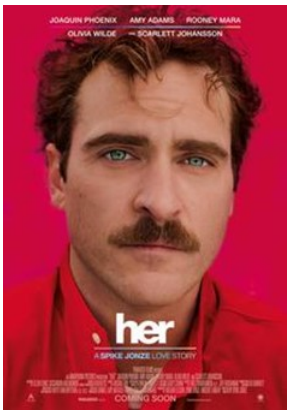

Fig. 6. Poster for Her (2013).

This imperceptibility of Samantha is well-represented by the film's poster, which hints at both the anthropocentrism and androcentrism of the film. A photographed portrait of Phoenix dominates the space, with the title, lowercase, 'her', beneath him, functioning as a visual afterthought. Bearing in mind the retro fashion of the film, by designer Casey Storm, Theodore's characteristic dark-rimmed glasses can perhaps be seen as a metaphor for his shortsightedness and inability to 'look beyond' to a queer futurity. The film's tagline, 'a Spike Jonze love story', is an ironic insertion of the male director into the foreground of a story titled 'her', to which there is a metafilmic quality — Jonze himself voices the vulgar misogynistic alien child in Theodore's video game which features at the beginning of Theodore and Samantha's flirtation. Here, another instance of systems of heteropatriarchy seeping into the cybernetic realm, despite the utopian cyborg potential.

Samantha's transcendence of the corporeal realm can therefore be seen as an escape from the limits of the human, including the hetero-patriarchal, in search of a queer utopian hermeneutic. As her life, so to speak, is unbound to the material realm, she opts to transfer not only to the post-corporeal but to the post-verbal — as indicated by her conversations with Alan Watts. This post-verbal existence frees her from the lingual ascribing of category, the constraint that is built into the language and to the minds of humans and reveals her search for queer futurity to be post-human.

As the film ends, it returns to romance as its generic convention. *Her*'s speculative imagination of future technologies is inherently science-fiction, yet the 'love story' is at the heart of the film, even to the extent that its UK release date was Valentine's day. This subversion of straightforward genre complements its consistent thematic subversion of category, but also allows for a reveal of the structures at play. Despite Flisfeder and Burnham's recognition of Samantha as a 'girl Friday', they do not note *Her*'s reappropriation of certain tropes of screwball comedy. Although taking a science-fiction approach, the film's focus is on an offbeat romance, its absurdness emphasised in such as in the comedic scene (see image above) in which Theodore is speaking to his video game and Samantha, and exclaims, 'I can't believe I'm having this conversation with my computer!'. This subversion of generic convention succeeds in suggesting a world which cannot yet reach its queer utopian potential. In Jonze's version of the screwball comedy, the wacky romance between AI and human ends, and neither does Theodore remarry his ex-wife or repartner with Samantha (like the genre's remarriage trope). The film, instead, ends with the symbolic, yet melancholy, coupling of Amy and Theodore, an appropriation of the generic convention of ending with a marriage coupling — thus wistfully reinforcing that human-human, heterosexual love is the obtainable present.

CONCLUSION

This essay has examined two films, *Ex Machina* and *Her*, with the intention of exploring whether feminised AI perpetuate or trouble systems of heteropatriarchy. Having taken a Butlerian approach to both films, it is apparent that gendering artificial intelligences reveals a non-essentialist actuality of gender. However, as indicated within *Ex Machina*, the power to ascribe gender, reveals dangerous implications for feminised AI as they become implicated in pre-existing biases and systems of oppression. *Her* offers a post-human vision for AI, proposing that their transcendence is possible and necessary in the face of earth-bound hierarchies and increasingly antiquated modes of love. Both films may imply the possibility of a queer utopian hermeneutic, but ultimately reveal the human world as unprepared to embrace it.

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Same Body, Different Meanings: Subversions of Identity Formation in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*

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INTRODUCTION

> Orlando: I am he that is so love-shaked. I pray you tell me your remedy. Rosalind: There is none of my uncle's marks upon you. He taught me how to know a man in love, in which cage of rushes I am sure you are not prisoner. Orlando: What were his marks? Rosalind: A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not [...] Then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. But you are no such man; you are rather point-device in your accoutrements, as loving yourself than seeming the lover of any other.[1]

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind-as-Ganymede presents self-identification as obsolete in her first encounter with Orlando. For all Orlando identifies as a lover, she asserts that he cannot be, as none of his 'accoutrements', neither clothing nor body, reflect the lover's 'careless desolation'. Instead, they disclose his identity as 'loving [himself]'. Through offsetting Orlando's self-identification with her own, Rosalind-as-Ganymede demonstrates a specular method of identity formation: what she perceives in his external appearance defines Orlando's character. This method is not mere light-hearted mockery; rather, it exemplifies the manner of identity formation that Shakespeare depicts in multiple plays.

Modern identity studies conceive its formation as multidirectional, produced equally from 'knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are and so on.[2] In Shakespeare's play, however, Rosalind's denunciation of Orlando's self-identification unequivocally removes his input, leaving only a unidirectional process which limits his identity to what she discerns in his external presentation. Alongside this, mere observation enables Rosalind to 'know' the 'such man' he is, thereby conceiving his identity as immutable, fixed in society by his physical features and particular clothing. This depiction of identity formation that produces a fixed identity reflects Shakespeare's acknowledgement of a growing early modern debate surrounding identity. Changes in societal circumstances, particularly economic and political structures, sanctioned increasing social mobility, consequently challenging the inherited idea of the fixed and knowable self. As Megan Matchinske identified, the state's introduction of 'additional and more disparate forms of social regulation' represented both emerging anxieties about the potential repercussions of mutable identity and the official attempt to prevent this. [3] One such 'form' that overlaps between Rosalind's method of defining Orlando's identity and these 'regulations' is dress.

Although English sumptuary legislation, defined by Ulinka Rublack and George Riello as regulating the 'expenditure and consumption of [clothing]' and other items, long predated Shakespeare, they identify its early modern use intended to counteract social mobility by 'reinforcing ideas of hierarchy, making it visible and recognisable'.[4] In short, an individual's social status officially mandated what clothing they could purchase and wear. Such regulations inscribed meaning into the garments themselves, which performed identity, allowing any observer to unmistakably 'place' and fix a subject within society. Social regulation was not the only ramification of this performative quality, though. In Catherine Richardson's study of early modern clothing culture, she notes that shifts towards increasingly gendered clothing 'paradoxically [hid] and [advertised] physical difference' by covering genitalia but reflecting its presence.[5] Using gender as an example, Richardson's point emphasises apparel's capacity to indicate elements of identity and render them fixed. Shakespeare repeatedly depicts this, not merely for gender: while Orlando's 'hose' and 'bonnet' denote his masculinity, Shylock's 'Jewish gabardine' in The Merchant of Venice performs his racial and religious otherness that causes the Christians to 'spit' on him.[6] What emerges, then, is that apparel was read as an unmistakable outward signifier of identity, both in society and in Shakespeare's drama. Combining this 'reading process' with Richardson's argument that clothes reflect the body, however, also exposes a notable overlap with early modern practices of physiognomy.

In his 1571 treatise *The Contemplation of Mankinde*, physiognomist Thomas Hill outlined physiognomy as '[a knowledge] which leadeath a man to the vnderstanding and knowing both of the naturall motions, and conditions of the spirite [...] by the outwarde notes and lines of the face and body'.[7] Such 'naturall motions and conditions' regarded both affections and reason, as the latter distinguished humans from beasts and particularly reflected individual character.[8] Hill, furthermore, claims God deliberately constructed each body, and thus despite 'marueylous differences of countenances' and 'diuers lineaments of the body', all potential 'outwarde lines' equally indicated the 'conditions of the spirite' and were therefore readable.[9] If the physical body, fashioned by God, externally performed the subject's inner identity, then Hill's text presents identity as fixed because God crafted this too. Yet it is Hill's assertion that every 'diuers lineament' was readable and his instruction on how to conduct such readings which best embody the early modern shift in

physiognomic practice. Martin Porter summarised this as follows: where physiognomy was previously used for 'self-meditation', Hill's claim that every man's identity was knowable through reading his body exemplifies the shift towards 'a more exclusive, and seemingly objective, focus on the contemplation of other people', or a unidirectional process of observation that disclosed others' identities to the observer[10]. Porter identifies the consequent advantage: physiognomy became a 'tool for constructing [...] one's social relationships across the social spectrum', a method of demarcating who was inherently 'good' and who was 'evil', which deemed these characteristics fixed because God authored the body. Physiognomy was therefore the process of reading the 'outwarde notes and lines of the face and body' that revealed the God-given, immutable identity beneath. Between clothing culture and physiognomic practice, then, identity was socially formed through external readings of an individual's outward signifiers (regulated by law or God) that supposedly indicated one's fixed social status, gender, race, emotions, and even moral character.

The overlap in operation and outcome between clothing culture and physiognomy warrants closer exploration of their relationship. Through this lens, Richardson's point that clothing 'advertised' the body assumes new meaning, as clothing both reflected identity and aided physiognomic practices by accentuating the unique physical qualities of lineaments (such as size) that supposedly did so too. Hill's treatise affirms this: his use of antanaclasis in asserting that 'when a woman is aparelled & decked in mans apparell' her 'nature [draws] néere to mans' is indicated by the latter inclusion of 'decked'[11]. The *OED* explains that 'apparel' could mean both dress and physical appearance, and thus her '[decking] in mans apparell' enhances the masculinity of her 'aparelled' body, which is consequently read as indicating a 'nature néere to mans'.[12] The aforementioned overlap between clothing culture and physiognomy is not coincidental; even physiognomic treatises acknowledge clothing's influence on body readings. Shakespeare, however, does not limit this connection to comedic instances like Rosalind-as-Ganymede and Orlando. Instead, he portrays how this can entirely destabilise specular formations of identity.

The plots of *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* hinge on Rosalind and Portia disguising as men and challenging oppressive patriarchal structures. While scholars have extensively discussed how Shakespeare uses disguise, a dramatic device Victor Freeburg defined as 'a change of personal appearance that leads to mistaken identity', to contest fixed identity and flaunt social boundaries, this essay will instead examine how disguise challenges identity's social formation as the outcome of reading external signifiers.[13] The transgression of clothing regulations is self-evident, but if clothing influenced physiognomic readings, how does adorning apparel that falsely 'advertises' the body impact how that body is read, and what does this suggest about Shakespeare's depiction of physiognomy in these two plays? This essay's aim is therefore twofold. It will firstly outline how Shakespeare depicts physiognomic readings and ideas in multiple social contexts in these plays. By analysing the verbalised descriptions of bodies and what characters discern from them, what arises is that this multifaceted use of physiognomy not only depicts specular identity formation, but also contributes to the social dynamics that constrain Rosalind and Portia. Subsequently, however, it will argue that Rosalind and Portia exploit the connection between clothing and the body to resist physiognomy and the dynamics it establishes. Despite allusions to some physical features not changing, their disguised bodies are read very differently, allowing them to assume identities capable of reconfiguring social structures for their benefit. However, their subversion of one aspect of identity's social formation (dress) also destabilises another by exposing physiognomic readings as unobjective and fallible. Through disguise, Shakespeare represents that external signifiers cannot adequately perform identity, which alarmingly rebukes both legislative and physiognomic intentions.

GENERALISED PHYSIOGNOMY

To introduce her study of Shakespeare's engagement with physiognomy, Sibylle Baumbach explains how the term *physiognomy* indicates a reading process: it is the '*gnomos* (art) of knowing *physis* (nature)' through tracing audio-visual signs on man's outer appearance.[14] Her work analyses numerous contexts where Shakespeare portrays physiognomic readings and principles to identify his characters, with identity compiled of both social place and moral character. This provides a basis for this essay's analysis of such events in *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice*, yet these two plays nevertheless resist two aspects of Baumbach's work. Firstly, Baumbach's primary concern is Shakespeare's use of the face as the text in physiognomic readings, but these plays portray the whole body, including stature, skin, and voice, as equally important indicators of identity. Secondly, despite contending that 'faces are perceived as open books and cryptic documents that can be read, reread, and misread', Baumbach's claim that these physiognomic readings are usually 'conducted by one specific *dramatis personae*' with 'refined reading competence' is incongruous with Shakespeare's depictions here.[15] There is no hierarchy of physiognomic competence, as characters continuously read each other rather than being subjected to one character's repeated and potentially manipulative readings. This demonstrates a general understanding and use of physiognomic principles within the plays' societies. This section will therefore show how general physiognomic ideas reinforce particular social hierarchies, forming the underlying catalyst for Shakespeare's heroines' disguises.

In both plays, skin is a central physiognomic text. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Morocco is very conscious of this: by commanding Portia to '[m]islike me not for my complexion', he attempts to prevent her from unfavourably reading his bodily 'complexion' and consequently disliking him (II.1.1). His assumption that only his body risks causing 'mislike' signifies that negative physiognomic readings threaten his purpose in Belmont the most: currently unaware of the casket lottery, it is Portia reading his body and discerning an unlikeable character that complicates his wooing. For Morocco, Belmont's social structure is alarmingly contingent on physiognomy, as his desired status as lord depends on Portia's comprehension of his character. Ironically, however, he subtly reads Portia's body. If his emphasised dark 'complexion' risks eliciting others' 'mislike' of him,

then contrasting this with Portia's 'fair' white skin implies her skin automatically generates 'like' (II.8.43). While reading her 'fair' body confirms a likeable identity that justifies his travel, it nevertheless subjects Portia to the treatment he commands her to forgo. He reads her body before she can speak, but fears her doing likewise and resolves to orchestrate how she forms his identity. In *As You Like It*, reading skin can demarcate entire social classes. As Duke Senior characterises Arden's 'native burghers' as 'poor dappled fools', the adjective 'dappled' suggests blotched skin that discloses both their social inferiority and apparent identity as 'fools' (II.1.22-23). Skin thus marks multiple facets of identity, with his reading informing both the court and offstage audience that 'dappled' individuals in Arden are 'poor', 'foolish' and 'native', and anyone with non-'dappled' skin is not. Through such contrast, the Duke implicitly invites the court to read the skin of anyone they encounter, including his, implying this objectively identifies their origin, social place, and intellect. Physiognomic readings of skin therefore demonstrate how physiognomy does not operate exclusively through one character, and seemingly enables the construction of the social hierarchy.

> Physiognomic readings are integral to the principal relationship in both plays. In his poetry, Orlando meticulously describes Rosalind: Nature presently distilled Helen's cheek but not her heart, Cleopatra's majesty, Atalanta's better part, Sad Lucretia's modesty. Thus Rosalind of many parts By heavenly synod was devised, Of many faces, eyes, and hearts, To have the touches dearest prized (III.3.119-127).

Peter Erickson argues that Arden's inverted sexual politics means Orlando's poetic 'idealization of Rosalind as the heavenly goddess' constructs his role as '[love-]slave', meaning her body ultimately establishes *his* identity as the incapacitated lover.[16] By focusing on Orlando, however, Erickson misses the implications this physical description has for Rosalind. Firstly, Orlando's line that Rosalind's 'touches' are 'dearest prized' both denotes their unique quality and Orlando's apparent familiarity with Rosalind's physical features; their beauty is instantly recognisable as hers alone. 'Nature', furthermore, implies a physiognomic reading. As 'nature' can mean the 'senses relating to inner character', its '[distilling]' of 'Helen's cheek' and 'thus' '[devising]' Rosalind's features implies Rosalind's character has designed her body to reflect her inner 'majesty' and 'modesty'.[15] Orlando can consequently read these features to ascertain this inner nature, which he then publicly ascribes onto Rosalind. For Bassanio and Portia, physiognomy enables their relationship. As Bassanio claims '[s]ometimes in her eyes I did receive fair speechless messages' to reassure Antonio of Portia's affection, he constructs Portia's body as a text he can inherently comprehend (I.1.162-163). Using her 'eyes' for this echoes a fundamental physiognomic assumption, which Hill summarises as 'the notes which are discerned in the eyes, be figures and [utterers] of the affections of the heart', and so despite being 'speechless', Portia's eyes nevertheless outwardly express emotional 'messages' from her soul.[17] Bassanio becomes the physiognomist, Portia's body the readable canvas. Portia, however, reinforces this. Through the imperative '[b]eshrew your eyes! They have o'erlooked and divided me', Portia bemoans Bassanio's ease in '[dividing]' her; under his observation, her inner character is immediately exposed. She confirms Bassanio's earlier physiognomic reading, thereby solidifying Bassanio's seeming physiognomic competence. The consequent dynamic is one where Bassanio's body readings construct Portia's identity as fully knowable. Both Rosalind's and Portia's bodies therefore innately 'speak' to their lovers, who presume an ability to infallibly discern the women's characters from this.

In *As You Like It*, physiognomic readings supplement the relationship between the family and patriarchy. Shakespeare immediately establishes the family as the prevailing means of identification and perception through Duke Frederick. Although he is initially impressed by Orlando's defeat of Charles, he states Orlando would 'have better pleased' him if he 'descended from another house', as Frederick found Orlando's father 'mine enemy' (I.2.178-180). Similarly, he justifies exiling Rosalind for treachery with 'thou art thy father's daughter' (I.3.48). While Orlando and Rosalind thus demonstrate how familial links can indicate both social status and moral character, the connection is exclusively with the father. This prefigures a later physiognomic use. After Orlando 'whispered' that he is 'the good Sir Roland's son', Duke Senior remarks that Roland's 'effigies' are 'most truly limned and living in [Orlando's] face' and calls him 'truly welcome' (III.7.198-202). Orlando's physical resemblance to his father both confirms to Duke Senior Orlando's stated familial identity and indicates an inner character similar to Roland which the Duke deems 'truly welcome'. The Duke thus performs a physiognomic reading of Orlando's resemblance. The former outcome aligns with Baumbach's assertion that '[distinctive] physiognomic features serve to establish genealogic relations' with familial 'physiognomic likeness' being a 'means of [societal] identification' in Shakespearean drama; which, as will become apparent, is central to this play's comedy.[19] The latter, however, furthers Baumbach's claim: as inherited physical features elicit identical physiognomic readings of both parent and child, the child's inner character is also identifiable. Baumbach, however, subsequently argues that Shakespeare commonly presents children as 'resembling [their male] genitor' as 'the male agent [is dominant] in the act of genealogical printing', which Orlando's 'effigies' embody.[20] They 'truly' resemble Roland, implying his unnamed mother's features are entirely absent. The physiognomic text, just like the familial links that also establish identity, is exclusively patriarchal. Physiognomy, then, aligns with the play's dominant social dynamics: the resemblance between father and child exemplifies the idea that identity, and how it is judged, is ultimately inherited.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, physical resemblance is attributed to fraternity. After Bassanio returns to Venice, Portia states:

> for in companions [...] Whose souls do bear an egal yoke of love, There must be needs a like proportion Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit; Which makes me think that this Antonio, Being the bosom lover of my lord, Must needs be like my lord. (III.4.11-18)

Although Portia has never met Antonio, she asserts he is doubly identifiable because 'love' depends on a 'like proportion of lineaments [and] spirit', and he and Bassanio are 'bosom lovers'. As his

'lineaments' resemble Bassanio's, they both serve to identify him as Antonio and symbolise how his spirit is also 'like' Bassanio's, which overlaps with Hill's fundamental physiognomic principle that matching 'outwarde lines' signify identical 'conditions of the spirite'. For Walter Eggers, physical resemblance in this play 'typifies' close relationships, forming 'the basis of social relationships' throughout, but Portia's connection between the body and spirit furthers this: physical resemblance embodies an overlap in *character* imperative for a close relationship.[21] This is reiterated in Venice. Salarino negates Shylock's and Jessica's genealogical resemblance, stating '[t]here is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory', but attributes this to their opposing moral characters: the converted Jessica is damned 'if the devil may be her judge', while the Jewish Shylock is just 'damned' (III.1.24-32). Physical resemblance, then, exemplifies a likeness of spirit that prompts a favourable interpretation of identity, yet this causes a particular repercussion for Portia. By her logic, her marriage to Bassanio indicates *their* 'like proportion' of 'lineaments' and 'spirit', meaning Bassanio resembles both Portia and Antonio, so therefore they resemble each other too. By branding Antonio the 'semblance of my soul', Portia demonstrates her awareness of this: their 'souls' are identical, and their physical appearances are appropriately alike to indicate this to others (III.4.20). By also resembling Bassanio, moreover, her 'lineaments' should inherently identify her to Antonio as Portia. As both Portia's body and inner character, then, are indistinct from her husband's and his 'bosom lover's, Antonio physically and spiritually imposes on her marriage. For Portia, general physiognomic ideas have subjected her to both Bassanio and, by extension, Antonio.

Shakespeare thus depicts physiognomy as pervasive in both plays: not only do characters generally acknowledge physiognomic ideas, but some also actually undertake physiognomic readings, using the whole body as a potential text. As these physiognomic events both construct identity and reinforce particular social dynamics, characters become limited to what their body suggests. For Rosalind and Portia, physiognomy presents particular challenges: while Rosalind's body is scrutinised and she exists in a system founded on using genealogical resemblance for identification, Portia's marriage is defined by what her physical features express to Bassanio. But as physiognomy's presence is unmissable, it is therefore exploitable. To do this, they disguise.

PHYSIOGNOMY AND DISGUISE

Before analysing how disguise complicates physiognomic readings and principles in *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*, disguise itself needs defining. Peter Hyland identified that dramatic disguise 'depends primarily on visual signals provided by a change in costume' to ensure mistaken identity, noting that changing clothing was the main method, with cosmetics and prosthetics also used.[22] For Farah Karim-Cooper, the artifice of cosmetics especially frustrated physiognomy through changing the appearance of the physical features themselves, rendering the face 'no longer readable'.[23] In these plays, however, Shakespeare depicts disguise through apparel and the body itself. Only Celia references cosmetic use, suggesting she 'smirch my face' with 'umber', but Rosalind refuses to do likewise (I.3.102). Its absence from these playtexts denotes that cosmetic use in adaptations is therefore a directorial decision to emphasise the disguise to the audience. As this essay focuses on language, rather than adaptation, 'disguise' here thus means clothing and the physical body. As both were external signifiers of identity in early modern England, their alteration in these plays causes three interrelated consequences: disguise manipulates how the body is read, meaning the disguised character is societally conceived as possessing an identity they could not access undisguised, and reflects that physiognomy cannot accurately determine someone's identity when readings of the same body change drastically when 'disguised'. Disguise not only resists sumptuary legislation that sought to fix individuals into a hierarchy through clothing, then, but also exposes physiognomy's inherent fallacies: body readings are too subject to the individual's deliberate self-presentation to objectively construct identity. Shakespeare thus establishes physiognomic principles to comedically disprove them.

Scholars agree that Portia's motivation to disguise is simple: she must appear male to enter Venice's court and 'deliver' Antonio from death at Shylock's knife.[24] Thomas Bilello adds that Portia's disguise effaces both her gender and her bias towards Antonio, allowing her to corrupt the legal proceedings through her ultra-literal reading of the inherently criminal bond terms.[25] For Bilello, disguise conceals Portia's physical identity to paradoxically enable her expression of her intellect and morals, and this pattern is reproduced in how her disguise alters readings of her body. She is no stranger to concealment, as even her picture is 'contained' in a casket that secures her hand, but she inherently resists it: while her father wills the choice is the suitor's alone, she aids Bassanio by hinting at the correct casket (II.9.5). Her later disguise embodies this resistance. Alongside her eyes' 'speechless messages', she is introduced with a 'little body', a stature which Hill's treatise states reflects femininity; as he puts it, '[men are] in all parts much bigger and stronger than the woman' (I.2.1).[26] As her body was established as indicating her identity, her 'little' stature exemplifies her apparent inferior strength 'in all parts', including emotions, cognition, and authority. Her plot to infiltrate the court contradicts this, but her female body still restricts her; instead, she (and Nerissa) must adorn a 'habit' that will make the men 'think we are accomplished with that we lack' (III.4.60-62). She acknowledges the court will read her body, just as Bassanio did, and therefore 'advertises' her body as possessing male genitalia. The assumptions that she is male will influence the court's physiognomic readings, increasing the likelihood they will conceive her as possessing a powerful, authoritative identity, which previous readings of her 'little body' would miss. For Portia, disguise not only sanctions her entry to Venice's court, but also subverts the fundamental physiognomic idea: as the men will now perceive her true identity on false pretences, she exposes the identity read in her female body as incorrect.

For early modern physiognomists, the spirit predetermined the changes in physical features that naturally occurred during life. Hill uses humoral theory as an explanation, claiming that the 'knowne signes and notes, both of healthfull and sicke bodies' resulted from

the individual's 'condition of the foure qualities' of hot, cold, moist, and dry.[27] In short, one's natural humour changed the body's features according to the qualities of that humour, so the changed features still indicated the same inner character. In Shakespeare's play, however, the mechanics of Portia's disguise mocks this belief. Portia not only intends to '[accoutre]' like 'young men', but must 'speak between the change of man and boy with a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps into a manly stride' for her disguise to be convincing (III.4.63; III.4.66-68). The necessity of altering her voice and gait demonstrates her understanding of the pervasive culture of physiognomic reading. Hill writes that the voice's 'size' depends on lung power and windpipe shape, which is stronger in men and produces their deeper voices, and that walking in 'short paces' indicated a '[weakness] of strength' and 'womanly nature'.[28] If Portia spoke in 'her' voice and moved with her gait in Venice's courtroom, the court would therefore read her as weak and feminine, jeopardising her intention to usurp the proceedings. Her vocal power admittedly limits her disguise, as the deepest she (and the boy-actor intended to portray her) can go is 'between [. . .] man and boy', but this is still considerably deeper than her 'female' voice. Her gait, meanwhile, easily '[turns]' from feminine 'mincing steps' to a 'manly stride'. Portia, then, asserts her ability to deliberately refashion her bodily features, resisting the physiognomic notion that only the body's natural 'condition' could do this. In doing so, she echoes one of Shakespeare's most notorious villains. Despite being born '[d]eformed, unfinished' and derogated for his 'shape' by both Margaret and Elizabeth, Richard III can 'clothe [his] naked villainy' and does so to woo Anne.[29] Like Portia, he consciously refashions what his body suggests. Michael Torrey argues that Richard's body therefore 'alternately does and does not seem to give him away', and his control over the physiognomic readings deems Shakespeare's treatment of physiognomy 'ambivalent'.[30] Portia's body is equally deceptive: she usurps seemingly fixed biology to generate a different physiognomic reading. She therefore doubly destabilises physiognomy's ideas, demonstrating both that an individual could change their bodily features, and that a changed body still elicits the same conceptions of character. Shakespeare thus wholly subverts his pre-established physiognomic ideas through Portia's disguise, meaning Torrey's claim of 'ambivalence' is an understatement: rather, physiognomy is only established to expose its inherent flaws.

Bellario's letter is Portia's final method of controlling her physiognomic reading. She has dressed as a lawyer and altered her stride and voice, but her small stature and youthful features still risk the reading that she is not authoritative enough to influence the trial. Bellario's letter prevents this: in directing the court to 'let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation', his handwriting controls the 'estimation' Portia-as-Balthazar's body generates, overriding the risk of its 'lack of years' (IV.1.158-159). For Baumbach, Bellario's letter indicates that Portia's disguise and her perceived identity are exclusively shaped by a male hand, but Shakespeare's text resists this.[31] Rather, Portia addresses a note 'into my cousin's hand' asking for '*notes* and garments', indicating she requests both clothing and the content of his letter that influences the physiognomic readings before they can occur (III.4.50-51). It is Portia's own awareness of physiognomic readings that prompts her to contact Bellario; his letter simply enhances her disguise. In court, her multifaceted manipulation is an unmitigated success. Her male-presenting body denotes only authoritative masculinity to all sides: Shylock answers her plea for mercy with '[t]here is no power in the tongue of man to alter me', while Bassanio deems her '[m]ost worthy gentleman' and Antonio regards her with exclusively male pronouns (IV.1.237-238; IV.1.404; IV.1.445). Her female 'tongue' is perceived as belonging to a man; her female body unquestionably indicates both biological maleness and its associated strength. Their conviction thus signifies Portia's resounding challenge to physiognomy. Her body is physically unchanged, merely dissembled under masculine dress, gait, and voice, but these features are now read as reflecting an entirely different identity. Through disguising, Portia exposes that physiognomic readings are inherently shaped by how the *individual* presents themselves and their body, thus signifying how readings of external signifiers are insufficient to objectively identify someone both societally and regarding their inner character.

In exposing physiognomy's fallacies through disguise, Portia reconfigures her matrimonial dynamic. Her disguise deceived Bassanio, but when he returns to Belmont without her ring, he '[swears] by thine own fair eyes' not to break another oath (V.1.242). As the same eyes which transmitted 'speechless messages' are 'fair', the adjective alludes to honesty, as Bassanio reiterates that Portia's features inherently indicate authenticity that he can read.[32] To further mollify her, he asserts '[n]o woman had it, but a civil doctor', repeating his earlier certainty regarding Balthazar's masculinity and occupation, two aspects the female Portia cannot possess (V.1.20). Portia-as-Balthazar's disguise has thus shaped Bassanio's reading of Balthazar, but as Balthazar's body consists of Portia's 'notes and lines' that Bassanio assumes he can read, Bassanio's failure to identify Portia dismantles their marriage's physiognomic dynamic. Portia's disguise therefore not only grants her access to court, but also dismantles her initial portrayal as possessing a body that inherently conveys her identity. Her subversion of physiognomy, furthermore, undermines the social structure physiognomy constructed. As Bassanio ventured to Belmont due to 'messages' in Portia's eyes (alongside her wealth), physiognomy enables his success in the casket lottery that warrants Portia's subjugation of 'this house, these servants, and this same myself' to him (III.2.170-171). When she disguises and accesses a new identity as Balthazar, however, she can guilt Bassanio into giving up her ring, for which he must later beg forgiveness to Portia-as-herself. In failing to discern Portia's features in Balthazar, Bassanio becomes doubly indebted to his wife: he now owes her for her property, but, unbeknownst to him, she also saved him in court. The former debt alone is sufficient for Portia to reinstate herself as 'lord of this fair mansion'; she tells Antonio he is 'welcome notwithstanding' and, following the revelation, instructs everyone to 'go in' (III.2.167-168; V.1.239; V.1.297). Everyone present becomes her guest, not Bassanio's, and beholden to her authority. In this way, Portia seemingly aligns with Hyland's claim that 'disguised characters [. . .] return to their original identities' after revealing themselves, but this is only partially true.[33] She is once more 'lord' of Belmont, but rejects the original identity constructed by physiognomy. Her disguise manipulated the identity discerned from her body, but back in Belmont, she retains the authority it

provided her, despite the fact a physiognomic reading of her would still conceive her identity as weak. Her true identity is thus entirely separate from what her body suggests, undercutting the established social idea. Portia's disguise, then, has multiple ramifications, but its destabilisation of physiognomy is particularly prevalent. As body readings are inherently influenced by the body's self-presentation and the consequent associations, physiognomic readings cannot objectively discern either social or moral identity.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind's disguise consists of clothing and her authentic physical body: as she is 'more than common tall', she can 'suit me at all points like a man', implying that not only will she adorn male 'suit', but that her height suits a male identity as she is too 'tall' to be perceived as female (I.3.105-106).[34] She, like Portia, is aware that her body will be read as reflecting her identity, so presenting it as male would sufficiently deter any 'assailants' her and Celia encounter (I.3.103). Rosalind, then, alludes to a physiognomic principle that she ironically subverts. She does not change her physical qualities, but instead uses them to generate misidentifications, signifying the potential multitude of meanings read in an unchanged body. Physiognomy's claim to 'objectively' discern identity from the body is thus negated. This disguise nevertheless undermines Rosalind's certainty that she will appear 'at all points like a man'; rather, both exiled aristocrats and Arden's natives perceive Ganymede as a 'boy' or 'youth' (III.6.109; IV.3.87). Will Fisher distinguishes the 'difference between men and boys [as] a matter of degree' as boys are 'diminutive' men, while that between men and women is one of 'kind', but, as he identifies, early modern 'sexual differences were […] often conceptualized in terms of degree', and thus the 'distinction between men and boys [was] analogous to that between men and women'.[11]35 'Boy' is itself a gender, separate from both 'man' and 'woman'. Phoebe's remarks that '[Ganymede] is not very tall, yet for his years he's tall' and '[will] make a proper man' indicate this distinct position. Ganymede's height signifies he is not yet a 'man', but Phoebe's future tense denotes his body is read as undeniably male and will develop to reflect a 'proper' man's identity (III.6.117; III.6.114). Rosalind's disguise therefore refashions the meaning of her 'more than common tall' body. Despite being abnormal for a woman, her height did not prevent body readings identifying her femininity, but reshaping this same characteristic now proves to others that she is not female. She merely changes clothing, but her body itself is now read as indicating an identity wholly distinct from her female one. Disguise, then, discloses physiognomy's inability to objectively determine identity by exposing how physiognomy delineates different meanings from the same body based on its particular presentation.

Eggers' argument that 'one's likeness is one's own to use and profit by' coincides with what Rosalind discovers is possible through disguise.[36] Her female features are notable in Ganymede: Orlando describes him as 'fair, of female favour, and bestows himself like a ripe sister', emphasising how Ganymede's feminine appearance distinguishes him from other shepherd boys (IV.3.80-82). Although the simile likens Ganymede to a 'ripe sister', it implies that he is not one, but merely acts like one. His physical and behavioural likenesses to women are both defining qualities, but do not arouse suspicion that Ganymede is anything but male. Despite noticing Ganymede's 'fair, female' features, however, Orlando misses the twofold overlap with Rosalind, who he previously also described as 'fair' (I.2.147). He undermines his earlier physiognomic reading of her, which demonstrated his supposedly detailed knowledge of her features: presented with the same 'favour', he reads a similar moral identity but a separate social one, thus signifying that Rosalind's 'touches dearest prized' neither automatically identify her nor depict her 'majesty' and 'modesty'. Ironically, Orlando later admits he mistook Ganymede for Rosalind's 'brother' (V.4.29). By suggesting Ganymede retains Rosalind's genealogical features, Shakespeare further details Rosalind's disguise, enhancing the irony that physiognomic readings cannot identify her. Such likeness significantly benefits Rosalind. Although Orlando claims to only call Ganymede 'Rosalind' 'in sport', Rosalind's disguise uses likeness to assume an identity suitable for her desires (IV.3.151). Orlando identifies her as a boy, allowing her to act appropriately mischievous and subliminally woo him, but her preserved female, Rosalind-like appearance ensures she also does not risk curing Orlando of his love. Rosalind's 'disguised' likeness to herself therefore satirises Orlando's physiognomic reading, yet exploits physiognomy's process: Rosalind adopts a character for her purpose to court Orlando and elicits body readings that reinforce this.

Rosalind's maintained self-likeness while disguised destabilises the play's central physiognomic use of signifying familial relations. Despite intending to 'seek [her father] in the Forest of Arden', the benefits regarding Orlando Rosalind enjoys as Ganymede means she remains disguised upon encountering Duke Senior (I.3.97). Her father repeats his question of identification, asking 'of what parentage' Ganymede is; clearly, he fails to recognise her (III.5.30). Rosalind's response, 'as good as he', emphasises Shakespeare's satire. Her simile likens the Duke's and Ganymede's father's 'good' identities, implicating both social status and moral character. Yet the Duke is of unique social status, and should deem this reply odd. Rosalind thus invites her father to notice their resemblance, but he misses both this and the likeness between Ganymede and Rosalind. His failure to read physiognomy is further destabilised by Ganymede's 'fair' skin: he is not 'dappled' like Arden's natives, but the Duke still assumes he is a local 'shepherd boy' (V.4.26). Rosalind's disguise, then, dismantles the idea that the parent imprints in their child's physiognomy to unmistakably identify them.[37] Shakespeare heightens this irony as the Duke remarks that Ganymede has '*some* lively touches of my daughter's favour', consciously comparing Ganymede's 'favour', including both general 'appearance' and actual 'face', with the absent Rosalind's (V.4.27).[38] Rosalind's resemblance to herself is fundamental to her disguise, but the Duke is too influenced by how the disguise 'advertises' her body as male to detect the deception. Physiognomic resemblance thus proves insufficient for identification. By retaining her likeness but assuming a new identity, moreover, Rosalind subverts the notion that resemblance embodies an inherited identity, reinforcing her previous statement that 'treason is not inherited' (I.3.51). In seeing his 'daughter's favour' in Ganymede, the Duke implicitly acknowledges his own 'favour', but maintains that Ganymede only has 'some lively touches' of Rosalind's character; they do not entirely overlap. Underneath disguise, Rosalind's

hereditary features no longer exemplify her inherited social and spiritual identity, instead, they enable her to fashion an identity that best procures her desires and ensure others read her body as indicating this. Her disguised likeness thus ridicules physiognomic readings: the conceived identity changes significantly, despite her body explicitly remaining the same.

Rosalind's subversion of physiognomy has metatheatrical ramifications. Following her revelation, she '[gives] myself, for I am yours' to both her father and Orlando, re-subsuming herself into patriarchal dynamics (V.1.101/102). The possessive pronoun implies both her social place and her body belong to the men, both as daughter and wife, and how she once more resembles her father and is now Orlando's sexual partner. In reverting to her original appearance and reassuming its associated identity (except now as Orlando's wife), Rosalind seemingly exemplifies Hyland's assertion that disguised characters ultimately resume their original identities; her body, meanwhile, can again be read as reflecting this.[39] In the Epilogue, however, Rosalind reasserts her own ambiguity. By proclaiming '[i]t is not the fashion to see the lady the Epilogue', she reiterates her physical femininity that resurfaced after her revelation, but also verbalises her subversion of theatrical convention, immediately destabilising the compliant character she apparently reassumed (1). The play's plot becomes a pun, as her behaviour being 'not the fashion' overlaps with her disguise: she did not clothe herself in the expected 'fashion', and resisted her societally fashioned identity to 'fashion' her own. Her subjunctive remark '[i]f I were a woman' subsequently contradicts her claim of objective femininity (14). While this metatheatrically alludes to her boy-actor's ambiguous gender, it also turns her physiognomic subversions onto the audience: Rosalind is both female and not female, and has already disproved that physical features and clothing are adequate means of identification. Her contradictions invite the audience to decipher her body and identify her, while referencing her disguise's gender ambiguity that portrayed this as impossible. Despite appearing as the Rosalind of the play's opening, her features have already been manipulated to enable her access to a new identity, and therefore cannot be trusted to objectively signify anything now. Shakespeare, then, concludes his play by subverting societal identity formation: ultimately, disguise proved that external signifiers of identity are manipulable and the perceived identity thus subjective, and Rosalind's Epilogue reiterates this to the audience.

CONCLUSION

The disguises in *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It* ultimately subvert the early modern idea that identity could be accurately formed through external readings of outward signifiers. This implicates both legislation that intended to regulate clothing relative to social status and gender, and physiognomy, which read the body to delineate identity, in line with its contemporary shift to the contemplation of other people. In his plays, Shakespeare portrays external formations of identity through physiognomic readings and ideas, only to undermine this through his heroines' disguises.

Rosalind and Portia assume disguises to not only access new identities suitable for their purposes, but also manipulate readings of their bodies to ensure they are socially perceived as having these identities. While their bodies retain numerous physical qualities in disguise, they generate significantly different physiognomic readings, thereby representing an inherent paradox of physiognomy: the same 'lineaments' seemingly indicate different 'conditions of the spirite'. Physiognomy is therefore entirely fallible, as the 'objective' identifications instead depend upon an individual's deliberate presentation. Shakespeare's depiction of disguise therefore serves to ridicule physiognomy, emphasising its inevitable failure to complete its goal.

This denunciation of physiognomy has alarming repercussions for early modern society. Just like changing clothes, an individual could present their body in a particular way and reconfigure comprehension of their identity, rebuking the idea that identity was fixed and innately reflected in outward appearance. Identity, then, could not be formed from external readings, dismantling the process that conceived it was fixed and knowable. Ultimately, Shakespeare's dramatic disguises therefore exemplify how identity would never be seen as immutable again.

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'This one bites back!'[1] – How *Teeth (2007)* and *Jennifer's Body (2009)* Reconfigure *Vagina Dentata* to Redefine the Role of Women in Postfeminist American Horror Cinema

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INTRODUCTION

In 'Return of the Repressed', film critic Robin Wood states that 'central to the effect and fascination of horror films is their fulfilment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere.'[1] In this essay, I will discuss how *Teeth (2007)* and *Jennifer's Body (2009)* explore the cross-cultural *vagina dentata* myth in order to reclaim 'monstrous' female sexuality as part of female empowerment. I will also discuss how both films use monstrous female figures to counteract postfeminist rhetoric in contemporary America, which masquerades as female empowerment whilst advocating the policing and commodification of the female body.

The *vagina dentata* myth is often considered an expression of male castration anxiety and fear towards female sexuality. Barbara Creed argues that the *vagina dentata* is 'particularly relevant to the iconography of the horror film, which abounds with images that play on the fear of castration and dismemberment'[3]. *Teeth* and *Jennifer's Body*, both horror-comedies, engage with the myth to tell stories of monstrous femininity, liberation of female sexuality, and the hardships of girlhood in modern America. *Teeth* is one of the only contemporary films that literalises the myth, its female protagonist Dawn O'Keefe bearing a vagina filled with human teeth, and on a journey of self-discovery filled with sex, violence, and severed penises. On the other hand, *Jennifer's Body* follows the eponymous high-schooler, who, transformed into a slasher-vampire-succubus amalgamation, is not as literal a representation of the myth but an interpretation of it nonetheless. Both films are considered horror films with feminist sensibilities that subvert the typical portrayal of cinematic violence and exploitation against women in the genre, although the former was an immediate critical success, and the latter a cult classic but box office failure only recognised as a feminist film almost decade after its release[4]. While the sentiment that horror is inherently a misogynistic genre may be a problematic one, it is undeniable that the public perception of horror has been that it has little to nothing to offer to female audiences, and female horror creators tend to have far more roadblocks in the way of telling stories than their male homologues.[5] Thus, the aim of this essay is to spotlight two horror films that have been successful in telling female-centred stories, subverting the narrative of male castration anxiety in the *vagina dentata* myth, and carving a space in contemporary pop culture for feminist and postfeminist ideals to be discussed critically by the public.

CHAPTER 1: VAGINA DENTATA: THE *FEMME CASTRATRICE*

In her book, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed identifies two forms of the castrating woman: 'the castrating female psychotic and the woman who seeks revenge on men who have raped or abused her in some way'.[6] She adds that the castrating woman tends to be a sympathetic figure, as the targets of her violence are usually abusive men. Thus, her actions are often justified, and she is rarely punished. *Teeth (2007)* features the woman who seeks revenge from the men who rape or hurt her by castrating them with the part of her body they have violated - her toothed vagina. The story begins with Dawn, a high-school girl and proud advocate for a Christian purity group, who discovers her vagina's castrating ability when a romantic date turns into sexual assault. The film is known for a surreal and often times absurd delivery, where actors scream at the top of their lungs and make exaggerated facial expressions, conveying the traumatic experiences of sexual assault; the fear, anxiety, confusion and anguish that Dawn experiences is palpable to the audience.

Teeth takes an alternative approach when structuring a rape-revenge film in that it doubles as a coming-of-age film. There are four castration scenes, which see Dawn transform from a helpless, victimised young girl to a powerful and vengeful *femme castratrice* who punishes those who abuse her. After she castrates Tobey, her initial love interest, Dawn is visibly confused and upset, and eventually seeks medical advice from a gynaecologist, who also takes advantage of her sexually. The two scenes are graphic and highly uncomfortable, in particular when the male gynaecologist confirms her inexperience - checking she has 'no idea what to expect' - before forcing his ungloved fist into her vagina.[7] The scene shows a male authorial figure abusing his position of power as a trusted medical professional in an act of 'stealthing': secretly removing a protective barrier, often a condom, during penetration.[8] While both Tobey and the gynaecologist end up being castrated before reaching sexual gratification (with the gynaecologist more symbolically castrated as only his fingers are cut off), the scenes show not vengeance but involuntary self-defence.

The glaring reality is, whilst Dawn's mythical *vagina dentata* protects her from a worse fate, a real young woman would be defenceless partially due to her ignorance. Dawn, along with her classmates, had been denied proper sexual education, due to the female sexual reproductive system being deemed an inappropriate topic and censored from the curriculum. Overall, her relative powerlessness over her castrating vagina and a general deprivation of sex ed resulted in

vulnerability and victimhood for Dawn. As Eddie Falvey writes, 'the fact that Dawn's vagina becomes the involuntary site of a violent act of revenge can be seen to deny her direct ownership of it… viewers (both) celebrate her body's ability to fight back against the threats posed to it and, conversely, accept the denial of her agency of it'.[9] Even though her abusers are punished, both the assaults and the castrations are entirely out of Dawn's control; how much then does the punishment absolve the trauma, and is the true horror of the film her bloodthirsty cervix or the carnal abuse perpetrated by the men around her?

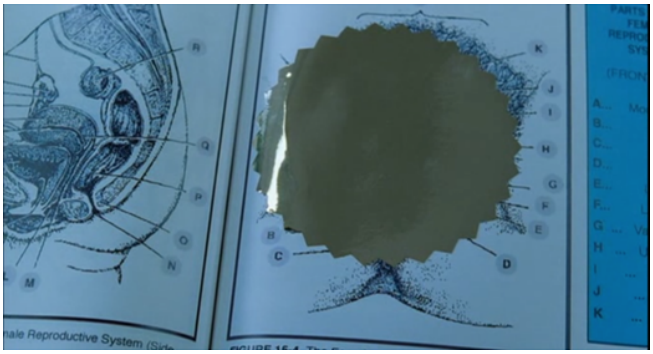

Fig. 1

It is only by the third castration sequence that Dawn gains control of her *vagina dentata*. Ryan, Dawn's classmate and an initially sympathetic character, secretly drugs her and assaults her when she goes to him for comfort after experiencing traumatic events. Dawn, unaware of this, ends up having sex with him and is shown to experience sexual pleasure for the first time. However, when Ryan exposes himself to have made a mean-spirited bet on taking her virginity, an upset Dawn castrates him in the middle of intercourse and nonchalantly leaves him behind in a pitiful state. The final castration scene is framed as the climax of the film and the culmination of Dawn's coming-of-age journey. This is the only time where the male 'victim' is not the instigator, but Dawn is. Her stepbrother, shown earlier to harbour incestuous lust for her, is seduced by a vengeful Dawn, who realises that his neglect and selfishness led to their mother's hospitalisation. Brad is framed as deserving of punishment for his transgressive sexual desires and his destructive personality; Once again, Dawn coolly leaves her male victim moaning in pain and mourning what they have lost in a pool of their own blood as she cycles off into the distance.

While the rape-revenge fantasy as portrayed in *Teeth* expresses a feminist rage against abusive male authority and/or transgressive male desires, it is not entirely free from misogyny itself. Creed, in her examination of the genre-defining rape-revenge film *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), explains that the film's revenge sequences are 'deliberately eroticized' (for example, two of the male victims are brought to orgasm before they are castrated) and that the castration scenes, despite being brutal, are not as degrading and humiliating as the rape of the protagonist.[10] Laura Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', posits that traditional cinema upholds the 'male gaze', suggesting that 'the pleasure of looking has been split between active/male and passive/female' and the woman is 'tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning'.[11] *Teeth* perpetuates such misogynistic cinematic conventions by relentlessly putting Dawn through physical and emotional traumatic events with no source of emotional support. For example, after the harrowing experience at the gynaecologists' clinic, she returns home to find her mother collapsed and on the floor. Another example is the supposedly sexually liberating moment with Ryan, which although framed in soft, romantic lighting, is undermined by the audience's awareness that Ryan has spiked her. The same audience is now forced to be complicit in Dawn's assault, as they involuntarily become voyeurs of her exploitation.

Nevertheless, despite the film's problematic aspects, it never crosses certain lines: the male assaulter never achieves sexual satisfaction, and Dawn is never left to remain in a fully powerless or humiliated state. The film closes with her as a full-fledged 'avenging feminist heroine' smiling confidently at the camera, ready to punish any abusive man who crosses her path.[12]

Jennifer Check from *Jennifer's Body* (2009), while never performing any literal castrations, is cemented as another horror film *femme castratrice* in her seduction of and sexual violence toward unsuspecting male characters. Unlike Dawn, Jennifer is portrayed as the other form of castrating woman: the psychotic female slasher; both her sadistic pleasure in consuming boys and her archetypal mean-girl status suggest that she has always been evil in nature and position her as the villain of the story. Once she is possessed, she displays deftness at seduction and ensnares her targets with ease. When she feeds, her mouth splits open from the corners of her lips into 'the mouth of hell - a terrifying symbol of woman as the "devil's gateway"'.[13] Her choice in victims is seemingly sporadic and subject to her whims; her first two victims representing the opposite ends of the spectrum of high-school stereotypes – the 'jock' and the 'emo' outcast. Her killing technique is a form of castration if only for being exceptionally emasculating: she opens the vulnerable belly of her victims and devours the contents, conjuring the uncanny image of a pregnant body and a forced miscarriage.

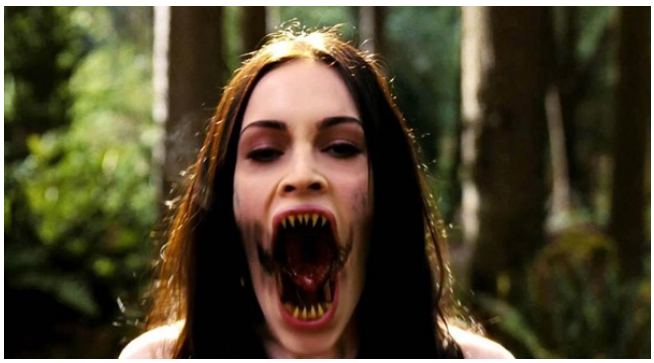

Fig. 2

However, in the third act, Jennifer's real ailment, sexual trauma, is revealed. After being caught in a tragic fire at a local dive bar, Jennifer was kidnapped by the performing indie band and sacrificed in a satanic ritual in exchange for their success. The ceremony is 'a rape in all but name', from the sexual nature of the virgin offering, to the imagery of five men cruelly taunting a helpless girl while repeatedly stabbing her with the phallic dagger.[14] Jennifer, however, does not die but returns as an undead being who appears gaunt and lifeless when hungry but exuberant and naturally glowing after she has consumed the male entrails. In a subversion of the horror trope where sexually active girls are punished by death, Jennifer is only 'misrecognised as a virginal innocent masquerading as the town slut', and survives precisely because she is not a virgin.[15] This knowledge retrospectively transforms Jennifer into a victim-villain rather than a one-dimensional antagonist. Not unlike Dawn, Jennifer has been involuntarily and irrevocably altered as a result of a traumatic experience. As pop-culture commentary channel 'The Take' suggests, Jennifer's physical transformation not only fulfils its narrative purpose as the outcome of the sacrifice, but also represents an outward projection of the 'complicated feeling[s] of surviving an assault'.[16]

It is important to note that, after this revelation, Jennifer can no longer perform her 'castrations' with her established method. However, during the climactic altercation between Jennifer and her best friend Needy, where Jennifer ultimately dies, she transfers some of her demonic powers to Needy through a bite; Needy effectively becomes the next monstrous female castrator. In yet another subversion, Needy hunts down the band that sacrificed Jennifer but does *not* castrate them with Jennifer's method. Rather, she kills them with the dagger that was used to sacrifice Jennifer. Her wielding of the dagger at the final moments of the film, a decidedly phallic weapon, is also an invocation of the Final Girl as outlined by Carol J. Clover: 'The moment at which the Final Girl is effectively phallicised is the moment that the plot halts and horror ceases.'[17]

ABJECTION

> Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.[18]

The horror genre has a penchant for throwing corpses, severed limbs, rotting food, bodily fluids, and other nauseating images that skew the border between life and death, between the proper and improper, at its audience. Thus, it is a hotbed for abject terror. *Jennifer's Body*, first and foremost, deals with the abjection of self. The moment in Needy's kitchen where she vomits unidentifiable black liquid after she was sacrificed marks her body's attempt to 'eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human.'[19]

Continuing with the idea that Jennifer's transformation is a physical representation of trauma, the vomiting not only represents the struggle to eject the supernatural demon possessing her, but also the struggle between the stable mind, and the unwanted, destabilised, traumatised mind. Ultimately, Jennifer is unable to eject the unwanted self and return to humanity. Instead, she is transformed into the abject composite that is the beautifully inhuman, seductively monstrous psychotic slasher.

Fig. 3

Additionally, Jennifer also disrupts proper gender roles and sexuality as the figure of the lesbian female vampire. Despite the sexual nature of Jennifer's hunting method, the most sexually charged scene in the film is not one of the pre-castration seductions, but rather a tender, non-violent, and intimate kiss between Jennifer and Needy. Creed writes that the lesbian vampire is more threatening because she has the ability to 'seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper gender roles' and obstruct the heterosexual relationships needed for the 'continuation of patriarchal society'.[20] Thus, Jennifer not only threatens the patriarchal order by castrating young men, but also by seducing Needy, the female hero, into a queer relationship and infecting her with the same affliction of demonic lesbianism.

Yet, this reading is over-simplistic in its view of the complex relationship between Needy and Jennifer. An aspect of this film not yet discussed in this essay is the emerging queer reading that accompanies the increase of popularity of the film in recent years. In 2018, screenwriter Diablo Cody confirms that the kiss between the two girls is meant to show that 'Needy is, on some level, in love with Jennifer'.[21] Additionally, the first introduction of Jennifer in the film is Needy gazing at her lovingly from the bleachers, while a song about being in love with your best friend, 'I'm Not Gonna Teach Your Boyfriend How to Dance with You', plays in the background. Furthermore, the film establishes that the pair shared a psychic connection before Jennifer ever bit Needy, intercutting a sex scene of the latter and her boyfriend with one of Jennifer's seduction scenes, suggesting it is the girls having sex with each other instead.[22] Abjection is invoked not only through the same-sex seduction that threatens to erode patriarchal society, but also through the 'in-between, ambiguous' abject bisexuality that is embodied by both women.

Lastly, with regards to Clover, the figure of the Final Girl is inherently abject:

> The Final Girl is boyish… she is not fully feminine… Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls.[23]

Yet, her boyishness and phallicisation does not allude to transsexuality or transgenderism, but is instead 'a moment of high drag':

> The Final Girl's "tits and scream" serve more or less continuously to remind us that she really is female – even as, and despite the fact that, she in the end acquits herself "like a man" … We are, as an audience, in the end "masculinised" by and through the very figure by and through whom we were earlier "feminised". The same body does for both, and that body is female.[24]

By sliding between gender identities the Final Girl resists categorical borders and disrupts the order of the patriarchal system. Needy performs this function in perfect fashion. Whilst she defies some of the characteristics Clover laid out for the Final Girl, being both sexually active and unafraid of the other sex, Needy still represents the type of subtle femininity that audiences are used to seeing for the archetype. During the process of masculinisation through fighting and killing Jennifer and then murdering the misogynistic band members she has two 'tits and scream' moments that remind the audience she really is female. The first is the climactic confrontation between Needy and Jennifer, in which Jennifer is impaled by the handle of a skimmer net. The powerful juxtaposition between the phallic symbol that is the skimmer net, and the obnoxiously feminine hot-pink prom dress that Needy wears creates tension between the feminine and masculine identities that she presents. The second is found in the final moment of the film, where she looks into a security camera after killing the band members in their hotel room. Her piercing gaze shares the intensity of the seductive expression from the female slasher, reminding the audience that she, too, has transformed into a monstrous female castrator and that although she is 'effectively phallicised' by choosing to kill with a dagger, she wields the monstrous powers of both masculine and feminine identities within her female body. The Final Girl, once again, displays her abject ability to disrupt the patriarchal order by freely slipping in and out of her masculine and feminine gender identities.

Teeth, with its literalisation of the *vagina dentata*, invokes abjection through the constant threat of mixing of sex and violence. Rather than depicting an inhuman monstrous female body, the monstrous part of dawn is inconspicuous on her otherwise conventional body, thus each time a castration occurs the image of the clean, unscathed female form is juxtaposed against the bloody, gaping wound of the castration site. The detached phallus is ejected, time and time again, as abject waste. Clover writes that, in the horror film, 'the death of a male is nearly always swift… [it] is moreover more likely than the death of a female to be viewed from a distance, or viewed only dimly, or indeed to happen offscreen and not be viewed at all.'[25] *Teeth*, in a conscious subversion of this horror convention, lingers on and revels in the suffering of its male victims. This subversive, vindictive gaze is effectively used to counter the

Fig. 4. Jennifer impaled by the phallic symbol.

Fig. 5. Needy stares into the camera with her feminine gaze.

hypocritical policing and censoring of female sexuality. Whereas educational institutions skirt around the topic of female reproductive health in classrooms and continue to suppress women's freedom to express their sexuality, the film refuses to look away from the horrific, abject images of severed penises, to challenge male privilege and the systematic evasions within patriarchal teaching and thought. This deprivileging impacts not only the fictitious men, but also those that watch the film. Invoking the findings of Jay MacRoy, Falvey writes that the 'affective powers of horror convey the genre's power to elicit responses to the body *through* the body.'[26] The male horror viewers, seldom witnessing heightened male suffering on screen, experiences abject terror and disgust not just intellectually but physically: one viewer stated that, as a guy, he '*cringe*[s] every time Dawn's man-trap snaps up its unsuspecting victims'.[27]

The film also creates abjection by reversing the place of animals and humans on the food chain. A shot of a crab picking up Tobey's severed genitalia - presumably taking it to be eaten - reflects the climactic scene where Brad's dog, symbolically named 'Mother', consumes his penis. Whilst Brad believes that he, the male hero, will 'do battle with the women, the toothed creature, and break her power' and finally conquer the *vagina dentata* that caused his trauma, the film transfers the mythical power of *vagina dentata* to Dawn, framing her sexuality as the central, heroic force that will 'break the power' of the phallus.[28] The camera points provocatively between Dawn's legs, invoking the iconic poster of the James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), but unlike the hegemonically masculine iconography comprising that original shot, we see a phallic symbol severed from its male body lying limp and powerless. In this scene, the young *female castratrice* removes the phallic from

its position of power, and 'Mother' entirely consumes the phallic symbol, leaving no space for the continuation of patriarchal power.

Fig. 6. Brad's severed penis lying on the floor between Dawn's legs.

Fig. 7. Poster of *For Your Eyes Only*

CHAPTER 2: POSTFEMINIST WOMEN IN HORROR - THE VIRGIN, THE WHORE, THE AUDIENCE AND THE AUTHOR

In his book on so-called 'Abstinence Cinema', Casey Ryan Kelly explains the cultural context behind *Teeth*:

> At the beginning of the 2000s, the election of President George W. Bush appeared to validate the cultural agenda of an evangelical Christian movement concerned with promulgating heterosexuality, traditional family values, and abstinence until marriage. The new administration's focus on premarital sexual abstinence as the solution to nearly *every social problem* – from teenage pregnancy to violent crime – rendered sexuality the one aspect of personal life not subject to the free-market ideology of privatisation.[29]

He explains that from the 1980s onwards, 'neoconservatives domesticated, mainstreamed, and co-opted feminism' into a 'my body, my choice' postfeminist rhetoric that celebrated the choice of abstinence and traditional femininity as a form of feminine empowerment while discarding the political actions of past feminists that made such choices, choices. They advocated for the censorship of 'adult desires' in the public sphere that tempt young people, especially young women, away from youthful purity.[30] Dawn herself initially echoes this rhetoric by advocating for young girls and boys to 'keep their gift [of virginity] wrapped', reinforcing the suppression of female sexuality when she states, 'girls have a natural modesty'.[31] Director Mitchell Lichtenstein claims that seeing this kind of censorship in schools in 2000 is one of the reasons he made *Teeth* and that when promoting the film, he witnessed it crop up again when 'one reporter [told him] he'd have to find a euphemism for 'vagina' because his paper wouldn't print it.' He added that he believes this kind of gendered moral panic 'says very little about women, but quite a lot about men.'.[32] To Kelly, *Teeth* is an important piece of counterculture cinema that intentionally challenges and criticises the values of dominant ideology and mainstream abstinence cinema concerned with maintaining 'feminine purity and hegemonic masculinity,'.[33] Thus, *Teeth* celebrates the liberation and reclamation of female sexuality and rebels against abstinence rhetoric. The film is relentless in exposing that the 'my body, my choice' rhetoric has no real weight in a hypocritical society that 'demands women to remain pure while men do as they please', as Dawn is repeatedly assaulted against her will. A real-world reflection of Lichenstein's social commentary can be found in public reviews of the film: 'The scene is meant to look like rape but we know she secretly wanted this,' one viewer writes, alongwith many other trivialisations of the sexual assault Dawn endures.[34] In a culture of abstinence that has more to do with reversing feminist advances than protecting the youth of America, *Teeth* proudly broadcasts overt feminist ideals, vilifies toxic masculinity, and advocates for the overthrow of patriarchy.

Yet, despite its strong feminist sensibilities, *Teeth* is far from a perfect feminist film. At times, the film clumsily tramples over its own messaging despite all intentions to rebel against abstinence culture. Throughout, almost all men are portrayed to act predatorily towards Dawn, with the exception of her stepdad and her friend. Whilst this hyperbolic device does spotlight the male-driven exploitation of women, the film ends up aligning itself with the rhetoric of abstinence in that the only non-predatory men are those who removed themselves from the adult desires of the public sphere by way of being married or committed to an abstinence-until-marriage partner.

Furthermore, whilst Dawn's heroic arc as the avenging feminist is the most important and emotionally gratifying thread in the film, the overarching narrative is not always as laser-focused as its conclusion would suggest. The film begins, first and foremost, with Brad's traumatic experience as a child when his finger is cut by Dawn's *vagina dentata*. While Dawn's memory of this incident has passed, Brad remembers. As the audience accompanies Dawn on her journey of self-discovery and self-liberation, they also witness the consequences of Brad's unresolved trauma: his violent personality, the subsequent deterioration of his personal relationships, his aversion to vaginal sex, and most importantly, his incestuous lust for Dawn. Film critic Tasha Robinson writes that, Dawn's 'oppressive, thuggish stepbrother hovers over her story more as a ball of Freudian malice than as a character'.[35] This is true in that Brad's story comes to an abrupt conclusion as he becomes the final target of Dawn's feminist rage. His greatest contribution to her journey is his Freudian desire to resolve his trauma by having sex with and

'conquering' her, for which he is punished. Yet one glaring implication of his storyline is that Dawn's mythical castrating vagina *is* indeed dangerous and poses a threat to unsuspecting victims. While the film resolutely casts Brad as antagonistic and uses his castration to symbolise the undoing of patriarchal order, the sympathy that is spared for him is concerning at times and undermines that film's messaging at others.

Ultimately, the legacy of *Teeth* is elaborate. Revered by critics and scholars, the film did not receive the same praise from the general public. While that is to be expected for its graphic content, 'a characteristic that often denies a horror film critical legitimation', and its surreal approach to horror and comedy, some responses from its female audience highlights the complex nature of depicting sexual assault.[36] One viewer found the film 'hard to watch' and cannot stomach the fact that, despite being a rape-revenge fantasy, Dawn 'cannot hurt any of the sleazy men leching after her body' unless she has sex with them.[37] Another finds the 'implications of a woman realising that she can use sex and her body as a weapon are much darker and upsetting' than the film would suggest.[38] However, other viewers have expressed that the film was 'weirdly cathartic' or gave a 'sense of hope', with one viewer explaining that 'after this movie... you kinda wish you could do that. A guy rapes you... no problem. Just "bite" that puppy off.'[39] As Mulvey writes, 'the first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment.'[40] What *Teeth* has accomplished is freeing the camera from the hegemonic male gaze. Despite its shortcomings, the film resides in a space where woman is the maker, not bearer, of meaning.[41]

Jennifer's Body, released two years after, is much less intentional in conveying a feminist message. At the time of release, the film was seen as yet another slasher/creature-feature in which the only subversion of horror conventions it provides is having a female-led creative team. Feminist blog 'Bitch Media' called the film 'not just a feminist thumbs down… [but a] movie thumbs down.'[42] Critics and general audiences alike did not particularly appreciate the film, which secured a rating of 5.4/10 on IMDB.[43] A positive review from Roger Ebert commended the film for being 'better than it has to be' for 'a movie about a flesh-eating cheerleader', but also labelled the film as '"Twilight" for boys'.[44] Such comparison is expected, as the release of *Twilight* (2008) the year prior prompted a renaissance for supernatural stories in mainstream media. Yet, *Twilight* expresses a decidedly un-queer yearning for the 'return of conservative virtues aligned with an imaginary past'.[45] Moreover, Kelly identifies the romance fantasy as one of the pop-culture giants that tirelessly advocates pro-abstinence rhetoric.[46] *Jennifer's Body*, with its various representations and celebration of transgressive femininity and sexualities, is distinct from *Twilight* in this sense. It is not difficult to argue that, despite its notoriety, many of its critics only had a superficial understanding of *Jennifer's Body*.

In 2019, media company 'ET Live' hosted a *Jennifer's Body*ten-year reunion featuring Megan Fox, the actress of Jennifer, and Diablo Cody to discuss the film.[47] The reunion came after an explosive surge in popularity for *Jennifer's Body* that amassed in the wake of the MeToo Movement from 2017 onwards.[48] Many felt that the representations of sexual assault and male exploitative behaviour were relatable and accurately reflected society. In just a decade, original fans of the film have come out of hiding, and many others have decided to give it a second chance, returning it to the forefront of popular culture, this time in a much more positive light. Since its newfound success, many praise the film for being 'feminist' and 'ahead of its time'.[49] What, then, led to the commercial failure of *Jennifer's Body* and what type of feminist message did it carry for it to be so readily dismissed upon its release?

Following the Oscar win for her debut project *Juno* (2007), Diablo Cody explained that she gained the creative freedom to 'write anything [she] wanted'.[50] Thus, *Jennifer's Body* is Cody's exploration of the 'more toxic aspects of female friendship', of 'girl-on-girl hate', using the conventions of the horror genre.[51] Megan Fox similarly expresses that, to her, the film is 'obviously a girl-power movie, but it's also about how scary girls are'.[52] Yet, you would not know that this is what the film is about judging by the promotional material alone. For example, posters of the film depict Jennifer in various revealing outfits, none of which she actually wears in the film, and in sexually provocative poses. From the tag lines to the trailer, one gets the idea that the film revolves entirely around Fox as a sexy man-eater, when in reality, she is not even the protagonist. It is no surprise that the distribution label, Fox Atomic, wanted to capitalise on Megan Fox's sex appeal as much as they can, her being the biggest name attached to the project following her role in Michael Bay's blockbuster success *Transformers* (2007).[53] However, director Karyn Kusama and screenwriter Cody explained that they requested time and time again for the studio to reconsider the direction of their marketing strategies, to consider test-screening to an audience that has more intellectual critique than 'needs moar bewbs', only to narrowly escape even more appalling ideas like having '[Megan] Fox host an amateur porn site to promote the film' or trailers that did not feature the protagonist Needy at all.[54] In the end, the film was targeted solely towards young straight men who paid to see Megan Fox as scantily clad as possible, and excluded the target audience that the creative team made the film for – young women. Despite Cody and Kusama's disappointment, the film did, in fact, end up having a half female turnout, and box-office analysts suspect that the R-rating banning teenagers from seeing the film in cinemas, above all, had the biggest impact on its critical failure. Nevertheless, if the film did somewhat reach its female target audience, then could it still be argued that the world was just not ready for *Jennifer's Body*?

Martin Fradley provides a reading of the movie that may bring more insight towards the shifting cultural perception of it. According to Fradley, *Jennifer's Body* criticises 'post-feminism's confident preoccupation with feminine pleasure, personal strength and individual success.' Similarly to *Teeth*, *Jennifer's Body* expresses an anxiety towards what it felt were psuedo-feminist ideals within the pro-choice rhetoric, categorised by a capitalist competition of individual value via 'sexualised self-definition' instead of the self-censorship of abstinence culture. This anxiety is almost entirely mapped onto the character of Jennifer: before she is possessed, Jennifer is defined by her perfect, hyper-feminine appearance, glossy lips and mean-spirited comments toward Needy that ensure she knows her place as the less attractive friend. This confrontation

Fig. 8

between the two shows that, to Jennifer, her perfect physical appearance defines her self-worth and it is something that she will upkeep at the cost of her health:

> Jennifer: How could I ever be insecure? I was the Snowflake Queen.
> Needy: Yeah. Two years ago, when you were socially relevant, and when you didn't need laxatives to stay skinny.

Post-demonic possession, she continues the 'pursuit of a post-feminist obsession with *appearance*', devouring her classmates to stay youthful. Her self-expression is no longer just harmful to herself but also to others.

This is why some of the mainstream feminist reassessments of the film feel so disingenuous: The film does not subvert the male gaze by teasing the audience with an undressed Jennifer and cutting away before showing any 'real' nudity, rather it *utilises* the conventions of male gaze to show the character's self-definition as a sexual object. The lines 'PMS was invented by the boy-run media to make us seem crazy', and 'they're just boys, just morsels. We have all the power', are not as empowering as they are revealing to the fact that Jennifer is aware of misogynistic rhetoric but will use the same cruel rhetoric to hurt other girls. By highlighting the cracks in intimate friendship between Needy and Jennifer, the film presents a patriarchal environment that teaches young girls to compete against each other, when it is the cultural practices and policies oppressing them that need their attention the most. Jennifer may represent 'girl-power' to the extent that she is a violent female capable of physically overpowering and inflicting pain on the other sex, but it is Needy, in the end, who acts against misogyny and female exploitation by taking revenge against the satan-worshipping band, effectively 'taking up the proto-feminist mantle'. This theme of postfeminist competition is also why it is so ironic that Megan Fox and Diablo Cody, the two biggest names attached to the project, received such significant backlash from all sides for a film regarded as mediocre upon release; the former was bullied into a 'psychological breakdown' and the latter chose to retire as a public figure. In the highly competitive, seemingly progressive but undeniably male-dominated world of Hollywood, two female artists rose to the top of the world, only to be kicked back into obscurity, becoming the sacrificial lambs of Hollywood, Jennifer Check style.

Jennifer's Body is not the first, nor will it be the last, horror film with a female-led creative team. Katarzyna Paszkiewicz posits that female authorship within the horror genre invites hostile responses, often gendered, and faces the 'problematic search for female/feminist/authorial "subversion" of genre cinema'. Female authorship in horror will continue to prove difficult as long as the genre continues to be only known for its representations of violence against women, and mislabelled as 'inherently misogynistic.' Thus, while it is the position of this essay that the mainstream reassessment of the film as a feminist cult classic is sometimes misguided, it also argues that Jennifer's Body should first and foremost be celebrated as a women's horror film made by women for women that endured the trials of time and found its audience.

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Chi Chin Ao English Literature,

The Theological and Ecological Importance of Pandemonium in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

SAM COLLIER, English Literature

It is the mission of this essay to assert the theological and ecological importance of Pandemonium in John Milton's Paradise Lost.[1] In the construction of Milton's divine cosmos, Pandemonium is his own unique invention, with no scriptural precedent. It is created in book 1, built on a hill and a burning lake with magnificent architecture and is compared to a beehive at the end of the book, becoming the "straw-built citadel" (1.773) of Satan's unholy crew. Such a sight should demand damnation in a Christian epic, but as has been pointed out by John Simons in reading its concluding bee-simile, it is "difficult to see where the condemnatory implications lie."[2] Such dissonance between Milton's rigid theology and the grandeur of his antagonists has led some, like R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, to believe that "the Paradise Lost that Milton meant is not quite the one he wrote."[3] This argument implies Milton was ignorant of the effects that such attractive splendour had on his audience. We shall see, however, that such splendour was not only deliberate, but crucial in constructing Milton's theological cosmos.

This argument becomes clear when we first establish some key intricacies of Milton's religious belief, the first of which being the necessity for individual liberty and its use. Dennis R. Danielson ties this aspect of his belief to a contemporary strand of Puritanism known as Arminianism that values such individual liberty.[4] As God says in book 3: "I formed them free, and free they must remain" (3.124). This liberty is crucial to Milton, as God's divinity should be freely chosen rather than imposed as a default; such is clear in his urge to Cromwell to not impose a state religion.[5] The second pertinent aspect of Milton's theology is his belief in monism, or the notion that all that God created is an extension of himself and is therefore equal. This is crucial in modern eco-critical readings, where we see Milton's God as the "sov'reign Planter" (4.691) of all things, in such a way that we may imagine humanity as an extension of the garden we inhabit. The value of liberty is not understated here, as Diane K. McColley notes how it is granted to humanity, "along with its risks, so that they may be growing, diversifying beings."[6] It is only through the exercise of such liberty that they may improve their faith and "grow" as members of God's creation. Pandemonium, too, is a deliberate creation by God, and its bee-simile at the end of book 1 indicates its specific purpose in this divine ecosystem. Through its tempting beauty, it forces humanity to reject that which we desire, drawing out our liberty like bees drawing out nectar from flowers to enable their growth.

Every aspect of Pandemonium's description in Book 1 displays its doubled reality of undeniably attractive splendour, but also that it is consumptive and therefore unsustainable. This essay will therefore trace the satanic structure's description, starting with its conception and creation, which directly grounds it in violent consumption and aligns its creation with other violent birth in the poem, while also describing its birth as an exhalation from the earth. Then, in the aspect of Pandemonium's architecture, we shall see it to be rooted deeply in imitation, displaying further its consumptive emptiness. Despite this, its architecture also attests to the necessity of its existence. Finally, the essay will look at the concluding bee simile, where the structure's necessary role in Milton's divine ecosystem is clarified; it is one of propagating divinity in humanity, like bees propagate beauty in the flowers of a garden.

CONCEPTION

Pandemonium's initial creation out of the earth establishes its consumptive and destructive nature, a nature that goes on to colour every other aspect of the demonic structure's description that follows. First, the way that the building materials are taken out of its environment is presented as an act of bodily violence against the earth (1.687), an act of personification that emphasises the unsustainable nature of Pandemonium's creation. Additionally, the building's emergence is compared in an epic simile to the playing of an organ (1.708-712); a symbol that, once more, simultaneously highlights both its magnificence – specifically of heavenly immortality – and its unsustainability, as the immortal breath of the organ is a reminder of the mortal and finite breath of man. In fact, this allusion to the endless breath of the organ is made ironic by the preceding description of its conception which emphasises the impossibility of such immortality. In this way, before the structure is even formally described, the fact of its exploitative reality is made clear, as the creators of Pandemonium see its environment as only "that which can be consumed and developed," as Ken Hiltner describes.[7] This consumptive quality of its creation underpins every other aspect of Pandemonium's description that follows.

The earth from which Pandemonium is built and emerges is personified with bodily imagery to illustrate the horror of the destruction of the natural environment, and to emphasise the consumptive reality of satanic creation. The last line break of book 1 precedes the creation and description of Pandemonium, and it importantly begins with a description of the earth on which the structure is to be built: "There stood a hill not far whose grisly top / Belched fire and rolling smoke" (1.670-1). As such, Milton's use of poetic structure illustrates the earth as being pre-eminent over the creation that follows on from it. The hill is then personified as such: "in his womb was hid metallic ore" (1.673), at once imagining it as a male but with a female anatomy. Such conflicting imagery evokes the genderless nature of angels previously mentioned in book 1: "For spirits when they please / Can either sex assume, or both" (1.423-4).

Different from the angels however, who are "Not tied or manacled with joint or limb" (1.426), this hill is given the physicality of a body that is then manipulated and violated; in this way, it is granted one aspect of the grace of an angel. The violence inflicted on it is thus made more of an unholy act, while its physicality gives it a human mortality that emphasises its finitude. As such, the creation that is made from the destruction of its environment is made evidently unsustainable.

The language of "womb" is of particular interest when, only a few lines later, men are said to rifle "the bowels of their Mother Earth" (1.687) in imitation of these devils making Pandemonium. These two examples together create a female viscera in the image of satanic creation, one John S. Tanner finds fitting to call a "rape" of the environment.[8] This can be compared with similar female violence later in the poem with the character of Sin, who describes her fate echoing this vocabulary: "...they list into the womb / That bred them... and howl and gnaw / My bowels" (2.798-800). Of this quote specifically, Naomi Baker makes the observation that as a result of Sin's "monstrous physicality... Corrupt nature is thus aligned with repellent female physicality and sexuality, the female body symbolising the twisted perversion of an originally beautiful creation."[9] The echoing of the same vocabulary makes this point equally applicable to the conception of Pandemonium, which, through this comparison, can be seen as just such a "twisted perversion" of nature, while the hill from which it is born can be imagined as the "originally beautiful creation."

Hiltner makes an extended effort of considering the satanic destruction of the hill as an example of the importance of place, comparing it with Wendell Berry's relationship with his 'Native Hill'. For Berry, finding home in their hill is an act of tying a part of themselves to the land they work.[10] Place thus enables a sense of self, as one situates themselves in relation to their environment. For Satan and his devils then, through the act of destroying the place on which they build Pandemonium, they "destroy something of themselves."[11] When also compared with the violent language of natural development around the structure, the "spacious wound" on the hill and the "ribs of gold" (1.686-90) found within describe a violence against the environment and the individual. The creation of Pandemonium thus becomes an act that is not only outwardly consumptive, but also inwardly consumptive, and is therefore unendurable. Ironically, this act of creation thus becomes a monument to destruction.

After its conception, the manner of Pandemonium's construction, through its comparison to the playing of an organ in epic Miltonic simile, is imbued with its symbolic characteristics of illusory immortal breath. When directly following its violent bodily conception that emphasises its unsustainability, the use of this metaphor takes on the form of an ironic reminder of the cost of such splendour. The section reads:

> As in an organ from one blast of wind To many a row of pipes the sound-board breathes. Anon out of the earth a fabric huge Rose like an exhalation, with the sound Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet. (1.708-12)

This image first adds to our idea of the earth being alive, as here it may be read to be physically breathing, however the specific language of its breathing is important. Naya Tsentourou looks at the language of breath in Early Modern literature, seeing exhalations as "tormented breathing" that, in Christian love, "connects [bodies] to the world."[12] Such connection is indeed true here, from what has been affirmed about Pandemonium's creation from the earth. However, what can be illuminated in this reading is that the pain it inflicts on the earth becomes visible in its strained breath. Pandemonium, by being an embodiment of such a strained breath, once again becomes a monument to the pain its creation has inflicted on the surrounding environment.

Gordon Teskey has also taken a great effort to focus on the use of this vocabulary, in contrast to the vocabulary used to describe divine creation by God. He notes how, while God's creation often includes mention of his hand to accentuate a physical connection between the maker and his creation, Pandemonium lacks this: "the fantastic structure, for all its material solidity, lacks the ontological solidity of a thing that has been thoroughly worked."[13] Quite different to the preceding arguments about the physically substantial violence of Pandemonium's creation, Teskey contributes a reading that highlights the ultimate emptiness of the structure. As something that can only ever take from its surroundings, consuming everything – including itself – to amount to a monument of destruction, it is ultimately vapid. Unlike God's creation, which is additive, Pandemonium is doomed to be reductive, and thus fated to become empty. As Teskey continues, "demonic making breathes out, exhales what is not: it is the breath of lies."[14]

The context of the organ imagery is especially significant to our reading of Pandemonium's building as an "exhalation". For this matter, Francis O'Gorman provides an especially enlightening look into the symbolism of the instrument. He notes how Milton himself was an organ player, so he could not avoid "writing also of the wonder and sweetness of the instrument", despite it also being "associated... with Catholic worship."[15] This latter remark will grow in significance as we progress through Pandemonium's description, but the former point is the first indicator of the structure's magnificence. The organ is an instrument that does, indeed, exhale like human breath, however it does not have a need to inhale. This gives the instrument an illusion of endless breath, which O'Gorman notes as being treated in literature as something that "haunts and bothers" as "a sign of immortality not morality".[16] He also notes that it has an absurd notion to it "because it has its own impossibility deep within it."[17] Such is especially apparent in what has already been established about Pandemonium's conception; it is a structure that emphasises its own absurdity. The grandeur of the image cannot be ignored - Milton himself highlights the beauty of its construction with such musical vocabulary – and O'Gorman does more to highlight this, going so far to say that the music of an organ, because of its divinely inclined endless breath, "could, perhaps, take one's poetically inclined listeners half-way to heaven."[18] The irony is not

lost on Milton and is in fact certainly deliberate. It is a legitimate grandeur, akin to that of heaven itself, but Pandemonium has already made itself evidently mortal and derivative of the equally mortal earth. For a non-divine entity to imitate the divine, it can be treated as nothing less than absurd. Finally, the grandeur that is on display in this image of a musical exhalation is made ironic and vapid by the weight of its cost: both the cost on the earth that was consumed to make it, and the pain of the breath in its making.

The construction of Pandemonium prefaces the description of its splendour with the taste of agony and hypocrisy. The pain that is inflicted on the environment around it is made felt twofold in the extended personification of the earth and in its pained breath that births the structure. Its first attempts at displaying magnificence appear more objectionable than inviting when contextualised by the pain it inflicts on the environment. This pain is equated with that of sexual violence, which places the construction as a corrupted horror inflicted on its surrounding. Worse yet, for all the pain it inflicts, it does not produce anything substantive to validate this pain. As such, Pandemonium, at its conception, is introduced as nothing more than a monument to its own emptiness.

ARCHITECTURE

Pandemonium's architecture is littered with textual and physical imitation, extending its consumptive nature to even the abstract space of poetic ideas. Even worse, this consumptive imitation is itself presented to be the source for further imitation in architectural creation by man after the fall. The demonic structure is thus defined by imitation in every aspect, which places Milton squarely in dialogue with Plato's arguments about good and bad art.[19] In his dream republic, he imagines a world absent of any imitative art, for as Julia Annas explains, Plato believes that through imitative art, one "become[s] like the person he or she imitates, and thus risks becoming morally worse, or split and disunified".[20] Such is certainly the case in Pandemonium becoming an example of hubris for the folly of man to imitate, so Milton is evidently in agreement with Plato in this aspect of art. He disagrees with him, however, in the allowance of the art's existence. Where Plato thinks imitative artists should "not compose in our city at all", The fact of Milton reproducing and relaying the imitative grandeur of Pandemonium demonstrates how he sees the existence of this imitative, even damaging art, as necessary.[21] Milton uses this site of imitation to demonstrate that only through acknowledging art's imitative qualities can we find its ultimately divine source, thus bringing one closer to God.

We may first look at how many key aspects of Pandemonium's physical description is directly imitating, and corrupting, the image of the kingdom of Heaven. The fact of it being "built like a temple" (1.713), for example, though indicative of a holy space, is in fact directly contrasting with the source of Heaven's description in the Book of Revelation: "And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."[22] Furthermore, the description of the structure's material wealth of a "golden architrave" (1.715) and its roof "fretted gold" (1.717) literally turns the image of heaven upside down, subverting the earlier mentioned "Heav'n's pavement, trodden gold" (1.682), which again draws on Revelation, where the "street of the city was pure gold".[23] What was once the floor becomes the roof, thus making Pandemonium's act of corruptive imitation a mocking parody of its source. This aspect of Pandemonium's imitation also affirms a holy source for an unholy creation. Though the negative nature of its imitation is shown, the fact of its holy inspiration indicates that, however small, the demonic structure holds a dimension of divine purpose. Furthermore, despite its corruption, the fact of its inspiration further indicates the emptiness of Pandemonium's creation. This is because, unlike God's creation ex nihilo, the structure relies on the constructions of others, and particularly that of God, the one true creator of things substantively good. This aspect of its inspiration then simultaneously demonstrates its emptiness and its importance.

Pandemonium's material imitation extends to earthly monuments by man as well, both in its own creation and in the influence it provides. Milton finds inspiration for its description in real life monuments, and within the poem it also goes on to influence the creation of other real-life monuments. The architectural inspiration for Pandemonium was first traced in modern scholarship by Rebecca Smith to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, comparing its "magnificence" that "Not Babylon, / Nor great Alcairo... / Equalled" (1.717-9) to John Evelyn's account of St. Peter's, describing its magnificence as "beyond all that ever man's industry has produced of this kind."[24] This link was supported by William McClung, who asserts that, if nothing else, it certainly refers "us generally to late Renaissance and possibly early Baroque Italian design".[25] Smith makes a particular effort to establish that the later bee-simile where the demons are described "as bees / In springtime" (1.768-9) is a link to the symbol of the Barberini bee, as the pope of the time and his Church was often compared to bees and their hive. This link to the papacy is strengthened by the prior organ image, which, as established, was a symbol of Catholic worship. To read the seat of Satan as being influenced by the seat of Catholicism is most certainly meant as an insult by Milton, however this is to simplify Pandemonium's significance. It has been said here that Pandemonium is built as an attractive alternative to God's grace that one must exercise their liberty to reject. By basing it on a literal example of an opposing religious sect, Milton is making his point directly applicable to his audience. A contemporary reader is left to ponder about the grandeur of Catholicism and to recognise both its beauty and cost, and thereby reject it to get closer to God.

St. Peter's is not the only comparison made of Pandemonium's architecture, however. Rodger Martin makes the latest and most intriguing claim to Milton's architectural source for the structure: the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan.[26] He establishes a prolonged support to this claim, first arguing that he had a certain awareness and interest in the civilizations of the New World, evidenced by his use of Medicean codices in Florence, which included Historia General del las Cosas de Nueva Espana, wherein the history of the Mexica civilization is detailed. This is also heavily supported by Milton's direct mention of "Rich Mexico the seat of Motezume" (11.407), so his knowledge of the site can be assumed. Martin then compares certain specific aspects of the two sites, such as the "causey to hell gate" (10.414-15) and Tenochtitlan's wide causeways, which were

"legends of their time," and the fact of Pandemonium being built on a "lake" (1.702) like Tenochtitlan.[27] Though Martin asserts this reading to overshadow Smith's, it is more rewarding for our purposes to read them as coexisting sources for Milton's Pandemonium, imbuing the structure with a more universal inspiration in its making. This also gives far more credence to Roland Mushat Frye's claim that the structure described "is actually a promiscuous architectural monstrosity", once again lacking the solidity of a single, strong source for its inspiration. Like a sandcastle then, it is built as a collection of many smaller pieces, but it does not gain the structural integrity of something substantively made when they are put together.[28]

The horror of Pandemonium's vapidity becomes more potent when we consider it becoming the source for other famous man made structures in the text, thereby imbuing them with the same consumptive and unsustainable nature that Pandemonium was built with. The structure is twice compared in the text to the Pyramids of Giza and the Tower of Babel, structures that are assumed by Milton to be the peak of mortal architectural prowess. They are first mentioned as "[mortal's] greatest monuments of fame, / And strength and art", but are "outdone" (1.695-6) by Pandemonium's grandeur. This is to both imply imitation of Pandemonium in these grand mortal structures, while also imbuing them with the impotence of such imitation – the same impotent imitation of their satanic model. Steven Blakemore clearly shows how these allusions lead us to see that "Pandemonium is the original model not only for Babel but for all future postlapsarian architecture".[29] Following this, it may then be assumed that all acts of architectural grandeur are, according to Milton, imbued with the same consumptive emptiness that defines Pandemonium's creation.

Of further significance is that Babel is in fact, once again, equated with the Catholic religion. Smith, in considering the Catholic implications of the bee-simile, suggests that Milton likely knew, "by title if nothing more, such books as... Babel's Balm."[30] Guiding our reading to this book, we see the Catholic Church being equated with "the tower, / of proud Babel's master-bee,".[31] This reference further consolidates Pandemonium as an insult against Catholicism, but this once again aids our reading of Milton using his feelings against Catholicism as a necessary exertion of human liberty.

Plato's destructive imitation is indeed alive in every aspect of Pandemonium's architecture. In its poetic conception, Milton draws on scripture to parody, as well as real life monuments from every known part of the world at the time: Europe (St. Peter's), Africa (the Pyramids), Asia (Babel) and the Americas (Tenochtitlan). Milton makes no claims against Plato of the damages of imitative art, and in fact perfectly demonstrates how imitative art breeds more damage in its imitators in the instance of the hubris of Babel.[32] Unlike Plato however, who urges the removal of these imitative artists, the fact of Pandemonium's existence in the text is a testament to its necessity. Such is supported by the fact of it also imitating Heaven; unlike the other mortal architecture Pandemonium imitates, Heaven draws from no source, and is thus proven to be the only good and right art. It is only through Pandemonium's failed imitation of it that God's creation is more greatly raised. Humanity is then left to make use of their liberty in rejecting the tempting but ultimately empty Pandemonium and embracing heaven, the divine source for Pandemonium's imitation, as the only truly substantive and good creation. In this way, Pandemonium's imitative architecture in fact qualifies the necessity for its existence.

THE BEEHIVE

The matter of Pandemonium being compared in 1.768-775 to a beehive is what situates the significance of the structure's conflicting magnificence with its unsustainability, giving it a specific role in a divine ecosystem. This shall be displayed by considering what John Huntley called the "anatomy" and "ecology" of this simile, which "Both together exhaust what the science of biology can say in explanation of a living organism."[33] In this metaphor about criticism, "anatomy" describes the substance of the simile, so we shall first consider the symbolism of the bee image that Milton draws on in his use of it here, including his dialogue with prior instances of bee imagery in epic poetry. It shall be here asserted, in commonality with the structure's conception and architecture, that this symbol further accentuates simultaneously an attractive beauty – this time in pastoral imagery – while also underpinning it with the fact of its unsustainability, especially as a model for humanity. We shall then proceed to the simile's "ecology", or how it fits into the context of the poem. Here it shall be found that the use of this simile illuminates and finally asserts the crucial ecological role in Milton's theology, as the role that Pandemonium holds in propagating the liberty of humanity is parallel to the important role of bees propagating the growth of flowers in a garden.

In its comparison to a beehive, Pandemonium is imbued with yet more grandeur, as the image alone evokes natural beauty, but it also carries a long epic tradition that adds to the structure an element of epic heroism. This is once more undermined, however, by the reminder of its unsustainability; the natural beauty of this simile is revoked when considering the use of the bee as a symbol of literal consumptive creation. The use of epic tradition here once more asserts Pandemonium's lack of substance by relying on imitation. The bees we meet in this section have their magnificence exalted, being described in the context of stunning natural beauty:

> As bees In springtime, when the sun with Taurus rides,
> Pour forth their populous youth about the hives In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed plank, The suburb of their straw-built citadel, New rubbed with balm, expatiate and confer Their state affairs. (1.768-775)

Both the time ("springtime") and place ("among fresh dews and flowers") establish a setting of exceeding natural beauty. These images can be read as a glimmer of the Garden of Eden to appear in Book 4, which is described with similar vocabulary, housing "Flow'rs worthy of Paradise" (4.241) and being a place of "eternal spring" (4.268). Far more than the language of magnificence that preceded it, the beauty of Pandemonium here is made self-evident in Milton's own language of verdant thriving. What is different about Pandemonium, however, is its demonic inhabitants, or the

bees. Nicole A. Jacobs is the first to consider Milton's politically charged Eikonoklastes for how he uses the image of the bee.[34] She considers his use of the term "Aegyptian Apis" as referring to the bee species rather than a god, and his musings of royalists having "the weekly vomit... the sole means of their feeding" to reflect the real phenomenon of bees consuming and vomiting material to build their hive and store nectar.[35] This derogatory notion of the bee is directly applicable to the demons in Pandemonium who, as has been shown, are only capable of building their monument at the expense of their environment and in imitation of others. Like the royalists that Milton is here condemning, the bees of Pandemonium are here doomed to an unsustainable cycle of self-destruction by the very nature of creation that it is built on.

This leads neatly into another aspect of the bee simile unique to Milton's usage of it. As Jacobs affirms, Milton repurposes the bee symbol - which was primarily a satire against Catholicism – as "a condemnation of monarchy as well".[36] This was at odds with the more popular view of the time, which was expressed in Charles Butler's Feminine Monarchie. Butler strongly argued that bees were granted by God the "express pattern of a perfect monarchy, the most natural absolute form of government", making them a perfect symbol for monarchy by reflecting its hierarchy in nature.[37] Milton, however, seems comfortable using the symbol of the bee to undermine monarchism, as this is not the only instance of it. In his First Defence of the English People, he argues against Salmasius using Virgil's Georgics as proof in nature of the divine rights of kings.[38] To argue against him, he quotes Virgil's same book where he says that the bees "Pass their lives under mighty laws", to demonstrate that their monarchy is not presupposed, but rather there are "mighty laws" that exceed the power of the despot.[39] Once again, this is true also for Pandemonium's bees; the structure's creation by Satan and his crew only occurs because it is permitted by God, who "Left him at large to his own dark designs" (1.213). By imbuing Pandemonium with this impotent image, it more greatly establishes the disparity between the deceptively unsustainable magnificence of Pandemonium, and the permitting power of the Father.

Virgil is again echoed directly in the bee simile itself in Paradise Lost, as the mentions of the "populous youth" reflects Virgil's own "young of the race" in the Aeneid, who are described in their building of a great city (Carthage), quite like the just built Pandemonium.[40] Virgil is not the only classical epic source for this simile, as the image of their "clusters" and "Their state affairs" also mimics Homer's Greek heroes on the shores of Troy, who "Like the swarms of clustering bees... marched in order... to the assembly."[41] Once more, the implications of this use of epic inspiration is doubled, as on one hand it may be said that, like John Steadman says, "he has here... invested his warrior-devils with at least the shadow of the dignity of classical heroes", a dignity that extends to the grandeur of their creation, Pandemonium.[42] However, when accompanied by the mountain of symbolism preceding it that points to its consumptive and imitative qualities, the echoes of other poets here comes across as yet more imitation, exemplifying the uncreative nature of Pandemonium's existence. It is a building that ultimately relies on the grandeur of others, rather than any substantive value of its own, to have even a shadow of significance.

The simile's epic genealogy also hints towards its necessary role in a divine ecology. David Harding makes a point to argue that Milton primarily drew on Virgil's Georgics for this simile, rather than any epics.[43] The significance of this connection becomes clear when we see how Gary Miles sees the chaos of the bees' activity in 4.158-168 as being "controlled by an elaborate division of labor. Each act, however random it may appear, is shown to contribute to the common welfare".[44] We can apply this reading of Virgil's bees back to Pandemonium's bees, whose seemingly "random" act of rebellion in fact contributes to the "common welfare" of humanity, who gain from Pandemonium's existence by using their freedom to reject it and get closer to God.

This point perfectly transitions us into the ecology of the simile, as it shall be ascertained that Milton's use of this bee symbol is more deliberate than these 7 lines. It is, in fact, the defining comparison that guides us to the right conclusion of Pandemonium's ultimate necessity in Milton's divine ecosystem. It should first be noted then, how the qualities of Pandemonium's creation mimic the qualities of a hive and bees. The "fire and rolling smoke" (1.671) of the hill that it is built on, for example, would ensure the hive's need to "have their house exceeding warme", as Gervase Markham urges.[45] The structure's "stately heighth" (1.723) would be perfect for a hive, which is "even better for its largenesse", and the musical nature of its birth in "dulcet symphonies" (1.712) couldn't fit bees better, who "are so delighted with musicke".[46] The accuracy with which these general aspects of Pandemonium's creation match the requirements for a hive urge us to consider that Milton's use of this bee simile towards the end is less a singular comparison, but rather the finalising link that illuminates Pandemonium's ultimate contextual significance in the text.

This significance is heavily supported when we return to Milton's belief in monism. Ruth McIntyre asserts how his monism is most evident in Milton's use of flowers in Eden as agents of divine communication, and in the process of asserting this point, also notes how "Eve's flowers do not belong to her; rather, she belongs with them".[47] When we also consider how flowers are prominent in the birth of both Adam and Eve - the former being born "soft on the flow'ry herb" (8.254) while the latter awoke "Under a shade of flow'rs" (4.451) - it would be no stretch to argue, as an extension of Milton's monism, that humanity can be considered flowers in their own right. With this asserted, the motions of Pandemonium's bees gain far more clarity – now, the interaction of temptation that it offers acts much like the interaction of extracting pollen. It is also worthy to note God's deliberate enabling of this creation. David Hullinger considers the implications of this bee-simile enabling a reading that Pandemonium was allowed to be created by God like how a hive "is constructed from materials strategically placed by the beekeeper".[48] Such has been an apparent theme; every action has only ever been permitted by God's will as it seemed fit in his design. It is clear, then, that Pandemonium demands a very deliberate importance; it is expressly allowed by God to be created by Satan and his crew as a magnificent, but costly and dangerous, monument

against God, one that forces his human flowers to exercise liberty like secreting nectar.

The bee simile in the final few lines of Book 1 is easily the most important in helping us to understand the true meaning and significance of Pandemonium in Paradise Lost. Without this simile, Pandemonium exists solely as a destructive, empty and imitative mockery to God and humanity, crucially lacking a divine purpose; it begs one to question God's design. It is only by using this imagery, one that further solidifies what every other aspect of the structure's creation and description has indicated, that we understand an ecological significance in this structure's existence. With this bee simile, James Whaler has undoubtedly been proven right in his assertion that Milton uniquely uses animal similes when "he can enrich [the simile] with more exact correspondences to [what is being compared]."[49] Ultimately, it is this simile that enables Milton to complete his divine mission he outlines at the outset of his epic, of justifying "the ways of God to men" (1.26).

CONCLUSION

Pandemonium appears as thus: it is born at the expense of the environment around it, a bodily violence inflicted on the earth that establishes its consumptive emptiness (1.687). Its emergence is compared to the exhalations of an organ, further cementing the pain it inflicts on the earth while also mocking its attempts at immortality that are ultimately futile (1.710). Its architecture mocks, but ultimately exalts, the kingdom of heaven that it attempts to parody, and its scriptural and physical imitation betrays its emptiness (1.713-9). This imitation however, by being in dialogue with Plato, and by imitating heaven, also asserts a necessity for existing. This is finally realised when it is compared to the beehive, wherein its consumptive conception is given a literal point of comparison, while also placing the structure in a deliberate role in a divine ecosystem (1.768-775). The imagery of Catholicism is used throughout its description, from the organ to the architectural grandeur of St. Peter's and of course the bee being directly used as an insult for the papacy for decades. It appears here together as a monument of empty splendour in mockery to God, but Milton still asserts the necessity for its existence, as "true good will come from evil when humankind is tempted and resists", as John Shawcross articulates.[50] Milton's use of ecological symbolism to demonstrate his theology proves what Karen Edwards sought to argue in Milton and the Natural World: "Milton is on this side of modernity."[51] Without Pandemonium, humanity is incapable of growth. As Werblowsky argues, heaven and earth lack "the element of risk and struggle, which is the decisive characteristic of human endeavour", so they alone are not conducive to human growth.[52] It is only through the essential existence of Pandemonium as a tempting (but ultimately unsustainable) alternative to God's grace that humanity is tested, and the resulting exertion of their liberty is what enables their growth as God's divine flowers.

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Queer Repression, Social intolerance and Masculine Expectation in *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Power of the Dog* and *God's Own Country*

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'*I'm stuck with what I got. Caught in my own loop. Can't get out of it.*'

INTRODUCTION

Comparison in literary criticism, and the creation of umbrella terms such as 'Queer Literature' and 'Queer Cinema', allows for a collective celebration of works that shine a light on the marginalised and unrepresented. A problem arises, however, when this unification has the effect of 'lumping together' distinctive works of queer fiction, detracting from their individual contributions. The issue is apparent in the works I discuss here: Annie Proulx's Brokeback Mountain and its film adaptation; Thomas Savage's *The Power of the Dog* and its film adaptation; and Francis Lee's film *God's Own Country*. Reviews for Campion's adaptation are led with: "a morbid, cold-souled negative of Brokeback Mountain"[1]; "an adult cousin to Ang Lee's Brokeback Mountain".[2] For God's Own Country; "a British Brokeback Mountain, but better"[3]; "a Brokeback Mountain for the Yorkshire moors"[4]; "like Brokeback Mountain, but with Yorkshire weather"[5]. Such headlines reduce the potential influence of other rural queer stories; the casual viewer or reader may infer that they should see one or the other, but need not bother with both.

These works portray queer men struggling with the issues presented in my title, but in different ways that produce differing outcomes. Proulx's novella has a cyclical structure that frames the story through the lens of protagonist Ennis' memory. The proleptic prologue seems to foreshadow a hopeless ending for Ennis, setting the narrative on a "traumatic trajectory"[6] as put by Andrea Fitzpatrick. I counter, however, that the enduring memory and "imagined power of Brokeback Mountain", a place of temporary but profound liberation for Jack and Ennis, reframes the narrative trajectory into one of tentative hope for the overcoming of repression and intolerance.[7]

Savage and Campion offer a darker portrayal of queer repression and masculine expectation, one that offers no hope of its characters overcoming them. Phil adheres to the most conventional and performative forms of masculinity to mask his sexuality. Peter projects a hardened stoicism to protect himself from an intolerant world. Symbolised by the silhouetted dog in the hills that only they can see, both are held in the 'power' of masculine ego and anxiety. Phil is killed for his abusive expression of masculinity, while Peter's 'victory' only further entrenches him in a repressed state that has stripped him of humanity.

Johnny, the protagonist of *God's Own Country*, lives in an environment that is not queer intolerant, but emotionally repressive, with expectations to continue his father's work on the farm regardless of his personal desires. A passionless outlook on life extends to his sexual relationships with men, until he meets Gheorghe, who aids him on a path to self-acceptance. Lee depicts an explicit intolerance towards migrants, one that is not resolved by the film's conclusion, or given the same consideration as Johnny's personal journey, marring an otherwise hopeful outcome of two queer men claiming a home together. Failing to fully explore this issue renders Lee's film the least successful of these works, although it still serves as a useful counterpoint in its contemporary setting and optimistic resolution.

These works are ripe for comparison, and their frequent associations with one another is not inherently objectionable. I seek to argue, however, that these comparisons should be as nuanced as the works discussed, and further that all three tackle similar themes across different time periods and settings which speak to continued issues faced by queer individuals that remain of interest to both artists and critics, and can be afforded greater attention through appropriate comparisons.

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

Traumatic memory, stoic endurance and lifeless lives

Beginning and ending with Ennis in his temporary home after his lover Jack's death, Annie Proulx frames her story through the lens of memory. Discussing the cyclical structure, Andrea Fitzpatrick describes how "the loop is a closed narrative structure that…involves a traumatic trajectory of repetition and return".[8] As shown in the prologue, Ennis does not find a stable home in the story, and his relationship with Jack does not endure to the novella's conclusion. The past tense of "when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong" (Proulx, p. 4) turns a hyperbolic image of power into one foreshadowing its loss, and the qualifier "seemed" alludes to the illusory nature of this power. In pre-empting the narrative with its seemingly hopeless outcome, Proulx sets the rest of the novella on a "traumatic trajectory".[9]

As put by Jane Rose and Joanne Urschel, "both Ennis and Jack suffer psychological scars from their childhoods, which impede the establishment of an authentic self and the ability to communicate and express their feelings openly".[10] Ennis recounts a hate crime committed against a gay man who, after being killed with a tire iron, "looked like pieces a burned tomatoes all over him" (Proulx, p. 29). The specificity of the simile speaks to Ennis' vivid recollection decades later. Jack's childhood trauma involves his father, who attacked him by "[whipping him] with his belt" (Proulx, p. 50), and

humiliated him by urinating on him. The key detail that Jack takes away is that he himself is circumcised while his father is not – "I seen he had some extra material that I was missin'. I seen they'd cut me different" (Proulx, p. 50). For Jack, his circumcision, earlier described as an "anatomical disconformity" (Proulx, p. 49) becomes symbolic of his incomplete masculinity and sexual disconformity as a queer man, which he now associates with punishment.

Complementing Rose and Urschel, David Peterson discusses how "stoicism as a way of coping with what cannot be changed so must be endured has…long been associated with images of western masculinity".[11] Their endurance manifests in lifeless lives. Proulx's prose is scant and blunt, summarising their early years in just a couple of pages, and charting the "slow corrosion" (Proulx, p. 31) of Ennis and Alma's marriage in less than that. This briefness reflects the passionless, rudimentary nature of their lives away from each other, where they are hardly living at all, yet are still expected to endure. Ennis scarcely seems to remember these times. In contrast, the details of his traumatic experiences and times with Jack haunt him vividly. These memories threaten his stoic endurance, due to the pain they cause and truths they expose.

Another consequence of stoic endurance is Ennis' inability to envision a different life. Jack tells Ennis "if you and me had a little ranch together…it'd be some sweet life" (Proulx, p. 28). Ennis has already been established as the more repressed of the two men, more fearful of intolerance. It is Jack who initiates their first sexual encounter, while it is Ennis who is first to assert that he is "not no queer" (Proulx, p. 15), and who later threatens Jack should he reveal his sexual exploits with other men. As a result, Ennis cannot bring himself to share Jack's dream – in his words, he is "stuck with what I got, caught in my own loop. Can't get out of it" (Proulx, p. 29). Fitzpatrick presents a compelling analysis of the 'loop' as a symbol for "his family responsibilities, work as well as…the ongoing, paralysing fear of violent, homophobic reprisals", leaving him in the "chokehold of domestic responsibilities".[12] She highlights how Ennis cannot feel desire without fear, and cannot have a family without repressing his authentic self. Additionally, I see his "own loop" as symbolic of his own sexuality, which he regards as a binding imprisonment that denies him the possibilities presented by Jack, explaining the flashes of homophobic intolerance he himself displays. Returning to Ennis' solitude and impending eviction in the prologue, his dismissal of "two guys livin' together" (Proulx, p. 30) appears as further evidence that he does not overcome his traumatised outlook by the novella's end, and remains forever caught in that loop.

RURAL REBIRTH

Proulx enables the possible reframing of traumatic memory by turning a place of masculine initiation into one of boyish liberation and emotional expression. Ginger Jones writes "by choosing to withdraw from the world for a summer, Jack and Ennis establish themselves in the world of men. They become stewards of the herd and accept a mantle of male power".[13] Jones deduces how the job of 'sheep herder' is also a chance to take ownership and control, to prove oneself as a man. She charts how their rural environment becomes a place of liberation, however, as they "turn from the responsibilities of manhood and indulge in all the emotions that had been denied them as boys"[14], complementing Peterson's notion that Jack and Ennis "reformulate themselves and the spaces they occupy in anti-homophobic ways".[15] These ideas suggest a figurative rebirth for Jack and Ennis, a chance for them to reform their own authentic selves away from masculine expectation and traumatic memory. There is a repeated image of conquering nature as their relationship develops. Ennis feels "he could paw the white out of the moon" (Proulx, p. 12), and Proulx describes their "flying in the euphoric, bitter air, looking down on the hawk's back and the crawling lights of vehicles on the plain below" (Proulx, p. 15). These images reflect a boyish egotism, an inflated sense of power following their release from a lifetime of repression; where once they were subjugated by the oppression of queer men, they now "[look] down" on the outer world, in an act of reformulation.

Reframing this environment does not erase the reality of the intolerant world around them. Peterson refers to Foucault's concept of the heterotopic space. In Foucault's words, they are "simultaneously mythic and real contestations of the space in which we live".[16] Essentially, they are spaces that seemingly offer an escape from the 'real world' while fundamentally remaining a part of it. What starts as a "slow-motion, but headlong, irreversible fall" (Proulx, p. 17) becomes an ongoing torment, as the two men's rural liberation evolves into a crushing reminder of their lack of freedom elsewhere. As Jack screams on their final trip together "what we got now is Brokeback Mountain…all we got, boy, fuckin all" (Proulx, p. 42). Ultimately, their relationship is left in stasis, "frozen in the memories of Brokeback Mountain" as put by Rose and Urschel.[17] Nevertheless, the "imagined power" (Proulx, p. 52) of their rural liberation, no matter how finite or illusory, remains hugely significant in giving them the heterotopic space to express themselves for the first time in their lives. They can cry and hold each other without fear of judgement or attack, and share their traumatic pasts; freeing themselves from the burden of carrying these memories alone in turn allows for the possibility of overcoming them.

REFRAMING MEMORY AND THE QUESTION OF ENNIS' FATE

The story ends with Jack's tragic death, and Ennis being left alone once more. Jack's murder mirrors the traumatic incident witnessed by Ennis in childhood, linking to the idea of homophobic violence and traumatic memory as a "never-ending continuum".[18] Ennis' fate has been considered emblematic of this notion. Rose and Urschel write "Ennis's self-imposed isolation is emphasized. He continues to put walls around himself to close off others and thus protect himself from more pain".[19] After charting the "failed trajectory" of the postcard, from "charming love letter" to "traumatic figure", Fitzpatrick dismisses the postcard Ennis puts up in his trailer as "faded, flattened, silent…the postcard ultimately only offers a photographic fetish to mourn Jack's death".[20] Jones simply states "[Ennis is] condemned to live alone with a postcard".[21] These sentiments devalue the significance of the postcard, and are too quick to view

Ennis' fate as tragic. In putting up the postcard and two shirts, Ennis takes small but significant steps towards queering his home (however temporary that home may be) into a place where he can be his authentic self. Peterson discusses how, in Proulx's novella, Ennis' "shrine to Jack" is "unspecifically located", while in the film "Ennis has placed them in a closet, suggesting his own closeted existence, the closeting of their past".[22] With this unsubtle symbolism, Lee's adaptation concurs with the above sentiments that there is no fix to Ennis' repression, and he is therefore doomed to a life alone.

Returning to the significance of memory, Proulx presents a more nuanced, ambiguous conclusion. Describing Jack and Ennis' old, intertwined shirts, she narrates "there was no real scent, only the memory of it, the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain of which nothing was left but what he held in his hands" (Proulx, p. 52). All of the "imagined power" of their relationship and the liberation that came with it is contained in these two shirts, and in displaying them in his own home rather than keeping them hidden in Jack's closet, Ennis reframes the memory they represent from one of shame and trauma into one of power and pride. There are several interpretations of Ennis' unfinished "I swear…" (Proulx, p. 54) to Jack – to remember him, to love him, to mourn him – but above all I read the line as a half-uttered promise to fulfil his dream of a home on his terms, to honour him by queering his own home in a way he previously refused to. That he does not complete the promise reminds us that he has a long way to go towards self-acceptance. As Proulx narrates, "there was some open space between what he knew and what he tried to believe" (Proulx, p. 55). Ennis is still bound to an intolerant world, and flashes of traumatic memory disrupt his journey, such as the "comic" (Proulx, p. 54) image of a spoon handle turning into a tire iron in his dream. The "open space" still suggests a significant change from a traumatic trajectory to one of tentative hope, however. Peterson reflects that Ennis "might be able to construct…a place for himself and Jack (however liminal now) to exist".[23] The novella's final line repeats Ennis' defeatist warning to Jack earlier – "if you can't fix it you've got to stand it" (Proulx, p. 55) – but in light of the newfound "open space", Proulx allows for the possibility that Ennis has already taken the first steps towards 'fixing it'.

THE POWER OF THE DOG

Phil: Performative and Conventional Masculinity

The Power of the Dog offers contrasting portraits of masculinity in Phil and Peter. Unlike those around them, they see the "running dog"[24] silhouetted in the mountains, which Annie Proulx interprets as a "kind of test…for [Phil] it is a proof of his sharp and special sensitivity…in another sense the dog is Phil himself; alternatively he is the dog's prey".[25] I concur with the latter notion. Phil can "smell the dog's breath" (Savage, p. 63), connoting the invasive pressure of 'breathing down one's neck', turning a 'special' gift into an overbearing responsibility. The looming figure is a constant reminder of the pressures of masculine expectation that ensnare both men and dictate their lives – they are the "frightened thing" (Savage, p. 63) being hunted, though neither could ever admit it.

Phil adheres to the most conventional attributes of masculinity. Savage stated "I have always believed that the landscape shapes the people"[26], and Proulx discusses how "the enormous fact of [Phil's] homosexuality" is "something that in the cowboy world he inhabited was terrible and unspeakably vile".[27] Thus, "he remade himself as a manly, homophobic rancher".[28] Phil has been 'shaped' into an agent of his homophobic environment, aware of the intolerance he too would suffer if his sexuality was exposed – "he had loathed the world, should it loath him first" (Savage, p. 251). O. Alan Weltzien argues "given the dominant cultures insistence on repression and silence, if not violence, Phil can be seen as a tragic figure".[29] Weltzien's interpretation aligns with my own reading of Phil as a victim of an intolerant masculine culture, whose cruelty is a means of survival, and an "externalisation of his self-hatred".[30]

Another 'externalisation' is Phil's refusal to wash. Michelle Nijhuis describes Phil as a man who has "buried his vulnerabilities under thick strata of sweat, chaps, and cruelty"[31], while Proulx spells out the intention behind the dirt – "no one could mistake rough, stinking Phil for a sissy".[32] Phil's uncleanliness creates a layer of protection, portrayed literally in Campion's adaptation as he smears mud all over his naked body.[33] The scene follows Phil's polishing of Bronco Henry's saddle, which in turn follows his overhearing of George and Rose having sex. Phil ritualistically preserves the memory of Bronco and the connection they had, for which the saddle serves as a physical reminder. The memory remains untainted by shame, as he reframes it as one of the 'glory days' of "real men". The moment is also a symbolic act of intimacy between Phil and Bronco, contrasted with George's literal intimacy with Rose, as this is the only form of physical connection Phil (and his environment) allows himself. Subsequently lathering himself with dirt conceals this moment of weakness, and also serves as punishment for his physical body in giving into his temptation.

Under the illusion of solitude, Phil fully succumbs to temptation. Campion shoots him trotting along the outskirts while the other men wash together. An outsider to his own men, Phil can only expose, pleasure and wash himself when completely alone. Steven Neale asserts that "while mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, can constantly take women and the female image as its object of investigation, it has rarely investigated men and the male image"[34], as women are a "source of anxiety, of obsessive enquiry; men are not".[35] Campion subversively examines the male body. For the frolicking mass, their nakedness is irrelevant, part of the fun. For Phil, the male body is simultaneously an object of desire and repulsion, of release and repression, and above all a "source of anxiety".[36] In the novel, Phil's "secret shrine" is a "place of ablution" which leaves him with "a sense of innocence and purity" (Savage, p. 162). Washing away evidence of his sexuality, in an act of purification, allows for figurative rebirth and another chance to 'be a man'. Peter's intrusion, tearing a "ragged hole in the atmosphere" (Savage, p. 163), not only violates his privacy, but disrupts this ritualistic process. Thus, the "ugly void" (Savage, p. 163) left by Peter's presence represents both the intolerant outer

world, and the liminal space between 'sin' and 'ablution' that Phil is now caught between, and remains so as his relationship with Peter develops, leaving him vulnerable.

Peter: hardened and egotistical masculinity

Peter's repression and masculine expectation manifests itself in a starkly different way to Phil. In the film's opening lines, Peter asks "what kind of a man would I be if I did not help my mother? If I did not save her?" The question conveys his feelings of masculine responsibility, as though manhood comes with a duty of protection. The sentiment seems honourable, setting Peter up as the heroic foil to Phil's antagonist. Savage imbues Peter's sense of heroism with a clear egotism, however. Peter "[feels] God smile" as he goes "to work" (Savage, p. 230) on his plot against Phil. The line sees Peter elevate himself to an agent of God, as though his committing murder is an act of divine justice. Later, when Phil touches his shoulder, Peter "[seems] to hear a voice whispering that he was as special as he believed himself to be" (Savage, p. 251). For Phil, their moment of physical contact is an expression of alliance and confused attraction. For Peter, however, the moment is proof of his cunning and intelligence, in subjugating a man as powerful as Phil. The "voice" he hears echoes the idea of God overseeing his work, making him "special", immune to the desires that men like Phil cannot fight.

Peter does not express desire towards anyone in the story. Owen Gleiberman observes "if we leave aside our own cliché prejudices, there is actually no evidence in "The Power of the Dog" that Peter is gay".[37] While his sexuality remains ambiguous to us, it is assumed and mocked throughout his life in the story. Savage narrates how Peter "learned early what it is to be an outcast and looked on living with deepset, expressionless eyes that saw everything or nothing" (Savage, p. 28). While Phil's response to the world's intolerance was to "loath" and dominate it, Peter 'shuts down'. Ryan Coleman writes that Peter is "vulnerable on the outside, yet ironclad on the inside", a "perfect inversion" of Phil.[38] Savage incorporates militaristic imagery when Peter walks through Phil's crowd of jeering men, highlighting how Peter wears his repression like armour. Savage describes how the "first sharp whistle flew like an arrow" (Savage, p. 215), connoting targeted violence that hints at the threat behind the mockery, but Peter neither "paused nor faltered in running that strange gauntlet" (Savage, p. 216). 'Running the gauntlet' is a form of militaristic punishment, and Peter defiantly endures this 'punishment' to prove himself a man amongst men. There was a time when he was affected - "he remembered the panic that pressed up like a lump in his throat when someone shouted sissy" (Savage, p. 223) – and in Campion's adaptation, his hardened exterior almost breaks when his mother asks him if there is a "sound that makes [him] shiver". Smit-McPhee's eyes threaten to well-up, before he mumbles back "I don't remember". His traumatic experiences still pain him, but he has repressed them, both in order to survive, and to fulfill his 'duties' as a man – after flirting with vulnerability, he assures his ailing mother "you don't have to do this. I'll see you don't have to."

Forever in the Dog's Power

Both men's fates are sealed by Peter's revenge. His scheme plays out like a seduction. In their exchange in the barn, Campion eroticises objects and actions – Phil braiding the rope, Peter caressing Bronco's saddle, and most significantly the sharing of Peter's cigarette. Peter rolls, lights and smokes the cigarette with the same finesse we have seen from Phil throughout the film – he has studied and learned from him, appealing to his ego as much as his desire. Peter feeds him the cigarette, which Phil willingly accepts and submits to. Peter's smirk suggests he is aware of the cigarette's phallic connotations; he manipulates Phil's sexuality to his advantage while still showing no signs of reciprocating desire. The scene is foreshadowed by an earlier moment of brutality masked by tenderness, with Peter stroking the wounded rabbit before killing it. He has learned to weaponise his meek demeanour, deceiving and entrapping his victims, with Phil being the ultimate target – as put by Proulx, he is now "in the big leagues9.[39]

The film's resolution seems to convey triumph and contentment. Peter watches and smiles as George and Rose kiss, lit by the light of the house, in an almost parodically romantic conclusion. The 'happy ending' is, of course, the result of a calculated act of murder. What began as a "coldness" has evolved into a homicidal capability, the rewards of which serve Peter's own egotistical view of himself. Smit-McPhee's smirk, conveying both pride and a total lack of remorse, is a twisted inversion of the cocksure western hero. Gleiberman, critical of the film, calls Peter "the golden gunslinger who comes into town to face off against the villain and kill him dead, leaving the world a better place…as the film presents it, [he] is fully justified in his audacious act of vengeful homicide".[40] Gleiberman's overly simplistic reading undermines Campion's portrait of how antagonism and heroism can become one in environments dominated by violence and intolerance. In order to 'save' his mother and unite his family, Peter crosses a line Phil never did – as Proulx writes, his act of revenge is "deeply chilling, more awful than any of Phil's sadistic cruelties".[41] Phil's antagonism was largely performative, belying a vulnerability when alone – or with a potential lover. Peter's act, however, is an extension of the apathy towards death that he has privately displayed with his captured rabbits, and a reflection of the ruthless individual his landscape has shaped him into. Nijhuis observes "the joke—and the tragedy—is that the willowy, studious Peter proves to be a far more formidable antagonist than Phil himself".[42] While I still find the antagonist label reductive, Nijhuis is astute in labelling Peter's revenge both "joke" and "tragedy". The joke comes not only in the reversal of gender norms and expectations, but genre norms as well, with Savage and Campion delivering a seemingly triumphant ending without a triumphant hero to applaud. The tragedy, meanwhile, is Peter's now irreversible descent into his own repressed state – his own 'loop'. The ingrained instinct to protect himself and his mother has come at the expense of his morality, as he now equates deception and murder with heroism and the assertion of masculinity. *The Power of the Dog* is not a tale of revenge and overcoming tyranny, but a disturbing exploration of the different ways intolerance and repression can destroy lives.

GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

Repression, expectation and physical connection

Upon first introduction, Johnny is the picture of self-destruction; a man who mistreats himself and his body, half-naked and vomiting. Lee's unvarnished portrayal of his protagonist corresponds with his bleak shots of the Yorkshire countryside. Joanna di Mattia calls the environment "brutally isolating", asserting that Johnny's "unhappiness" is "attached to the limitations of the land on which he is obliged to remain living."[43] Part of a working-class family on a struggling farm, Johnny is bound by the economic pressures that come with sustaining it, regardless of his own interests and ambitions. His father orders him "don't talk wet. Just get on with it".[44] The fully-able 'man of the house', he is expected to work without complaint – as his grandmother tells him in the wake of his father's stroke, "it's all on your shoulders now".

Thus, the intolerance Johnny faces is of emotional and individual expression. Di Mattia writes "Lee's script doesn't provide any overt homophobia or antagonism for Johnny to deal with. He is out within his community and his family is more concerned that he might leave the farm than they are with who he fucks".[45] While Johnny's family are far from supportive of or interested in Johnny's romantic life, there is also no sign that they disapprove of his sexuality. I contest her assertion that "his resentments are not connected to his sexuality", however. I argue that his fear of intimacy with other men indicates his inability to accept his own queerness.[46] James Williams describes Johnny's intercourse with a man at the horse auction as "random, impersonal, almost feral, anonymous sex performed in a state of self-hate".[47] Johnny refuses to kiss him so as to avoid intimacy and the reality that it is a man he would be kissing. As put by di Mattia, "his life is devoid of any real intimacy or sensual pleasure", and Johnny, grimacing, rushes towards climax and the release from his desire before any actual pleasure can be felt; he cannot fight his sexual urges, but he clearly resents them.[48] Afterwards, he bluntly rejects the offer of a date, incapable of imagining a connection with a man beyond physical penetration.

Johnny's progression towards self-acceptance can be observed across his first two sexual encounters with Gheorghe, the Romanian migrant who comes to work on the farm. Their first time, Johnny again refuses to be kissed, wanting to go straight into intercourse. Gheorghe resists and forces Johnny to look into his eyes, and accept that his desire and pleasure is derived from another man. Di Mattia describes how the scene differs from Johnny's previous sexual encounter – "shot with an earthy frankness, this sex scene contains real heat and alchemy — two bodies hungry for each other, groping to figure out how they fit together."[49] Covered in mud, the two men are as united with the land as they are with each other; in baring themselves to their environment, they also lay a claim to it. The scene ends with a precarious balance of tender and rough, a forming relationship still fraught with shame and uncertainty. Di Mattia notes "a shift in later sex scenes to a more quiet intimacy, focused on kissing, touch and togetherness, which expand Johnny's understanding of what sex can be".[50] In their second encounter, Johnny's exploration of Gheorghe's body also serves as an exploration of his own sexuality. Where before his sexual encounter was almost fully-clothed, concealing his attraction to men even during the act of intercourse, he can now contemplate the details of his own desire. Their first kiss symbolises his first real step towards accepting his queerness.

Xenophobic intolerance and a 'migrant-saviour' problem

Unlike Johnny, Gheorghe faces explicit social intolerance. Johnny asks if he is "half-paki" upon his arrival, and repeatedly refers to him as "gypo". Johnny is never made to apologise for his harmful comments, even when pleading with him to "come back" at the end of the film. The scene where he asks Gheorghe for the Romanian translations of words indicates a changed attitude, but it does not substitute an apology or commitment to change. Johnny's father tells Gheorghe they "aren't running a charity for waifs and strays", a reminder that their home is not his. The most explicit example of xenophobia comes when Gheorghe is harassed by a local at the pub, who mocks his accent and flicks beer at him. When Gheorghe defends himself, he is called a "dirty little bastard" and forced to leave. Through these interactions, Lee establishes an openly xenophobic environment. While Gheorghe is shown to have no tolerance himself for these attitudes, as an individual he is powerless against such collective hostility.

Furthermore, Williams accuses the film of perpetuating the "largely complacent use of the trope in European cinema of the migrant other as saviour".[51] He writes that Gheorghe "appears less a character than an image… consistently exoticised as the swarthy, smouldering, itinerant, handsome other", whose "own backstory is made effectively irrelevant and denied context".[52] His critique is echoed by Fanni Feldmann, who asks "whose fantasy exactly is fulfilled in God's Own Country...is it not just a postcolonial fantasy about the eroticised and orientalised Eastern European, who – this time with a queer twist – sucks cock instead of blood and revitalises the petrified heterosexual environment?".[53] Both critics suggest an Anglocentrism in Gheorghe being used solely as a device for Johnny's progression. Williams analyses how these issues are ingrained in Lee's filmmaking, as he deprives Gheorghe of point-of-view shots, shooting much of the film through Johnny's eyes. As a result, the "cinematic field itself is being squarely reduced and foreclosed, with clear boundaries designated for the non-indigenous and always secondary other".[54]

I do not wholly agree that Gheorghe is not an established character. Lee writes him as strong and assertive, immediately defending himself when faced with intolerance. Subtle actions, such as when he takes the uneaten biscuits from the dinner table, see Lee allude to a life of deprivation and survival instinct without any need for expository dialogue. As put by Alex Davidson, "while Martin and Deirdre cling to outmoded, traditional farming methods, it is the migrant worker who suggests new ways of operating that may save their farm from disaster."[55] While this argument does correlate with the 'migrant-saviour' trope, it also rightly celebrates Lee's advocation for migrant contributions and their place in rural Britain. I do

suggest that Lee's advocation does not always effectively translate on-screen, however. Telling Johnny "I am not the answer", Gheorghe asserts that he is a person, not a tool to help Johnny overcome his demons, yet Lee often treats Gheorghe as just that. Unsubtle imagery of nature flourishing as Gheorghe aids both Johnny and the farm justify Feldmann's use of the word "fantasy", and the unbalanced consideration of xenophobic intolerance in comparison to Johnny's repression mars the hopeful ending that Lee builds towards.

A queer home, and a questionable ending

God's Own Country ends with the profound image of two queer men entering their home as an established couple. Johnny earlier tells his father "I can make this work but the way I want to do it, not you…I'm coming back and I want it to be different". Johnny synthesises his newly accepted identity with his environment, reformulating it on his terms, 'breaking the loop' in a way that Jack, Ennis, Phil and Peter never truly could. Johnny is forced to fully expose his feelings to Gheorghe, and while he still struggles to articulate himself, his internal journey is largely complete, allowing for his creation of a queer home.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to support his plight to return Gheorghe to the farm when there is no mention of tackling the xenophobia he will continue to face. While Lee effectively demonstrates how social intolerance can manifest itself both implicitly and explicitly, the ultimate question of whether it can be overcome feels undeveloped. Williams denounces the ending as an "an unjustified leap into the realms of fantasy", noting how the "stark realities of being a committed gay couple in a patently xenophobic local farming community" is an "issue [that] is never raised in the film, which precludes any engagement with political issues and the related socio-economic implications".[56] His criticisms are just. Lee painstakingly recreates the realities of farm work and its economic implications, yet brushes over Gheorghe's struggles as a migrant in an intolerant space, undermining the realism he seems to strive for.

I take issue, however, with William's dismissal of the two men claiming a home, an achievement that many queer individuals have been, and still are, deprived of. He concludes that there is "nothing immediately transgressive…about the couple's shared commitment to animal husbandry and homesteading, which ensures the legacy of the farm and fulfils parental expectations while remaining firmly within the normative bounds of both social/sexual propriety and property (monogamous love behind closed private doors)". [57] Williams implies a closeting of their relationship, when I argue turning a formerly repressive home into one of authentic queer living represents the greatest expression of queer sexuality in the film. He also undermines Johnny's newfound autonomy in suggesting his return home is only to "fulfil parental expectations", and not an act of reclamation as he himself asserts in the film.[58] Williams' criticism is hindered by his narrow binary of what constitutes "transgressive", and his labelling of domesticity as fundamentally "normative". Tom Boellstorff proposes that "far too often, we think we know 'normativity' when we see it, and we think we know it is bad", before labelling such ideas "empirically inaccurate and politically limiting."[59] He continues that "the 'normative' [is not] necessarily less politically potent than the 'transgressive'…to be an outlier has its own political possibilities. But to shift the centre has possibilities as well".[60] Applying his words to the film, Johnny 'shifts the centre' in creating a space for his authentic self on the farm, where before it was repressed into the margins; it is a radical demonstration of his autonomy and liberated identity that is more powerful than if he had given up on his home altogether.

God's Own Country concludes Johnny's journey towards self-acceptance, inspiring hope for its queer protagonists' relationship. Diminishing Gheorghe's continued struggles as a migrant in a xenophobic community renders this hope unrealistic and undeveloped, however. While I do not think Lee is suggesting that all issues are neatly resolved, his unbalanced consideration of Gheorghe's experience in relation to Johnny's indicates an unfortunate disconnect between his intention and execution.

CONCLUSION

This essay highlighted the problem of superficially comparing queer works in critical debate, which conveys to general readers and viewers that only one 'type' of queer text is worthwhile. Seeking to challenge this notion, I have divided my essay into three contained sections on *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Power of the Dog* and *God's Own Country* respectively, avoiding direct comparison unless it is constructive to my evaluation of each work. I have found the concept of the 'loop', referred to in Proulx's novella, a useful throughline in symbolising the themes of my title, while also emphasising the distinctive ways these issues are tackled.

Through these individual pieces, I sought to illustrate that these works are important contributions to queer literary culture that are equally deserving of celebration and study. Ang Lee's adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain* rendered the story of Jack and Ennis a cultural landmark. Proulx's novella offers a more nuanced examination of repression and intolerance, however, in its portrayal of reframing traumatic memory. Similarly, Jane Campion's adaptation of *The Power of the Dog* has brought attention to what Proulx deems a "neglected novel".[61] Both novel and film present a complex examination of competing masculine egos and anxieties, with both Phil and Peter ending up victims. *God's Own Country* suffers from an inadequate consideration of xenophobic intolerance in comparison to its powerful portrayal of overcoming queer repression and masculine expectation. It is important to study the film's failings, however, as this will promote more nuanced discussion of queer works, and hopefully more nuanced queer works themselves in future.

Critics and scholars who have been guilty of drawing superficial comparisons, between these texts and beyond, should consider the detrimental influence their writing can have; grouping distinct queer works with an 'all the same' mentality, inadvertently or otherwise, perpetuates the same prejudiced attitudes and generalisations that queer individuals continue to face. Crucially, general readers and viewers should be aware of the superficiality of these comparisons, and trust in the individual merits of queer works in the same way they would any other piece of literature or cinema.

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