

Comprehending the Comprehensives: An Exam Guide

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INTRODUCTION

As you all know, I hope, the Program is always concerned to be responsive to student perception and need. Indeed, much of the Program's strength comes from the active involvement of students in all its aspects. In this spirit, Mark McBeth, attentive as he is to the importance of attending to process and to the varieties of learning experience, came up with the idea of having a guide of some kind for the Comprehensives. He began preparing last fall, first by informally canvassing those who had taken the Comprehensives in August, and then by designing a questionnaire which he distributed to them. The exam takers responded voluntarily, and this guide is a representative collection of those responses with accompanying sample essays from the exam.

One of the things I hope that this sampling makes clear to all of you getting ready to take the Comps is that while study groups can be immensely useful and supportive, finally, each person shapes, in addition, his/her own method of study. It is very important to realize this. The strongest exams are those in which individual, not group, perception and interpretation are evident. In other words, certain kinds of things are profitably learned and discussed together. Other things, the selection of novels to be read, for example, or critical approaches to take should not be products of group activity. It is impossible for your essay to be thought original or particularly insightful when it is one of a number using the same novel or novels you have chosen to illustrate your variation on themes covered in your study group.

I trust that this guide will work towards demystifying how to live, what to do in preparing for the Comps. That is a tremendous good, and I am very grateful to Mark and all the contributors.

Joan Richardson,
Former Executive Officer
Ph.D Program in English

A quick note about this expanded version of *Comprehending the Comprehensives*: Thanks to the efforts of Charles Carroll and Julie Pranicoff, the traditional guide has now been supplemented by three additional sections: A few words of advice from professors who have served on the grading committee, narratives by students describing how they studied, and a few anonymous examples of actual comps essays. Enjoy!

Student Preface

I decided to prepare this document because it would fulfill something that I, at least, had wished for when studying for the comprehensive exams. Of course when I began preparing for the comps, I visited the library and read the old exams on reserve in the library; I asked some friends who had taken the test if I could read their essays; I even took ginkgo balboa (the "smart" herbal supplement) to increase any mental dexterity ... but still something was missing. There was still something I didn't know: How did these people study for the exams? What did they do before the test to prepare themselves for such a project? What does one need to do to get ready?

Feeling like these were all important questions, I decided to ask my graduate colleagues who had already taken the exam if they would describe how they had readied themselves. I stopped people whose names I didn't know, but whom I saw sitting in the testing room with me. I accosted friends at Jimmy's reminding them of their collegial duties to their compatriots in the program. I cajoled and coerced everyone I could to respond to my questionnaire and to volunteer an essay. In the end, none of this external pressure on my part was necessary; people wanted to contribute. The content of this manual typifies the giving spirit of those people who had the kind-heartedness to share their work (and, yes, maybe the resolve to stop my textual harassment). My fellow grad students proved to have more than enough knowledge and know-how to successfully advise about taking the comprehensives.

The manual is arranged with each contributor's explanation of how he or she prepared for the exam preceded by the essay that he or she actually wrote for the exam. (The test question for each essay accompanies the author's answer.) An effort was made to include at least one essay from each section of the Comprehensives. Having the opportunity to read the before, during and, often, after process of the comps will give test-takers a better sense of what is required. In Composition Theory, we talk a lot about student-based teaching practice and how this applies to our freshman composition classrooms. I hope that this manual demonstrates that these types of process-centered practices are useful at all levels of learning - from the elementary to the Ph.D level. Everyone needs assistance learning sometimes. As I read the process essays that people wrote, I imagined them to be very patient and careful instructors; their students are lucky. Moreover, I enjoyed putting this guide together because it was once again confirmed for me the quality of people in this program. It is risky sharing work that you don't have an opportunity to rewrite or reconceive, but taking that risk offers those who will take the test in the future a helpful resource. Reading these unretouched exam essays and the reflective prefaces, one notices the intelligence and thoughtfulness these people invest into their work. Furthermore, and more importantly, they are generous and collegial with their ways of knowing. Not only are they fine scholars, but considerate colleagues as well. I feel privileged to be among them. Their efforts of cooperative learning and sharing are true signs of an intellectual community.

I want to thank all the contributors for their donations to this guide, and to wish good luck and productive studying to those who will take the exam in the future.

Mark McBeth

Student Preface 2

When I was studying for my comprehensive exam, I found this booklet incredibly useful. The advice from students was interesting and reassuring, the advice from a reader was highly informative, and the sample exam answers showed me different approaches to the questions and facilitated many stimulating discussions in my study group. I certainly felt more prepared for the exam thanks to this booklet, and I am deeply grateful to those who created and worked on it before me. I thought, though, that the booklet might be easier to use if it were reorganized, so I scanned and formatted the pages, combined all student advice into one section, all exam answers into one section, and so on. I hope you find it helpful, and I welcome any suggestions for further revisions. Good luck!

Alison Klein

About the Exam

The First ("Comprehensive") Examination - often referred to as "the Comps" - tests student reading skills, as well as the extent and particularity of students' knowledge about the range of literature and criticism in English. All students, regardless of educational background, are required to take this exam at the end of their first year of study. This all-day exam is usually scheduled for the Friday of the third week in August; the APO will announce the exact exam date at least 4 months in advance.

The examination consists of four sections (divided into two parts). Students arrive with the first section already prepared, they take the second and third sections in the morning (from 9:00 to noon), and section four in the afternoon (from 1:00 to 5:00), on a single day. Students will not be permitted to sit for the written examination if they do not bring Essay I-A (the "passport essay") to the testing room. Results are available within three weeks and before each semester's deadline for filing for a change in registration level.

Information about examination dates is available in the office and is distributed via e-mail. Each examination is read by three members of the doctoral faculty, who award grades of pass or fail to each section of each part. When their judgment is not unanimous, the section(s) in question will be read by an arbitration committee and the EO; the same is true of any section that all three readers grade a failure. Students must retake any section of the test they fail, but they need not repeat sections they have passed. The retake day is usually scheduled for the Friday of the third week in January; the notification letter will contain an exact date. Students who fail the Comprehensive Examination twice will usually be asked to withdraw from the Program. Readers may pass particularly distinguished examinations "with distinction," a notation, reserved for work that is uniformly excellent, that appears on the student's official transcript.

Students may best prepare for the Comprehensive Examination by taking a wide variety of courses; many also form study groups, meeting during the months before the August test date. Most student groups make up practice exams and discuss the readings; they also offer helpful moral support during the months before the exam.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The First/Comprehensive Examination is designed to test reading skills as well as the extent and particularity of students' knowledge of British, American, and other Anglophone literatures. You are advised to draw on examples that will display the range, depth, and detail of your knowledge to best advantage. Answers that refer to a number and variety of different texts will better demonstrate this knowledge than answers that repeatedly rely on the same texts and/or authors.

Part Essay I-A: Submitted before Examination

Theory has been described by Paul de Man as "controlled reflection ... on method." For the "passport essay" to be submitted before taking the First Examination, write an essay of 1500 to 2000 words in which you 1) develop a reading of a single work of literature in English, distinguishing sharply your chosen approach from two other theoretical approaches, and 2) reflect on the theoretical and methodological assumptions informing your reading. 3) Supplement your reading with an annotated bibliography identifying and commenting on three relevant critical texts that you have referred to in your discussion. Also include in the annotated bibliography an annotation of the primary text you have chosen to discuss. Each entry in the bibliography should be no more than 100 words.

Essay I-B (90 minutes)

Choose one passage of poetry from the attached possibilities and subject it to what might be called a "close reading." You are encouraged to attend to such formal elements as rhythm, meter, tone, diction, metaphor, and other aspects of prosody. At the same time, you are also encouraged to display your historical knowledge and to incorporate your understanding of literary criticism and your ability to apply exegetical techniques, traditional and/or contemporary.

Essay I-C (90 minutes)

This essay is to focus on a single author, period, movement, or problem, and enable you to demonstrate your historical perspective through your capacity for making intelligent generalizations about authors, periods, literary movements, and, where appropriate, interconnections among them. Use as examples at least three literary works in framing your response. Choose and discuss one of the following five topics.

Part II (3 ½ hours).

This essay is to focus on an idea, theme, problem, and/or genre organized around one of the five statements or topics below (questions 1-5). The essay must address works that fall into at least three of the following chronological or topical areas, of which at least one is pre-1800 and at least one post-1800. Additionally, none of the three areas you discuss in this essay should overlap with the period that you discussed in your essay in Part IC.

Chronological Areas: 1) Old English Literature (to 1066); 2) Middle English Literature (to 1450); 3) Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Literature (to 1603); 4) Seventeenth-Century Literature (to 1660, including all of Milton); 5) Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature (to 1798); 6) American Colonial and Federalist Literature (to 1800); 7) Romantic Literature (to 1830); 8) Victorian Literature (to 1900); 9) Nineteenth-Century American Literature; 10) Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century British Literature; 11) Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century American Literature; 12) Other Anglophone Literatures.

Advice from Readers

Updated April 19, 2002

As a reader and as a writer of questions, the thing I would say is that students should avoid having canned responses. They should read the questions carefully and actually respond to the specific thing the question is asking. It is not enough to get the facts right; a passing response for me must address the issues raised by the question. From my point of view, this is the single biggest weakness I see in student responses. It is a product I think of the study groups, which are a good thing, but they can result in a kind of corporate response that gets laid over whatever the question is.

I was once chair of the comps committee, however, and I have read dozens of exams, so I think I can say with some accuracy that the most common grounds for failure was that the writer of the exam did not do one of two things:

- 1) answer the question (I have read exams that have been so unfocused that I could not tell which of five questions—on wildly different topics—the student was answering;
- 2) follow the directions (they usually call on the student to write about three works, and these may need to be from different periods or different writers—I have read exams that treat only one work or focus on three works by the SAME author, in direct contradiction to the question).

I really think one of the most helpful things you can say to students is this: You are likely to be very anxious and nervous, even scared and fearful, about the exam, both beforehand and during it. Don't let this unnerve you so that you don't read the question carefully and make sure you comprehend it. Then follow the directions and make sure you clearly address the terms of the question you are answering.

I know this may seem basic advice, but in my experience with the exam, most failures were, unhappily, articulate, intelligent exams that didn't meet the stated requirements. AND I should add that there are not many failed exams. Students in the Program are smart. They leap this hurdle almost in unison and with the same skill they bring to other matters, like their course work and their teaching.

Whatever the question, the kind of essay answer I find especially impressive is one that doesn't just take the generalization within the question for granted but rather qualifies (and sometimes even quarrels with?) that generalization and then answers the qualification. For me, this suggests a pretty original and sophisticated critical sensibility—but I'd emphasize "for me." I'm not sure such a procedure would be to every reader's taste?

Last exam I graded, on the "pick a poem and explicate it" section, I thought there was a knee-jerk tendency for students to go after a poem that looked like it was going to be easy because it used simple words, but was actually fiendishly difficult unless you had a pretty clear sense of the poet's system of beliefs. About half the students in the stack of exams I was grading had chosen that poem and only one student had the foggiest idea of what was going on—the rest either floundered around or strode confidently into a wildly erroneous reading. (It was one of Emily Dickinson's excruciatingly arcane theological meditations on the vicarious atonement but I can imagine the same thing happening with poems by Blake or Yeats.)

Since the point is to pass, not necessarily to shine, I recommend that students spend more time than they seem to in selecting which of the poems to explicate, that they seek a poem they have read before, or one at least by a poet whose ideas and persona] loyalties they understand. One of the best essays I read was by a

student who understood that the poem was by Seamus Heaney and used Heaney's origins in Ulster and his attitude toward the tribal warfare there to elucidate his symbolism.

Advice from Students

Lise Esdaile

I'm going to keep this very short because it's much easier for me to write about how I studied or what to do since I've already taken the exam. I'm studying for orals now, and quite a few people, whom I watched freak out studying for them, are now telling me not to worry and that it's not that big of a deal.

Luckily, students before me had put together a handbook for preparing for the written comprehensive exam. I used that, along with my notes from college and a few papers. I had taken a few classes to prepare me for them, too (Shakespeare; Victorian Poetry and Poetics), and I used my notes and papers from those classes as well.

As far as texts, I used the following: Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory. 2/e*, Hans Beriens' very portable *Literary Theory: The Basics*, photocopies of the historical introductions to each section in the *Norton Anthology of Women's Literature*, and a couple of books on literary terms. That summer, because I was traveling and carrying my own luggage (Jeeves had the summer off), I was thinking light-weighted texts (paperback vs. hardcover) and avoiding tomes.

Look, I stink at studying, and I realize that to write more about how I studied isn't as truthful as to why I studied. Of course I just wanted to pass the darn thing and move on, but that doesn't fully explain my process. I was alone for part of the trip in a little seaside town in Sicily, not able to speak any Italian or figure out the currency (lira, then). The few people I knew were quite sweet; too

much so because they insisted on speaking to me, or rather, gesticulating, poking, and feeding me, thinking that if they did it enough, I would suddenly understand Italian.

Therefore, I hid in the apartment where I was staying, which had no television. After painting my nails (again and again), cleaning, listening to inventively bad European pop music, and reading books having nothing to do with the periods I was covering for the comps, I had no alternative but to read and take notes, reviewing and re-reviewing what I wrote to deafen the creepy silence at night (it didn't help that I was reading *Dracula*). That's my studying technique.

The comps are really not that bad because people here really want us to succeed. There are no trick questions. Be straightforward. Oh, for the poetry section (for those of you who, like me, read poetry the way folks on the Lawrence Welk show might dance to disco—badly), don't just dwell on the historical, biographical, or any one approach. So, if you're writing about Phyllis Wheatley, dazzle them with your knowledge of prosodic terms, the historical climate in which she was writing, her life, and what scholars have to say about the poem. Just don't forget to mention what the poem is about.

Don't worry; it's not that big of a deal.

Lindsey Freer

Studying for the comps was something I wanted to approach in as straightforward a manner as possible, so I made a real effort not to get too worried about it. I'm not completely sure I succeeded, but I got a lot out of all of the work I did put in. I started out with a group of first-years in January, and we met a few times, going over things like meter and scansion and practicing close reading. These meetings were enough to make me feel confident about the poetry explication. That group fizzled out by the end of term, but we started another in mid-June. Each of us picked somewhere between six and ten texts that we wanted to focus on for the test (taking care to pick a cross-section of works that could be used in multiple ways), and we brought them to our meetings and talked about them. Having the books on the table opened up a lot of ground for discussion, as we helped each other remember things about each book.

Our group also got copies of past exam questions off of reserve, and while we chose not to write practice exams, we would read a question aloud, then go around the table and explain what works we would use to answer the questions and why. This was effective practice for both I-C and Part II.

On my own, I started re-reading my personal list of books, but I got too bogged down in details that I didn't think would be helpful. I do best when I work with my hands, so in the last few weeks before the exam, I put together a handmade collage book. Each page was devoted to one text, and included a synopsis I had written, some handy key words, important facts, and related authors, as well as a picture of some kind. Putting this together allowed me to synthesize my thoughts in a three-dimensional way that proved incredibly useful on the exam. Nearly all of the works I wrote about were in my book.

The night before the exam, I had to give my summer composition students their final, so I didn't have too much time to be worried about myself. I did, however, re-read *The Waste Land*, which turned out to be a very good idea - I wrote about it in Part II.

You are going to write about what you know best, no question. If there's a particular author or movement you know well, capitalize on that. Get a fair amount of sleep the night before, and bring felt-tip pens to the exam, or anything that's easy on your hands. The comps are certainly important, but sitting for them taught me just how much I already knew.

Works I found helpful in studying for the exam were *Lentricchia* and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, and the critical editions of various major works I wanted to discuss.

Lauren Elkin

Believe it or not, studying for this exam was a useful critical exercise and a surprisingly creative experience. I found myself collating all the disjointed information I'd accumulated in graduate school into something resembling a coherent critical approach, and I really felt like I was claiming my space as a critic and as a writer. I approached the test organically, with a minimal amount of angst, and passed with distinction. I have absolutely no idea what I wrote that was so distinctive, but there it is. That said, here's a rundown of what I did to prepare.

Three to four weeks in advance: read the comps booklet, realized the test was nothing to stress about, and compiled some lists: one of books I felt I could write intelligently about without reopening them and one of books I felt I could write intelligently about if I were to reopen them. The first list was too short for

comfort; the second slightly more comforting but the idea of consulting all of them thoroughly was daunting. Sort of casting about for inspiration, I read and reread some texts (ranging from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Melville, to Dickinson, to Stein) but those I eventually chose for my short list were all novels I had already read, some at least several times. I reread *Pride and Prejudice* with the intention of using it to write my passport essay, and decided to do Marxist, feminist, and deconstructionist readings of Austen's novel. The decision to write about this novel rather than one in my own period (that is, the twentieth-century) was made out of what I'm afraid is pure laziness: Austen is, for me at least, the literary equivalent of comfort food. It feels much more like "work" to take apart a Modernist novel that I love equally well like *To the Lighthouse*, where I have to deal with the additional challenges of constructing three distinct readings of a novel that makes its meaning in a non-traditional manner.

Two weeks in advance: I met with a study group a couple of times. The first time we met, we schlepped a bunch of books we planned to use down to BMCC, stacked them all on the table, and oohed and aahed over each other's choices. We looked at questions from copies of old tests and threw around ideas as to what books and ideas we would use to answer each kind of question. This was useful (and fun) in that it forced us to practice manipulating our texts to fit different kinds of questions, and to account for the reasons why. I knew not a whole lot about poetry so I had two close friends in the program tutor me on technical stuff—scansion, meter, etc.—and writing about poetry. I figured there was bound to be a sonnet on the test so I learned everything I could about that form, including its origins and development, and used that background to get Part IB off the ground.

One week to go: I watched the Derrida documentary and the Trevor Nunn/BBC adaptation of "Merchant of Venice," surfed around in my Norton Anthology of Criticism, reread Shakespeare, and lugged David Richter's *The Critical Tradition* to the Hungarian Pastry Shop, where I spent an intense afternoon consuming it along with several litres of coffee. I wrote my passport essay during this week, then had a couple of friends take a look at it to make sure it read alright.

I took the night before the test off; that morning, on the subway ride down to 34th Street,

I reviewed "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "Modern Fiction," and "Tradition and the Individual Talent." This was key, because all three essays were fresh in my mind and I used them a great deal on Part 1C.

In summation, my comps philosophy: don't drive yourself crazy; have a good idea of the level of depth that's expected of you in each essay, be able to talk about a variety of texts from a number of different critical vantage points, and the day of the test, walk to the Grad Center listening to music that gets your adrenaline going. Best of luck!

Critical sources:

Leitch, Vincent, ed. *Norton Anthology of Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001. Richter, David H., ed. *The Critical Tradition*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1998. Warhol,

Robyn R., and Diane Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997.

The Marx-Engels Reader. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1978.

Levin, Phillis, ed. *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet*. New York: Penguin, 2001.

Carrie Shanafelt

My study plans for the comprehensive exams were not incredibly ambitious. Several of my friends were in study groups for months leading up to the exam, taking old tests and making lists of books. Watching them do so and hearing them talk about it was all the stress I could handle. (I'm low-key unless my inner John-Brown-type Kansan is incensed.) I did, however, do three things that helped me:

- 1) I went on an interview in which the chair of the department asked me to bring a "fantasy syllabus." I got so obsessed with the question that I brought six or seven. This is not a bad question to ask yourself now and again: "In what areas do I know enough texts that I could teach a class?" It forced me to reach back into the recesses of all my abandoned interests, and I considered, briefly, whether I could, in a pinch, teach, say, Ben Okri. In case I got grilled at the interview, I gave each of the books a three-minute flip-through. This was two months before the exam, but I kept those fantasy syllabi as my lists of books I like and know, grouped by period, genre, and subject, with a decent idea of what angle I'd take in teaching and what secondary texts I'd provide. Voila job, voila exam study.
- 2) Similarly accidentally, my exam responses were greatly assisted by the fact that I moved. Moving forced me to box up my library, drive it, unpack it, and realphabetize it. I looked at every book I have individually, thumbed through a few, and put them in order. My advice? Rearrange your books in some new way. Look at (not in) every one of them.
- 3) The only study I did specifically for the exam was to take mental note of a few books that I thought would be uncommon choices for the exam after reading through the book of sample essays and prep comments. I looked at some of my old papers and thought about texts I had read so closely that I remembered passages verbatim, like *Our Mutual Friend*, which came in quite handy. On the night before the exam, I was treated to a lovely dinner out and relaxing evening by my s.o., who, having taken the exam himself in years previous, refused to allow me to study or freak out that night. The morning of the exam, he made eggs, potatoes, toast, and coffee. I read Gravity's Rainbow on the train, as it was the book I thought would be the most fun to work in, and it ended up saving my rear end.

On the exam itself: I wrote my passport essay on *Wuthering Heights*, which I love (and is rich with interpretive possibilities) but wasn't sure I could write about off the top of my head. It was the worst part of my exam, so we'll leave that one there. (I hate doing little critical crank-turnings.)

For the poetry section, I chose Sonnet I from Sydney's "Astrophel and Stella," not because it was my favorite but because I had taught Sonnet XXXI and knew, if nothing else, I could talk about the poet, the period, the theme, the cycle, the form, and scansion. Go with what you know.

For the next question, I tried to find one that reflected a paper I had written or a class I had taken. One of the questions was about establishing authorship (or at least that was what it hinted to me), and my first grad-level paper had been about postcolonial Yoruban Nigerian novelists and the different ways their texts establish authorial identity both to an African and a worldwide audience. (It seemed best to write about authors as alike as possible – in period, genre, purpose, nationality, etc. – whose works are as different as possible.)

Finally, I was a little stymied by the last set, but paused, breathed, and wangled the question about "lyric poetry appearing in novels" into something more specific and more extreme: the ironic (and simultaneously unironic) use of sentimental songs and song- lyrics in long, un-sentimental novels. It was

perhaps insane, and, if I recall, referenced Michiko Kakutani's NYT review of Bill Clinton's *My Life* (which tome I read that summer instead of studying) in the introduction, and I'm sure wandered off-topic a thousand times, and yet I am perhaps more proud of getting *Tristram Shandy*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* into a thesis-driven essay that I am of most of my other grad-school hijinks.

Katharine Jager

Five fellow students and I formed a writing group in order to prepare for the comps.

Everyone in our group passed the exam; I passed with distinction. We met weekly over the summer of 2003; I think we had seven sessions that each concluded with valuable socializing.

Because four of the six of us were poets with MFA's—and teachers of composition—we used our sessions primarily as if they were writing workshops. That means that we wrote a mini-essay each week, usually in the first 30 minutes of our meetings. Then we would read these aloud to one another and discuss different approaches or texts to the essay-writer.

This was an extraordinarily helpful way to prepare for the writing-under-pressure aspect of the exam, and it also gave us familiarity with the kinds of questions we would be asked.

Because we knew that we would be asked to discuss a variety of critical methods, we farmed out five topics to the members of the group. Each week one person would present on the background and uses of a particular critical methodology. They were presentations, then, on feminist criticism, new criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, postcolonial theory, and narrative theory.

We used Lentricchia's text on critical terms for literary study towards this end, and we also encouraged presenters to locate other seminal texts in each critical field to which we might turn. That said, reading Said's *Orientalism* elicited some public encouragement from strangers on the subway, which reading Chaucer never does.

Some weeks we would try to use the critical methodology presented as a focus for our on-the-spot essays. Thus, we would try to apply these theories towards an analysis of the primary texts we had individually been reading.

By the time we sat the exam, we were frightened but confident. We knew the format of the questions, we had practiced answering similar questions, and we had written under pressure. I felt as if I had an objective handle on my writing because I had shared so many mini-essays with our group—I knew where my weaknesses lay, and how to work through them. The poets in the group knew through practice about prosody; the hardcore critics knew about theory.

Reading our essays aloud gave us models for how to use strengths other than our own. In addition to working with our group, I went back to old essays on literature I had written. This helped me remember canonical literature I had once closely read, and gave me some templates for how I could tackle the exam questions. I was lucky that I had been an English major as an undergrad, and that I had consequently been required to take several "traditions of English lit." courses. I'd read the Norton anthology, and I'd taken the GRE subject test in English literature, too, so I didn't read many new texts in my preparation for the comps. I stuck with what I knew, and made sure I could write maniacally about those texts.

I also went over my notes from my prior graduate literature classes, and I reread the presentations I had given in those classes. I had taken a class in *The Canterbury Tales* that spring, so I had a handle on a big canonical text, too. All told, I think I received my 'distinction' because I had prepared like mad, and because I had taught so many writing classes that I knew how to aim for structure and clarity in an essay exam. As a poet, I was confident I could explicate the hell out of a poem. And my curse is that I turn logorrheic when I am under pressure—in this situation that was a blessing.

The formation of the writing group was the big lifesaver, however. It forced me to read, to write, and to make my writing public. It also made sure that we weren't studying in a hermetic vacuum, and gave us a good excuse to drink beer on summer nights. And, indispensably, it created an audience for whom I could write.

Anonymous

I took the comps in 2002. I'd like to recommend Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* for the secondary sources list. It's part of Oxford's "Very Short Introduction" series and gives a lucid recap of major trends in literary theory in 130 very readable pages. There are other volumes in the Very Short Introduction series that could be helpful for those wanting a more detailed review of particular things like structuralism, Freud etc.

I belonged to a study group, which I believed helped a great deal in my preparation for the comps. Two out of the five of us were doing the comp-rhet concentration - therefore, we wrote a lot (they insisted!). I think that was one of the most useful aspects of our group.

Beginning in the spring semester, we got together and wrote answers to questions we made up or borrowed from old exams. Early on (April and May), we met every few weeks, writing for about an hour and then reading our papers aloud to each other. This helped us to discover where our interests overlapped, find out what we thought we knew well but couldn't quite remember, etc. Also, hearing other people's essays reminded us of works we'd forgotten, we knew. All of this was kind of a getting ready to study. Later, we mapped out which subjects we would cover together, and met just about every week during the summer. Each session was planned around a certain period, which we would study for before the meeting. We suggested texts to each other, with people stronger in certain areas providing guidance on secondary readings and sources. When we arrived, we would put all of our essay questions together in a pile, each of us would choose one, and we'd go off and do a timed writing in answer to the question (at first, we wrote only an hour or so, but near the end of the summer we used the actual amounts of time we'd have during the exam). Our discussions of the period then grew out of our answers to those questions, which we read aloud. We also did plenty of exchanging of materials, reading lists, etc. One of the ways this writing proved most useful was that I found certain works kept coming up for me, again and again, even if I hadn't planned on studying them for the test. This told me that I should review them, since they seemed to lend themselves to essays I chose to write — this turned out to be a good decision, since I did in fact end up using them on the exam.

About halfway through the summer, we started writing in answer to the 3-period questions, and including poetry explications in our writing sessions (no one in our group had written about poetry in some time, and we felt rusty). This was also extremely helpful. These poetry sessions sometimes included a mini "lesson"

from someone who was familiar with that period, or who took on a particular type of poetry in order to explain it to us. One of the poems we wrote about together came up on the test, so I was glad we'd practiced.

Part of getting ready for the test is just getting in the habit of answering test questions - in the Spring, I used to look at the old questions, and wonder how I could possibly answer them. By the day of the exam, the test was a challenge, but something I'd been doing on a regular basis.

Mark McBeth

I was particularly nervous about the comprehensive exams because I did not enter the program with a lot of literary knowledge or know-how. I earned a Bachelor's in Fine Arts and a Masters specializing in Language and Literacy. Neither of those courses of study offered me a whole lot of literature experience, although they had prepared me in language and linguistic theories, and the processes of interpretations (of visual artwork) that were applicable to this test. Knowing my literary deficiencies when I entered the program and the impending comps exam, I took courses to prepare me: Sedgwick's course in Victorian literature, Koestenbaum's course in contemporary poetry. These seminars gave me a range of texts from particular periods and some exegetical techniques by which to read them. However, it still didn't feel like enough. The summer before the exam, I spent nearly all three months reading, studying, and writing about books. I returned to books that I had read in courses, and I found books that I had always loved but hadn't read in ages. My biggest fear was the pre-1800's requirement, since I had little to no experience with any periods previous to the Victorian. I picked Joe Wittreich's brain about what text would be a good one for me to read to get an understanding of the 17th century. Joe knowing my interest in issues revolving around education gave me a book which described education at that period and how education reflected literary tastes of the time. This made a lot of sense to me because it entered into the period through a vantage point at which I had some expertise. (Furthermore, it complements my orals reading list presently. Thanks Joe!) After reading this historical text, I turned to various literary texts, such as John Aubrey (who wrote on education at the time), Milton (who also wrote on education at the time), and Ben Jonson (whose short masques really interested me (in content and manageable reading length)). As I accumulated texts, I began a reading list on which I noted all my texts and their dates. This helped me keep my reading list in chronological memory.

I returned to some Shakespeare plays (which covered two different early periods) and, after reading them, went to see productions of them at various Shakespeare festivals around the city. (Prospect Park has a great one.) In August I took my privileged self to Fire Island where I spent a week baking on the beach with a book constantly in my hand. I coaxed my fellow vacationers to read some of the same books so that I would have somebody to talk to them about. I saw people from the Grad Center at the beach whose ears I would chew off about what I had read, and why, and how I thought it would be to my advantage during the exam. They patiently listened and gave me good advice about strategies of taking the comps.

Also during this period I read through different glossaries of literary terms (Abrams, Bedford, Princeton). I refreshed myself on terms and I knew and learned some new ones too. I hate to admit this but I made myself flash cards that I carried around with me all summer and practiced on the subway and buses. I read different books and journals on explication. (The Explicator is a good journal to browse for how explications are structured and approached.) I sat down and wrote some explications and had a friend

(Krysia), who is a poet and teacher, read and critique them for me. Throughout I gained more and more confidence about the whole endeavor.

Writing was an important part of this studying process. The last two weeks I didn't read anything new, but I did write about all the texts I had perused. I wrote really quick essays (with pen and paper like one does during the test) about themes and characters in the novels and poems I had read. This helped me remember names, places and dates of the narrative, and forced me to practice grappling with literary ideas. I did this likewise with old materials I had studied in my Masters in Language and Literacy because I would need to do the Composition/Rhetoric essay also. I jotted brief outlines for myself and sketched out possible essays. I know this helped me a lot and was crucial to my comfort level that I felt when I finally took the test. I spent a lot of time writing and revising my passport essay. I figured if I wasn't successful with the exam, I could at least write and rewrite a decent passport essay. I fell in love with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* again. After all the queer theory and composition theory I had studied over the past two years, this book had whole new meaning. It dawned upon me that Victor really had the right idea. Imagine making the man of your dreams! Too bad he had such closeted guilt about it. And the monster became a new hero of literacy for me because it was through his striving to read and express himself through language that he gained a sense of himself as a person. Although I don't wish his bad fortune on anybody, I do wish my students (and all learners) the kind of passionate desires that he had to gain a sense of place in the world through literacy. I felt like the monster sometimes racing about the wilds of libraries and bookstores foraging for sustenance (knowledge) and trying to figure out what it all meant to me. Maybe it doesn't need to mean all that much ... it's just a test. However, it's a step that one needs to complete on this educational endeavor. The one thing that I would suggest is that you try to give yourself pleasure in this seemingly arduous and tedious task. Read books that you have wanted to read for a while, explore texts that you know will inform your future work, practice writing on ideas that you would have entertained anyway. If you induce some pleasure into this project (for example, I love to read anything on the beach so that's where I went to study), you will assuredly gain more from it than merely passing the comprehensive exams. Happy studying and *Bon Courage!*

Ann Wallace

The Comprehensive Exam Ordeal

I feel like somewhat of a comps expert - having taken it not once, but twice, and having gone through entirely different preparation processes and stresses each time. I initially took the exam last August, but did not pass the Literary Period and Genre question (second short essay in the morning). So, I took that one portion again in January, this time successfully. Because so many of the English department's students come from other disciplines, I think it is important to mention that my background is not at all in literature (my B.A. is in art history and fine arts, and my masters is in women's studies). So, I felt quite unprepared to take an exam that assumed I had a wide range of literary knowledge and familiarity, which I don't (I'll forever be working on that). However, I wanted to take the comps as early as possible for a few reasons: I wanted to get them out of the way; I thought it would be a lot easier to prepare for them over the summer than over January break; and I considered that if I failed a portion I would be able to retake it by the time I reached 45 credits (a semester later), so I would change levels and my tuition would go down. Now, I know this decision is no longer in the hands of first-year students, but I mention all of this merely to say

that taking the comps after your first year is not so bad. And neither is failing them.

In preparation for my first effort, I participated in a study group that met one evening a week throughout the summer. I found this to be very useful - not because we discussed a lot of specific texts (we didn't) - but because we familiarized ourselves with the test format and with the types of questions we could expect. At the beginning we shared copies of old passing and failing essays and old exam questions. The questions were extremely useful; the essays themselves were less so. As I recall, I skimmed through a couple of essays, mainly in order to find the degree of sophistication, detail, etc. that is expected. However, I spent more time looking at two poetry explication essays because I was most nervous about this essay, as I hadn't talked about rhyme or meter or anything to do with poetic form since high school. Also, these essays were more useful than the others because the poems were included in the exams, so I could refer to them while reading the explications.

Aside from the test-taking strategies gained from being in a study group, our regular meetings forced me to keep the upcoming exam on my mind (constantly!). Throughout the summer, in addition to feeling low-level, continual guilt about not reading enough, I was always putting texts together in my head, formulating questions and thinking about three or more works that would complement each other in my imaginary response. For instance, I would imagine a question on the theme of, say, economics or money, and would then try to take an angle on it that I could use, like women in tough financial situations. Then I would think about possible texts - like *Moll Flanders*, *The House of Mirth*, and...well, I've already taken the test, I'm not going through this again.

Because of this constant puzzle-working, I learned to read very selectively and strategically. I chose to read (or reread) books with multiple themes that would work in relation to a variety of questions. In fact, I read very few new books, focusing instead on refreshing my memory of ones I'd already worked on in my mind in the past. It seems to me that it is important not to inundate yourself with too many new texts - it's just too much to retain and make sense of - and why bother? Every one of us has already read more than enough books to answer the essay questions effectively (even though it might not feel like it at the time). Even for the long, multi-period afternoon question, I did not really read much that was new to me. My pre-1800 knowledge is very limited, so I reviewed some Shakespeare I'd read in the past (and, yes, rented the movies), reread a novel or two, looked at some poetry, and maybe did a little more work that I don't recall. After all, I only needed to write about one pre-1800 text in the whole exam (though I actually used two).

I know this is already rather long, but I need to talk about failing the one essay. I know that my failure was not the result of too little test preparation or knowledge. So, I did not fail because I took the exam earlier than necessary, but rather because my essay did not adequately develop the idea in my head. I think I went off track with my essay and never got around to making my point (I remember that I really wanted to write about something other than the essay question and kept fighting with myself to answer the question). In fact, I remember that after I finished the essay I reread the essay question, then reread my conclusion. I knew I hadn't really gotten at the question, so I added one sentence. But what was one sentence going to do? I should have added more but I hate making revisions and changes, so I left it, with the nagging feeling that it was not going to be enough. I would just want to remind everyone to read the essay question after you have finished writing your essay and make sure that you've answered it - and don't let your laziness get the best of you, as it did me.

One other thing that occurred to me later was that I could have much more easily used the same texts to

answer one of the other questions, one on the color line. But I skipped right over it because it referred to DuBois, whom I had not read in a while. Now I realize that I did not have to write about DuBois specifically, and that I probably would have passed if I had chosen that question (it was closer to what I really wanted to talk about anyway in my botched essay).

Finally, I want to say that failing did not destroy me. I certainly was embarrassed and angry at myself, but I was not thinking that I shouldn't be in grad school or that I was just stupid (although, to be honest, I am terrified of rereading my mess of an essay - I do not want to know how bad it is - and please don't tell me). When I retook the exam in January I felt relaxed and well-prepared, even though I had not officially "studied" at all. I knew what to expect and felt well prepared to answer the one question without cramming. In fact, I was able to find a question that could be answered using some of my favorite books and poems, all of which, quite coincidentally, I had just read in the fall semester.

Wendy Ryden

I was a member of a study group that consisted of five women. We found it beneficial to use our group as a writing workshop. We would meet, write a practice essay from questions that we would make up for one another, then read and discuss our answers as a group. This worked particularly well for poetry explications. I found that doing this focused my energy in a constructive way that helped reduce anxiety. This also helped prepare me for the physical ordeal of writing long-hand under time constraints. Talking is one thing—actually writing an essay is another.

Here's how I think taking the comp/rhet section of the exam should affect your strategy: since comp/rhet replaces the question on periodicity, you no longer need to know a particular literary period in depth (although you probably do anyhow). Therefore, rather than limit your study to three areas (the number of areas you are required to write about in the "cross-period" question), I would widen my base to include fewer works from more areas to give you the most flexibility. Make a list of all the works you feel comfortable writing about from early to present. For this last question you will only have to write about one work from any period (just be sure that one of them is before 1800.) Also, despite all the studying, I ended up discussing works I had written papers about or taught to undergrads.

Chris Iannini

My strategy for the three-period essay was very simple. First, I figured out the four historical periods I knew the most about: 19th-century American, 18th-century American, 19th-century British, and 17th-century British (I think the category was "British Lit to 1660, including all of Milton). Second, I selected one text from each of those four periods. I looked for texts I thought I could use to answer any question. I didn't care how long they were. My goal was to only have to review four books. I wanted to avoid the whole "let's read the Norton cover to cover" strategy. The texts I chose were: *Paradise Lost*, Crevecoeur's *Letters From an American Farmer* (this was my fourth-string text — I was only planning to discuss it if I couldn't use *Paradise Lost* to fulfill the pre-1800 requirement), *Moby Dick*, and *Frankenstein*.

To review, I read *Frankenstein* and *Letters From an American Farmer* cover to cover. I read about a dozen key chapters from *Moby Dick*. I read the arguments and the major prologues of *Paradise Lost*, and what I

remembered as crucial speeches by Satan, God, Eve, etc. For obvious reasons, I didn't want to reread *Paradise Lost*, so I was pleasantly surprised to find out I didn't need to. In the process of going over old classnotes and reading selective criticism most of the details of the poem came back to me. I tried to read about four articles on each of the four texts I was preparing. I looked for accessible (read: easily paraphrasable) articles from a variety of critical perspectives. The Dover editions are really useful for this. I used their edition of *Frankenstein*.

To make sure that my texts were going to work together well, and would work for just about my question, I dug up as many old exams as I could find. There are old exams in Linda's files, and in a folder on reserve in Mina Rees. I didn't worry that the format of the exam had changed. I figured the exam would ask roughly the same sorts of questions. I picked out about 20 or 25 questions, and outlined answers using my three texts. These outlines were fairly detailed. I wasn't trying to script answers in advance. I just wanted to get in the habit of making plausible connections between the texts, in a variety of contexts.

Maybe not the smartest ways to prepare, but it passed. Best of luck, Chris

Michelle Pacht

This was my study game plan (I passed, so I guess it worked)...

First, identify the literary periods to be covered, and refresh your memory on the history, culture, major figures, big events, literary themes, social trends, etc. of each. (Anthology introductions are actually useful for this.)

Then, choose 4 or 5 texts from each period to focus on. For each text, review everything - including characters, characterization, style, plot twists, major themes, the work's place within the period, the author's other works, etc. Re-read passages if it's been a while since your last reading of the text, and review until you feel completely comfortable with each one. It helps to choose texts you like and are already familiar with. Remember, they don't have to be long texts, just ones that are rich in essay-writing possibilities.

Also review major literary genres - what defines them, major examples of each, the period in which each was prominent, which authors gravitated toward which genres, etc. Think about how genre relates to the texts you've chosen to focus on - the kind of text it is, what the text has to say, how it was received, and whatever else you can think of. As you do all this, pay attention to ideas/themes/trends that overlap between texts of the same period, as well as those of different periods. Write down connections you notice, keeping the historical, cultural background of each period in mind. Remember that there are two kinds of question - one which asks you to connect texts of one period, and one that asks for connections between texts of different periods. Imagine what possible questions could be asked about your texts and think about how you'd answer them.

For the at-home essay (part 1), it might help to choose a text from the literary period you feel least comfortable writing about off the top of your head. That way you've already covered a period that you're not likely to repeat during the actual exam. Since it's a comprehensive exam, the more literary periods you write about, the better. I'll finish with the best piece of advice given to me: Don't think of it as a test. Think of it as an opportunity to review, re-read, and re-think the stuff you read and loved ages ago.

Matthew Gold

I began studying for the comps about a week before the exam. Part of the reason I began studying so late was that I had gone through an M. A. orals experience a year before at another school.

I would suggest that when students prepare for the comps, they keep two things in mind:

- 1) For the literary period or genre essay, review or reread at least five texts; for the literary periods questions prepare about three texts in each period that you can discuss at length. Try to remember key scenes and issues—and be flexible as you think about them. I made index cards for all of the texts I used.
- 2) Try to choose "rich" texts - i.e., texts that can be easily analyzed along a number of different threads. I found, for example, that books such as *Moby Dick*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Wasteland*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were good for the comps because one could easily trace issues of race, class, gender, and genre in them. If students have trouble with theory, I would recommend a look at M. H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (I'm not sure if that's the exact title.) If students need to review poetic form, I heartily recommend Mary Oliver's most recent book on the subject - *Rules for the Dance*, I think. It's highly readable.

Finally, I would just say that students should try not to freak out over the comps. Remember that you're not expected to write publishable prose during the exam; you don't need to do research; you just need to demonstrate that you can do reasonable analyses of a few texts from a number of different periods.

Two final notes: (1) Look over your old papers for ideas. (2) As I mentioned, I began my prep late. On the morning of the exam, I freaked out a bit because I didn't have time to review two of the texts I wanted to review — *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Damnation of Theron Ware*.

On my way to the Grad Center, I stopped at Starbucks, where I feverishly flipped through both books and some index cards I had made about them a year before. (That was 15 minutes before the exam.) I ended up using both books in my exam. Granted, I had read each book at least twice before, but if I hadn't looked them over, I don't know whether I would have felt comfortable using them.

I don't know whether I can extract a moral from that story, but I would say that every little bit counts.

SAMPLE ESSAYS

Part I-A (Passport): 6 Sample Essays

Essay 1: Joseph Bowling (Distinction)

In “On Sublimity,” Alfred Lord Tennyson explores the relationship between the poet and the influence of her material context upon her poetry. Engaging the tradition of the sublime that began with Longinus up through Wordsworth, Tennyson works out a definition of the category of sublimity and its influences on poetic production. In this paper, I will offer an ecocritical reading of the poem that demonstrates the ways in which “On Sublimity” suggests a model of sublimity in contrast to his Romantic predecessors and values the external and material over the interior and subjective, questioning the centrality of human subjectivity. However, the poem ultimately reinforces a Western anthropocentric aesthetic through the poem's deployment of sublimity as a category that orders a disorderly material world and allows the poet to conquer that disorder through writing. Furthermore, I will distinguish the ecocritical approach from the Marxist and deconstructive by demonstrating how an ecocritical reading not only best reveals the ecological consciousness—and its limits—of the poem but also offers the most currently exigent reading.

Ecocritics hold as a fundamental tenet that, because of the current ecological crisis, literary criticism must reorient its approach to texts. The ecocritic must consider the textual, cultural, and political exchanges that occur between reader, text, and environment. Thus ecocritics read in two directions, so to speak: first, one must determine how the text does or does not participate in a cultural logic that legitimizes ecological exploitation; second, one must identify how a text resists such cultural logics. Given the potential severity of an impending ecological crisis, ecocritics hold this approach as more currently imperative than other critical approaches, although ecocritics might borrow from other critical strategies.

In this paper, I will draw upon Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*, a foundational text to ecocriticism, to read “On Sublimity” in both ways. I will draw from two of Buell's concepts: dual accountability and the aesthetics of relinquishment. Dual accountability refers to “the capacity of the stylized image to put the reader or viewer in touch with the environment . . . as a counter to the assumptions that stylization must somehow work against outer mimesis” (98). While Buell's concept assumes that discourse can “put the reader . . . in touch with the environment,” an assumption that both Marxism and deconstruction would question, he argues that doing so is imperative for two reasons: readers must be made aware of how environmental space and place constitute subjectivity and, as a result, perform “a deliberate dislocation of ordinary [anthropocentric] perception” (104). In “On Sublimity,” the speaker approaches this ideal when he asserts that the greatest poets are those who write from experiences of the external sublime. Furthermore, Buell's aesthetics of relinquishment arise from just such a dislocation of perception: the ecocentric — as opposed to anthropocentric — text “abandons, or at least questions, what would seem to be literature's most basic foci: character, persona, narrative consciousness” (145) because those foci always privilege the perceiving subject over her environment. Yet here “On Sublimity” falls short: after acknowledging that sublimity lies beyond the subject, the poem works to make it fit within conventional, anthropocentric poetics.

Marxist and deconstructive approaches inform and overlap with ecocriticism, but they differ in key assumptions and interpretive strategies. Marxism shares with ecocriticism the view that literature, in both

form and content, is ideologically determined and determining. Raymond Williams explains in *Marxism and Literature* that society “is always . . . a constitutive process with very powerful pressures which are both expressed in political, economic, and cultural formations and, to take the full weight of ‘constitutive,’ are internalized and become ‘individual wills’” (87). Therefore, a Marxist approach would analyze literature to unveil structures that “powerful pressures” left upon texts, pressures that appear “natural” or nonpolitical because of internalization. The critical shortcoming of Marxism to ecocriticism, then, is the lack of either the influence of the environment upon texts or texts' influence upon the environment. Buell's concept of “dual accountability” assumes just the opposite: authors can use experimental styles to create texts that undermine traditional anthropocentric mimesis, depict the way environments constitute perception, and thus allow “the reader to see as a seal might see” (Buell 102).

Ecocriticism overlaps with deconstruction where it departs from Marxism. Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology* that the “fundamental condition [of deconstructionism] is . . . the undoing of logocentrism” (46), with “logocentrism” referring to the “belief in some ultimate 'word,' presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience” (Eagleton 113). Ecocritics share a similar goal, for logocentrism is symptomatic of anthropocentrism. Applied to texts, then, deconstructionists counter logocentrism by “[showing] how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic . . . [and show] this by fastening on . . . the *aporia* or impasses of meaning, where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves” (Eagleton 116). Similarly, an aesthetics of relinquishment “calls into question the authority of the superintending consciousness” of the author or characters within a text and “suggests the possibility of a more ecocentric state of being” (Buell 144-45). Reading for relinquishment corresponds to reading to deconstruct: both seek to demonstrate how texts undermine traditional forms of meaning. However, the difference between the two is severe: paraphrasing Eagleton, deconstruction is blind to what texts *do* outside of themselves (127). For the ecocritic, it is fundamental that texts exist within an ecology of exchange between reader, culture, and material environment; the text expresses meaning — even stable meanings — because of its function in this ecology.

Having called attention to ecocriticism's tenets, assumptions, and methods and delineated it from Marxism and deconstructionism, I will offer a reading of Tennyson's “On Sublimity” that both draws from Buell to demonstrate how the poem works within the Western tradition of the sublime, approaches a subversion of it, but ultimately reaffirms anthropocentrism. While I do so, I will also offer present Marxist and deconstructionist readings to demonstrate how those readings fail to reveal what ecocriticism does reveal about the poem.

“On Sublimity” possesses a chiasmic structure that enacts the meaning of the poem through a process of inversion. The poem opens with a self-reflective speaker who voices Buell's ideals for the ecocentric text by privileging the material environment over the perceiving subject. Yet, by the end of the chiasmic structure, which moves from the self-reflexive speaker to sublimity back to the speaker, poetry's dominance over nature is re-established. In other words, the poem enacts the subordination of the transcendent sublime through its structure and poetic voice.

In the first stanza of the poem, itself a chiasmus, the speaker defines sublimity as a material world that he cannot comprehend. Thus, in contrast to Kant and Wordsworth, sublimity is not merely a psychological experience but a state of being in the material world. The speaker begins in the first couplet, “O tell me not of vales in tenderest green / The poplar's shade, the plantane's graceful tree” and in the second couplet

valuable. The poem fails to develop an aesthetics of relinquishment suggested in stanza one.

A Marxist reading might interpret this final stanza differently. A Marxist reading would interpret sublimity as an ideologically constituted aesthetic category that distracts readers from the economic exploitation occurring in England's urban centers during the industrial revolution. Sublimity would even go beyond pastoral, which naturalizes an upper-class utopic vision, by representing uncultivated nature through a blazon of royal and classical qualities. The shortcoming of such a reading is that, because of its assumptions about language, it cannot permit the representation of a sublimity that would decenter the human subject. For the Marxist, culture begins and ends with ideology, which means it also begins and ends with the human.

In contrast, the ecocritic wishes to discover and recover an aesthetics that assumes that the nonhuman is "just as real as we are, has just as much right as you and I do to be taken as the center of the universe around which everything else shall revolve" (Buell 107). Therefore, ecocriticism uncovers not only how Tennyson's poem forwards the anthropocentric tradition that has led to our current crisis, but it also reveals moments in the text that potentially subvert that tradition, glimmers of what Buell calls an ecocentric environmental consciousness.

Bibliography

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995. Print

Published four years after Jonathan Bates' important Romantic Ecology, Buell's *Environmental Imagination* represents the first American book-length self-proclaimed ecocritical study. Buell, however, not only differs from Bates in the subject of his study but also in his politics. Compared to Buell, Bates has a naive approach to nature writing, for, unlike Bates, Buell argues that Thoreau not only pays attention to nature but elevates the nonhuman to be of equal importance as the human. For Buell, the environmental imagination de-centers the human subject from writing and demonstrates the nonhuman's ineluctable presence and centrality to human affairs.

Derrida, Jacques. "From *Of Grammatology*." *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. Ed. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 31-59. Print.

Of Grammatology was published in 1967 along with *Speech and Phenomena* and *Writing and Difference* and served as a foundational text for deconstructive criticism. The book develops a practice of reading Derrida names "grammatology," a word he borrowed but adapted from Ignace Gelb. Analyzing Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Rousseau "grammatologically," Derrida demonstrates how Western culture has constructed a binary between speech and writing, privileging the former on the basis of a "metaphysics of presence." Grammatology is thus a way of reading that not only undermines this binary but also reveals the contradictory logic that grounds all such binaries.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008. Print.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "On Sublimity." *The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson: Cambridge Edition*. Ed. W. J. Rolfe. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1898. 766. Print.

First published in *Poems by Two Brothers* in 1827, "On Sublimity" contains eleven stanzas of ten iambic pentameter lines, each ending with a couplet that serves a similar function to the final couplet in the Shakespearean sonnet. The poem was published with an epigraph from Edmund Burke's *On the Sublime*

and the Beautiful, which places the poem within the Romantic tradition of odes to sublimity. Tennyson's poem, however, departs from the Romantic and displays its Victorianism both in its redefinition of the sublimity as something not entirely interior as well as its detailed survey of exotic landscapes.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.

Williams attempts a synthesis of Marxist concepts and categories of cultural theory as well as the application of both to literary theory. Williams, however, deviates from former Marxist literary critics in his emphasis of Althusser's theory of mediation and determination, leading him to develop a model of culture more complicated than the traditional base-superstructure dialectic. In contrast, Williams proposes a dynamic, process model of society in which hegemony is lived individually and continually adapts to residual and emerging social and economic practices. Literature thus expresses the structure of hegemony indirectly through aesthetic form.

Essay 2: Rebecca Fullan (pass)

The Material Soul a (mostly) Marxist reading of *The Sorrows of Satan*

Geoffrey Tempest, the narrator of Marie Corelli's 1895 novel, *The Sorrows of Satan*, opens the book by asking, "Do you know what it is to be poor?" He calls poverty "the moral cancer that eats into the heart of an otherwise well-intentioned human creature and makes him [...] inclined to the use of dynamite"(1), demonstrating the violence courted by pronounced economic disparity. He promises an explanation for economic inequity in his narrative of temptation, spiritual self-destruction, and finally redemption through his encounters with Lucio, the literal Satan of the title. Geoffrey's claim that his story of near-damnation can answer economic questions invites Marxist analysis. The Marxist perspective, however, does not illuminate all aspects of the book, and a materialist reading, which is the centerpiece of any Marxist reading, can be enhanced by including other kinds of cultural criticism, such as feminism and queer theory.

Marxism is committed to a materialist view of history, which argues that material conditions are the ground of experience, and that ideas are derived from these conditions, rather than the other way around. Within materialism, economic structures form what Marx calls the "base" of society, influencing everything else, including ideologies and seemingly immaterial self-understandings the society harbors, which form what Marx's "superstructure" (Haslett). In *Marxist Literary and Cultural Theories*, Moyra Haslett emphasizes that economics and ideology can only be understood in relationship to one another. In seeing this relationship, one can also see that neither particular economic structures nor their accompanying ideologies are natural or essential. In *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Terry Eagleton argues that literature makes tacit ideologies perceptible, therefore also rendering them and their corresponding economic structures open to challenge, whatever the political alliances of the writer (19). Corelli's book is suffused with a spiritual worldview, but these spiritual realities are constantly mediated by economic interactions: souls are formed and deformed through relationships to money, which provides a useful conceptualization of an interaction of base and superstructure.

The Sorrows of Satan operates within a Christian cosmological framework whose boundaries are shaped by economic injustice of late Victorian capitalism. Geoffrey begins in extreme financial trouble, and so opens himself to vice in a passage that swings between spiritual and economic terms:

It was a moment when if ever good and evil angels play a game of chance for a man's soul,

they were surely throwing the dice on the last wager for mine... I had worked honestly and patiently;--all to no purpose. I knew of rogues who had gained plenty of money... Their prosperity appeared to prove that honesty after all was *not* the best policy... How should I begin the jesuitical business of committing evil that good, personal good, might come of it?
(11)

Geoffrey invites evil to take hold of him in a marriage of religious and financial language, from the gambling angels to “jesuitical business,” and his temptations to evil are economic injustice and disparity. Instead of the societal violence threatened in the first paragraphs’ reference to a poor man ready to blow things up, Geoffrey is ready to do spiritual violence to himself.

In response, Geoffrey receives both an introduction to Lucio, clearly (to the reader) the devil, and a huge inheritance from an unknown relative. Geoffrey remains passive in matters financial, while Lucio shows him how to use money to get social influence, a published book, a beautiful house, and a beautiful wife.

Lucio’s understanding of how to use money proceeds from his understanding of the structure containing Geoffrey and himself. Despite Lucio’s supernatural provenience, he is functioning as a materialist should within the book’s context—he is looking at the things in this world that have real effects (God exists, souls will be judged) while society attempts to naturalize its own constructed nature by obscuring these truths. His titular “sorrows” come from the fact that he can see but not change the situation. Having promised to attempt humanity’s ruin, Lucio is forced (by God’s world-*system*) to do so, although he only experiences pleasure when he fails. This resonates and troubles in a Marxist register, because Marxist thought, having *recognized* and *analyzed* the material, economically grounded truths of social existence, generally demands a political commitment to *changing* those systems to make life more livable and economics more equitable (Eagleton, Haslett). Lucio understands the system but suffers because he cannot change it. Ambiguously, though, Lucio asserts his submission to God (as forced-tempter) while giving Geoffrey a vision that prompts Geoffrey to reject Lucio and pursue his own salvation (458). Lucio does not seem to be acting *here* as the enemy of humankind—is *this* obedience or disobedience to God? Lucio claims to have chosen Geoffrey for this vision because Geoffrey’s evils are so ordinary in social terms (449). Likewise, Marxism works to reveal ordinary, structurally invisible evil, and Lucio’s apparent manipulation of his world’s system questions the very order Lucio claims as absolute (449). A Marxist awareness shows that Lucio’s sorrows and his responses to them are applicable to material history, if we now ask what it means to see a structure, what it means to be obedient or disobedient to it, etc.

Once Geoffrey has chosen obedience to God, his riches disappear because his lawyers have stolen them (464). Geoffrey is only called upon to make direct spiritual decisions, never economic ones. This coupling of spiritual choice and economic consequence detaches Geoffrey from his economic choices, allowing him to sidestep more violent responses to economic inequities that are evoked in the beginning of the book. At the same time, Geoffrey’s detachment from his economic choices engages with the Marxist concept of alienation, in which the separation of the worker from the work which “does not belong to his essential being” is part of the overall system of divorcing the products of labor from laborers, so as to concentrate wealth among those not actually doing the work to produce it (Marx and Engels 764). Geoffrey is careless and cruel with the money while he has it because it does not deeply relate to him, and through that distorted relationship, he becomes unable to *do* the work he has tried to support himself with earlier: writing.

As a poor man, Geoffrey is able to write a book, but cannot sell it because the publishing industry is

corrupt. As a rich man, he bribes a publisher, but loses his ability to write. He has become so alienated that he can no longer produce. When his inappropriate inheritance is lost, his book becomes popular enough to support him financially; finally, he is supporting himself with a product that *does* “belong to his essential being” (Marx and Engels 764). Poverty drives one to violence, wealth to damnable self-indulgence, so Geoffrey can only safely exist with a middling income, through a grounded relationship to his own labor and its product. This only works for Geoffrey as an individual, however, and highlights how the religious concerns of the novel, because they are individualistic, sever the economic awareness of the novel from any explicit call for political change. At the same time, Geoffrey’s relationship to writing allows a glimpse into the impact of Marxist alienation on both lower and upper classes, since Geoffrey moves through both.

Writing and reading in this novel also relate to the major female characters: Sibyl, Geoffrey’s ultimately suicidal society wife, and Mavis Clare, a spiritually and economically righteous writer. Sibyl cannot find religious faith or appropriate sexual expression because of sexually inappropriate books she has read, while Mavis Clare is pure in life and writing—leading to critical opprobrium and popular success. The place of these women in the novel cannot be fully understood through analysis that ignores gender. Moyra Haslett argues that Marxism and feminism should not be separate because they are both rooted in materialism (35) and are explicitly politicized(7), and indeed, arguing over whether gender or economics should be the starting point of analysis is not useful. It is significant, however, that in the Marxist reading of this novel so far, it has been convenient to ignore both the female characters and the impact of gender on any character. Feminist analysis, unlike Marxism, forces a reader to consider these issues as central.

Sibyl considers herself a commodity, enjoining Geoffrey to propose in economic terms: “ ‘... these eyes, these lips, these arms are all yours for the buying! Why do you expose me to the shame of dallying over your bargain?’ (195). It would seem, then, that we can understand Sibyl and Geoffrey’s relationship through Marxist concepts of alienation and commodification. In her essay “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” however, Donna Haraway warns that simple equivalence between Marxism and feminism is insufficient: “...a woman is not simply alienated from her product, but in a deep sense does not exist as a subject [...]To be constituted by another’s desire is not the same thing as to be alienated in the violent separation of a laborer from his product” (2280). According to this premise, to understand Sibyl’s presentation of herself as a sexual product, a Marxist-seeming project indeed, we would need to consider sexual objectification with the insights of feminist thinking.

Just as feminist reading can illuminate aspects of *The Sorrows of Satan* that Marxism alone misses, queer theory can open the text further by revealing relationships that would otherwise be hidden, thus fitting into a comprehensive materialist project. While Marxism strives to de-naturalize our understanding of the economic structures of society, queer theory seeks to de-naturalize the structures of power that give erotic relationships their legibility within society “by theorizing heteronormativity as a power relation that conditions all subjects and social life” (Morgensen 2). Queer theory makes visible pieces of Sibyl’s relationship to reading that both Marxism and feminism might miss. Sibyl blames the books she has read for spoiling her sexually and making her unable to love—which is a potential example of Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism, in which objects are imbued with the displaced energy of hidden labor that went into them (Marx 776). Queer theory, though, would also attend to the relationship between Sibyl and Mavis Clare that is begun when Sibyl reads Mavis Clare’s writing. Sibyl explains: “ ‘... when I read a book by Mavis Clare, I believe love may exist, but when I close the book my belief is shut up with it’ ” (202).

Later, when Sibyl has decided to kill herself, she thinks of Mavis Clare as a potential savior: “She would cling to me woman-like and kiss me, [...] and say, ‘[...]--you must come to me and rest!’[...] I will open my window and call her...”(400). Mavis Clare isn’t there, nor is there any reasonable expectation that she would be, but a queer reading offers a lens capacious (and capricious) enough to recognize many relational possibilities. These include more conventional homoeroticism in the vision of Mavis Clare’s potential physical tenderness toward Sibyl, and commodity fetishism in the idea of Mavis Clare’s books as the only things that make Sibyl believe in love, as well as an imagined relation so compelling that Sibyl calls out the window for someone likely to be absent. Queer theory invites attention to each of these destabilizing possibilities of intimacy (woman and woman, woman and book, woman and absent person) in order to expose the constructedness of the one socially sanctioned form of erotic intimacy (wife and husband). Thus, a queer eye can participate in the materialist project of Marxism and feminism with an attention to erotic relationship that strives against assumptions sometimes perpetuated by the other two frameworks.

Marxism, feminism, and queer theory are joined by their materialist roots and often by their political intentions. Nonetheless, each pays attention to different social structures, and these differences in attention are crucial, because their insights cannot be fully contained in one another. The Marxist reading of *The Sorrows of Satan* performed above reveals the relationship of economics and ideology within the text, but misses aspects of gender and erotic relationship that feminist and queer theory, respectively, can illuminate.

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This novel, originally published in 1895, follows Geoffrey Tempest, an aspiring writer who receives a sudden inheritance and meets Lucio Rimanez, the devil disguised as a man. Under Lucio’s guidance, Geoffrey acquires an estate, a beautiful wife, and publishes his book. His book is unsuccessful, however, and his wife, Sybil, does not love him. After trying to initiate an affair with Lucio, Sybil commits suicide and Geoffrey, spiritually bereft, travels with Lucio. Lucio reveals himself to Geoffrey in a vision, and Geoffrey chooses to obey God, after which he loses his fortune and returns to the writing life.

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.

In this book, Eagleton presents a history of Marxist literary criticism in four thematic chapters. In “Literature and History,” he examines the place of literature in the overall Marxist project of material history. In “Form and Content,” he defines the relationship between how a literary work is made and what it says. In “The Writer and Commitment” he address political commitments of writers, and contends that a writer need not be a Marxist to be useful to Marxist thinkers. In “The Author as Producer” he addresses books themselves as products of labor within a capitalist business of literary production.

Haslett, Moyra. *Marxist Literary and Cultural Theories*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

This book is an overview of how Marxism can interact with literary and cultural theorizing. Haslett gives a comprehensive, clear summary of major Marxist concepts and the ways these have been applied by various Marxist thinkers. She is particularly concerned with the relationship of the concept of ideology to various aspects of cultural production, and also with integrating Marxist and feminist perspectives in active political work. Haslett also offers Marxist readings of several works of literature, including Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, which is of interest here because Wilde and Corelli were contemporaries, and

Wilde enjoyed Corelli's work.

Leitch, Vincent B., et. al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001.

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Marx, Karl. From *Capital, Vol. 1*. Leitch 776-788.

The first section excerpted in this anthology is from Chapter 1, Section 4. It introduces and explains the concept of commodity fetishism by describing the distorted relationship to commodities produced by the social separation of the worker and the work from the product of that labor. Essentially, Marx argues that the social importance of workers and the relationship of the workers to the work they do is displaced onto the thing itself, investing commodities with power and meaning far beyond their literal usefulness. The anthology also includes part of Chapter 10, about the development and definition of the working day.

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Essay 3: Kaitlin Mondello (pass)

The Figure of Nature in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: An Ecocritical Approach

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) has been heralded as a groundbreaking text throughout its critical history: from one of the earliest prototypes for the English novel to the first literary portrayal of African slaves as sympathetic. It also has served as a foundational text for later developments in theories of race, empire, gender and narrative. The novella, purportedly an eye-witness account, details the tragedy of the book's eponymous character as he is displaced as prince of his native country (present-day Ghana) and enslaved in the British "New World" colony of Surinam. Notably, Behn portrays both Oroonoko and his wife Imoinda as paragons of humanity and gender roles. Yet arguably, even as Behn exposes the atrocities that befall the virtuous pair, she remains complicit in their exoticization and commodification.

Given its political subject matter, the novella has generated significant debate in both postcolonial and feminist studies. Postcolonial studies elucidates the role of "race" in identity. Behn idealizes Oroonoko as a westernized noble savage who is acculturated, but uncorrupted. His strength of character and leadership are directly juxtaposed to the cowardice and cruelty of his English captors. While Behn's portrayal of Oroonoko as "the Restoration's heroic ideal [...] a truly civilized man against a decadent society" (Spencer 215) was revolutionary during the colonial period, postcolonial scholars point to multiple ways in which the text reinforces the status quo. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon argues that the adoption of the colonizer's culture produces a profound alienation in the black subject. Such alienation is literally and symbolically manifest in the brutal dismemberment of Oroonoko's body, the pieces of which are sent to various plantations as warnings against slave rebellions. Likewise, Trefy's renaming of Oroonoko to Caesar (and Imoinda to Clemene) parallels Behn's own references to them as Adam and Eve,

and Mars and Venus. In both cases, African identity is occluded by a Western mask.

Postcolonial criticism also examines the brutal history and effects of the slave trade during colonization. For many postcolonial critics, the novella is not an explicit critique of slavery or English colonialism. Rather, as Albert Rivero argues, Behn provides a detailed exposure of the atrocities of a few within a larger, accepted economic model of development in the vein of *Heart of Darkness* (443). There is no categorical acknowledgement in the text that the reduction of humanity to commodity ideologically implies and perpetuates violence. At the same time, the text provided its readers with an important, moving and prescient account of the violence to come in the “Middle Passage.” The cyclical violence of empire is realized in the text when rather than murder his captors, Oroonoko executes his pregnant wife and begins to dismember himself before being dismembered by his captors. On the one hand, this violence frees him and his family from continued exploitation, but on the other, it disrupts their own genetic/cultural lineage rather than the socio-political system that perpetuates exploitation.

As Robert L. Chibka points out, “Race and gender, 'truths' written on the body, reflect on one another throughout the novel” (229). Just as Behn both challenges and reinforces cultural stereotypes of African and European, she likewise positions herself and Imoinda both in and against traditional gender roles. Feminist criticism heralds Behn as a female writer of equal talent to her male contemporaries. Among the “firsts” attributed to Behn is “England’s first professional woman writer” (Todd 1). As Virginia Woolf famously claimed, “All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, for it was she who earned them a right to speak their minds” (qtd. in Todd 1). Behn, who was criticized as “bawdy in her work, unchaste in her life” (Spencer 211), claimed her right as a woman to sexual and economic liberty through her writing. Jane Spencer argues in her feminist study of Behn as the author/narrator that Behn's gender enhances her capacity for social critique through her strategic employment of traditional female roles: relationship and sympathy. Spencer, however, points out that Behn also uses her gender as an “alibi” allowing the men who control the plantation to brutalize Oroonoko while the women flee for safety during the slave revolt (216-8). In this way, Behn's gender leaves her powerless; her chosen recourse is to write *Oroonoko*.

Feminist criticism also engages the role of Behn's female heroine, Imoinda. While Behn is protected from violence by her ethnic and social status in the text, Imoinda is the only woman to fight alongside her husband in the slave revolt. Yet, as Charlotte Sussman posits, “Imoinda is a possession even before she is a slave,” (247) a valuable sexual/reproductive commodity traded between a series of powerful men. Rather than allow this pattern to continue, Oroonoko and Imoinda agree that it is preferable for her and their unborn child to die at his hand. The novella concentrates heavily on Imoinda's body, from her beauty and tattooing, to her sexuality, pregnancy and corporeal decay into nature after death; her female body is thus read in various feminist studies as a sacrifice to patriarchy and/or a resistance to empire.

In her influential article on *Oroonoko*, Margaret W. Ferguson sagely suggests critical intersections on “The Categories Of Race, Class And Gender.” While postcolonial criticism focuses on political history and issues of identity, it can likewise engage the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy that are as rampant and powerful as racism in empire. Similarly, feminist studies that focus solely on the author's gender benefit from analysis of her privileged positions as a white European of the literary class. Such intersections between critical theories highlight important differences that may otherwise be elided.

Going further than Ferguson in attempting to galvanize political literary theory (postcolonial,

Marxist, feminist, etc.), many ecocritics argue for a more extensive understanding of the “interconnections of forms of oppression” (Gaard and Murphy 3) that includes the exploitation of nature. Ecocriticism, which solidified in the 1990s, radically redefined “nature” from a human/cultural construct to an ontological entity *subject to* cultural (including literary/linguistic) inscription. The ecological impetus in literary criticism coincided with widespread development in environmentalist movements that called attention to the tactile reality of interconnected life on our planet. Though ecocriticism began primarily as a framework to analyze nature writing, it has since developed as an extensive critical methodology with political implications akin to other forms of literary theory that interrogate exploitation. In this way, nature is a related “Other,” subject to economic, cultural and gendered ideological constructions and their resulting forms of oppression and violence.

The politicizing of nature within ecocriticism is necessitated both by theoretical kinship and shared physicality. What is deemed “natural” is often used as a basis for the types of subjugation studied by postcolonial, Marxist and feminist critics. Likewise, the oppression of various groups often directly corresponds to the exploitation of natural resources. Such interconnections are evident from a study of the role of nature in *Oroonoko*. An ecocritical reading of nature--as concept, symbol and material reality--significantly deepens a political reading of the text beyond the anthropocentric approaches of postcolonialism or feminism alone.

Behn's concept of nature anticipates Rousseau's and corresponds to the Biblical/Miltonic prelapsarian paradise that is uncorrupted. Comparisons between Oroonoko and Imoinda in Africa with Adam and Eve in paradise and in Greek mythology are not only forms of European whitewashing, but also are part of a larger mythology of the “New World” as harkening back to a lost Golden Age of harmony between humans and nature:

these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin. And 'tis most evident and plain that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive, and virtuous mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world than all the inventions of man. (Behn 11)

The same conceptions were applied to both indigenous people and their native lands: the mythology of “natural” innocence was thus used in colonialism to render indigenous people harmless and the land they inhabit ready for economic cultivation.

Such mutually reinforcing stereotypes enact the concerns raised by Sherry Ortner in her influential ecocritical article “Is female to male as nature is to culture?” in which nature is associated with the feminine, while culture is linked to the masculine, leaving both male and female, and culture and nature, rigidly divided from each other. Enacting the female/nature paradigm, Behn frequently refers to Imoinda in terms associated with nature: when her “virgin honour” is in question, she becomes a “polluted thing” that must be sent away and she repeatedly is likened to sexual “prey” (Behn 29, 31). Further, Behn's characterization of nature as feminine, innocent and fecund leads her to romanticize Surinam's natural bounty in a catalogue of everything that can be commodified and traded:

'Tis a continent whose vast extent was never yet known, and may contain more noble earth than all the universe beside; for, they say, it reaches from east to west one way as far as China, and another to Peru: it affords all things both for beauty and use; 'tis there eternal spring, always the very months of April, May, and June; the shades are perpetual, the trees

bearing at once all degrees of leaves and fruit (51)

This mythology of nature's endless bounty, highlighted in imagined geographic vastness and the hyperbole of “eternal” and “perpetual,” is used to justify continued exploitation without concern for sustainability or ethics. The extensive commodification of nature (plants, animals, minerals, etc.) that Behn describes not only parallels, but also enacts, the cycle of human enslavement. The economic cultivation of a once “virgin” land that is fruitful and multiplies likewise requires a seemingly endless stream of human bodies to cultivate those natural resources for others' economic profit, as in the Surinam plantation in *Oroonoko*. This myth of abundance, when applied to the commodification of humans, underlies the most brutal atrocities in the “Middle Passage” where humans became expendable objects that could be replenished.

A famous maxim in animal studies, an emerging field in literary criticism often allied with ecocriticism, is that whatever we do to animals, we will do to each other. Though Behn is not directly critical of the English trade in goods, animals or slaves, she creates stylistic parallels between her hero and heroine with the natural objects and creatures which are traded. She likewise foreshadows their deaths through two episodes in which Oroonoko slays female tigers. Behn describes the animal as taking an “abundance of sheep and oxen and other things that were the support of those to whom they belonged” (53). Here, the peaceful vegetarian animals that are part of a domestic economic system which is threatened by the greed of a carnivore from afar can be read as a symbolic microcosm of colonialism in nature. This parallel is reinforced when Oroonoko asks “*What trophies and garlands, ladies, will you make me, if I bring you home the heart of this ravenous beast that eats up all your lambs and pigs?*” (54). In both worlds, there is an exchange of resources and bodies. Behn complicates this symbolism in the end of the novella when it is Oroonoko, not his English captors/colonizers, who dies like the tiger and his body, like the tiger's heart, is divided in the spoils of colonization. Behn thereby uses nature subtly to both illustrate and critique cycles of violence and commodification. As these examples indicate, ecocriticism allows us to attend to the significant role that nature plays in a text to explore the shared ideological and material oppression of both humans and nature.

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Sussman, Charlotte. “The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra

Behn's *Oroonoko*." Lipking 246-255.

Annotated Bibliography

Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko*. Ed. Joanna Lipking. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997. Print.

Published a year before the author's death, this novella follows the tragic downfall of its eponymous hero. The text follows the conventions of tragic romance when both Oroonoko and his wife are enslaved in Surinam. After a failed attempt at a slave rebellion, Oroonoko kills his pregnant wife rather than leave her "prey" to their English colonizers. Devastated by this loss, he is unable to fight his captors and is ultimately quartered by them. The novella raises important questions of genre, narrative, gender and race.

Ortner, Sherry B. "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" *Woman, culture, and society*. Eds. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974: 68-87. Print.

In this groundbreaking essay, Ortner argues that women across all cultures traditionally are associated with nature due to their biology and hence denied access to the realm of culture. Ortner argues against the sexism, essentialism and false dualism of such a premise, as well as against the cultural institutions that enact and perpetuate this mythology.

Rivero, Albert J. "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and the 'Blank Spaces' of Colonial Fictions." *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39.3 (Summer 1999): 443-62. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 1 July 2012.

This essay draws multiple parallels between *Oroonoko* and *Heart of Darkness*, from the marginalized status of the authors to their use of narration and form. Rivero engages various postcolonial theories of hierarchy (JanMohamed), space (Pratt) and identity (Bhabha) to analyze the "blank spaces" in which cultures meet and conflict. He concludes that both texts, though they expose atrocities in colonization, ultimately reinscribe the dominant ideologies behind colonialism itself.

Sussman, Charlotte. "The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*." Lipking 246-255.

This essay studies the characterization of Imoinda and her pivotal role in the tragedy. Sussman analyzes Imoinda's objectification and eroticism, arguing that the form of heroic romance is complicated by the association between the corporeal power of her beauty and the simultaneous constraint of her body through both patriarchal and colonial means. Synthesizing these points, Sussman concludes that Imoinda's status as an erotic object drives the deaths in the text, thereby precluding the real and symbolic possibility of freedom embodied in Imoinda's unborn child.

Essay 4: Melina Alice Moore (distinction)

"My joly body schal a tale telle": Feminist, Queer, and Disability Theory
and The Wife of Bath's Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*

From her excess of head scarves and scarlet red stockings, to her lively engagement with medieval antifeminist and clerical texts, to her vigorous assertion of herself as a vividly present *desiring* female body (gap-tooth, deafness, red cheeks and all), Geoffrey Chaucer's Wife of Bath remains one of the most

enduring female voices in English literature. Many schools of critical thought have engaged with the Wife of Bath in order to explain the fascination she continues to ignite in modern readers. Such a vibrant figure provides rich material for feminist theorists, who focus on Alisoun's bold assertion of her sexuality and critique of patriarchal ideals of female chastity. Queer theory offers an alternative vision; the Wife's aggressive public presence and sexual candor can be understood as a disruption of the link between biological sex and "natural" masculine and feminine behavior, thus exposing the construction of gender categories in general. However, I argue that disability studies, with its attention to the cultural constructs of impairment and the material body, reveals vital aspects of the Wife's character and the narrative devices that construct her that feminist and queer theory fail to illuminate. Ultimately, the Wife of Bath challenges norms not only through her exceptional delineation of the situation of women within medieval marriage or her radical play with conventional gender categories, but also as a non-normative female body whose physical presence actively interrogates the intersections between femininity, sexuality, and disability.

Since its inception, feminist criticism has pursued the goal of recovering literary representations of women by both male and female authors within a cultural framework that assumes male superiority and authority. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar ask in their landmark feminist text, *The Madwoman in the Attic*: "What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose...definitions of literary authority are...both overtly and covertly patriarchal?" (45). While some feminist critics see the Wife as Chaucer's composite of negative female stereotypes, she can also be read as a proto-feminist figure, who counters the "auctoritee" of medieval society's cultural texts on women with her own "experience," and exposes and critiques the misogyny of her culture.

A female storyteller within a company of predominantly male pilgrims, the Wife articulates her frustration with the restrictions of medieval patriarchal culture, particularly in terms of the emphasis placed on female chastity in religious and anti-feminist texts. Scoffing at men who "glosen up and doun," imposing multiple interpretations of biblical texts in order to restrict female sexuality, she advocates a return to the main text and its positive portrayal of physical desire. Feminist critic Carolyn Dinshaw argues that the Wife speaks as the literal text, insisting on the positive, significant value of the carnal letter as opposed to the spiritual gloss; moreover, in doing so she appropriates the methods of the masculine, clerky glossators themselves, thus exposing the techniques that they would rather keep invisible (Dinshaw 120).

Rejecting the interpretations men use to condemn female licentiousness, the Wife provides her own analysis of restrictive cultural dogma—one that allows her to rationalize and celebrate both her deviation from the codes of behavior and her use of distinctly feminine power. Advertising the sexual experience acquired from five marriages, Alisoun asks her listeners why she should be condemned for her multiple marriages when "God bad us for to wexe and multiply," effectively forging space for female desire within male authored religious discourse (l. 44f, 28). Significantly, she counters her society's obvious gender bias in terms of the acceptance of bigamy with her own examples from scripture, pointing out that "Abraham was an hooly man, and Jacob eek...And eech of hem hadde wyves mo than two" (l. 55-7).

Further, the Wife's descriptions of five marriages identify the obstacles women face when husbands control access to material wealth and security. Here she seemingly replicates antifeminist discourse about female trickery in order to illuminate the situation of women disempowered through marriage. While the Wife appears to glorify the gifts of "deceite, wepyng, [and] spynnyng" that God kindly gives to women in order to help them manipulate their husbands, her account of various methods of contriving freedom also underscores the "wo" of marriages that contribute to the systematic oppression of women by attempting to

render them financially and socially dependent on men (l. 401-2).

While a feminist reading engages with the Wife of Bath's femininity as a fixed category of historical analysis, a queer reading de-stabilizes the notion of femininity by considering the ways she challenges the binary oppositions of masculine and feminine. Queer theory, developing from the "post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions," might here be described as engaged with "gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire" (Jagose 3). Here, the term queer refers to a queering of gender norms that aligns with queer theory's commitment to disrupt, question, and de-naturalize binary categories accepted as absolute by dominant culture.

As a biological woman who performs a bold, sexually explicit public persona typically associated with men, the Wife ruptures hegemonic gender categories and draws attention to the way gender is inscribed into the body through various social mechanisms. In *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (2003), Glenn Burger draws on Judith Halberstam's argument that "far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (Halberstam 1). Burger argues that the Wife is an example of performative 'female masculinity' that interrupts the kind of straight journey between male and female, masculine and feminine that would allow us comfortably to 'end' in a dominant and heteronormative masculinity and its productive circulations of male power (Burger 89).

Alisoun attempts to speak to the universal experience of being a wife, elucidating qualities and habits that "we women han" (l. 515). She also continually draws attention to her female body, especially in connection with her physical lust. Yet, in spite of the Wife's assertion of herself a universal female body, her sexual experiences and the frankness with which she speaks about them prove far from typical. As Burger suggests, while unmarried women and women with church titles enjoyed some degree of participation in medieval public life, wives were generally restricted from activities like pilgrimages or, presumably, storytelling competitions.

Further, the Wife's unabashed acknowledgement of sexual experience and desire, complete with objectification of the clerk Jankyn's "legges and feet so clene and faire" (l. 598) forms a portrait of a woman boldly acting out behaviors considered an inherent part of hegemonic masculinity. Queer theory's critical lens makes it possible to understand Alisoun as a character who challenges the strictures of patriarchy, but also poses a profound challenge to all stable categories of identity—de-centering medieval masculinity by disrupting assumptions about its cultural mapping and demonstrating its ability to transcend male bodies.

However, while both feminist and queer theoretical lenses yield rich readings, neither proves entirely satisfying because their focus on social constructionist models precludes a reading of the Wife's material body and her experiences as a disabled woman. Though disability studies "exposes with great force the constraints imposed on bodies by social codes and norms," Tobin Siebers suggests that disability scholars have also begun to "insist that strong social constructionism either fails to account for the difficult physical realities faced by people with disabilities or presents their body in ways that are conventional, conformist, and unrecognizable to them" (Siebers 57). Disability theorists continue to look for ways to deconstruct ableist assumptions imposed on all bodies without forgetting to attend to the specific lived experiences of suffering bodies.

The application of disability studies to medieval literature presents a challenge because of the period's distinct historical differences from modern culture. Perhaps the biggest obstacle has been the "belief of modern authors that ancient or medieval societies *invariably* saw a link between sin and illness" (Metzler 13). Yet, as Irina Metzler and others argue, this was not the only possible way in which medieval people understood and experienced disability, since not every medieval person had the same unquestioning relationship to the Church's doctrine. As new cultural models of medieval impairment emerge, disability theory illuminates the Wife as both a woman living with a physical impairment within a culture that frequently values normative bodies as spiritually pure, and a woman whose deafness confronts the tension between texts and embodied experience, raising salient questions about representation and communication.

Most critics dismiss the Wife's hearing impairment as insignificant, but it is actually the first detail Chaucer notes when he introduces the Wife in the General Prologue: "A good Wif was ther of biside Bathe,/ But she was somdel deaf, and that was scathe" (l. 445-6). Additionally, the Wife's deafness plays a central role in her Prologue, since she provides a vivid explanation of its origin in her depiction of the eruption of domestic violence that resulted in the injury. Tory Vandeventer Pearman finds the Wife of Bath's link between physical impairment and violence against women especially significant. As she argues:

Able-bodied wives face violent castigation that results in physical impairment for their sinfulness, thus demonstrating a direct link between inward corruption and outward physical appearance...These texts, consequently, place women in an uncomfortable predicament by marking unruly women as deviant, yet aligning ideal femininity with disability (Pearman 45).

The Wife rebels against her fifth husband Jankyn's predilection for antifeminist texts that expound on the wickedness of women, angrily tearing leaves from his favorite volume. In retaliation, Jankyn strikes her with such force that he causes permanent hearing loss. As Pearman suggests, this explicit connection between misogynist scripts and bodily punishment illustrates the way in which the able-bodied, unruly female body is always already perceived as disabled within medieval culture because a woman's misconduct brings about serious corporeal consequences. Further, this attention to a medieval construction of willful, able-bodied femininity as threatening suggests the degree to which socially sanctioned femininity proves enmeshed within the discourse of impairment; women tamed through the limitations imposed by disability may emerge as the ideal, compliant bodies of male fantasy.

Yet the Wife is never tamed; the injury caused by Jankyn actually enables her to finally gain mastery over her husband. She strikes him back in return, and the guilt he feels for deafening her persuades him to relinquish the "bridel" to his wife, giving her "governance of hous and land, and of his tonge, and of his hond also" (l. 819-821). This unexpected victory suggests that the significance of the Wife's deafness lies in its challenge to dominant cultural scripts yoking moral deviance to physical defects. As Edith Edna Sayers argues, the Wife provides a narrative of disability of great value to modern readers because she avoids clichés, emerging as neither "villain" nor "testament of human spirit" (Sayers 88).

Chaucer's exploration of deafness as a real-life condition also raises salient questions about the Wife's unique way of seeing the world and mediating her experiences and relationships with others. Sayers suggests that deafness can function as "the quintessential individualizer," because it removes subjects from the "leveling effects of social institutions":

the Wife deploys experience and orality to accommodate her deafness to the fullest, creating a satisfying world for herself where abusive husbands are rendered meek and sarcastic clerics must perforce let her have her say (Sayers 91-2).

Rather than working as a metaphorical inability to listen to patriarchal discourse, here the embodied experience of deafness actually enables the Wife of Bath to challenge male authority by providing her with the unique ability to inhabit a world formed by her own design and free from the oppressive rhetoric she once heard Jankyn read aloud. As the Wife tells us, after that fateful argument, the two never again had another “debaat” (l. 828). Ultimately, the Wife’s singular experience as a disabled woman not only allows her to challenge medieval cultural scripts about sin and impairment, but also to live unapologetically according to her own impulses, without feeling the pressure to adjust her opinions to conform with social norms.

The history of critical inquiry surrounding the Wife of Bath mirrors the very questions Chaucer’s memorable character raises in her Prologue. Critics have “glosen” up and down, but we would do well to follow Alisoun’s advice and return our focus to the main text, to that “joly body” that promises to tell us a tale of embodied experience. Exploring the Wife’s deafness not only complicates cultural associations between femininity, disability, and morality, but also provides valuable insight into her extraordinary ability to create space for her desires, to re-imagine herself into a world that grants her agency—and to describe this compelling world to generations of captivated readers.

Annotated Bibliography

Burger, Glenn. *Chaucer’s Queer Nation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Burger engages with both queer and postcolonial theory in order to re-imagine Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* in terms of the medieval relations between body and community and to consider questions of gender and sexuality within both medieval and modern contexts. His analysis of the Wife of Bath illuminates the way her apparent masculinity disrupts assumptions about the link between biological sex and gendered behaviors.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written largely in verse by Geoffrey Chaucer near the end of the 14th century. The stories are told through the various perspectives of pilgrims competing in a storytelling competition as they travel to Canterbury Cathedral. The Wife of Bath, one of the most fully developed pilgrims, boasts a prologue twice as long as her tale, and her discussion of marriage and female desire provides valuable insight into the role of women in the medieval period. Benson’s glossary and editorial notes make the volume accessible to first time readers and specialists alike.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Dinshaw’s text, the first full-length feminist treatment of Chaucer, argues that the gender dynamics at play in *The Canterbury Tales* are not incidental, but in fact central to achieving an understanding of Chaucer’s poetics. Dinshaw suggests that the Wife of Bath’s emphasis on her body as text challenges the authority of male authorship by appropriating and exposing the methods it attempts to keep invisible.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-*

Century Literary Imagination. 2nd ed. Yale University Press, 1979.

Gilbert and Gubar's pioneering volume of feminist literary criticism examines the vexed position of 19th century women writers struggling to move beyond the dichotomy of woman as either "angel of the house" or monstrous madwoman. While the text largely focuses on the 19th century, the authors engage with prominent figures of female authorship throughout literary history, such as the Wife of Bath, in order to illustrate the pervasiveness of assumed male authority and authorship.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998.

Halberstam's interdisciplinary exploration of diverse gender expression among masculine women from the 19th century to the contemporary performances of drag kings both provides a history of female masculinity and advocates for a more nuanced understanding of masculine identities and hybrid or minority genders within queer scholarship.

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, 1997.

Combining insights from a number of prominent queer theorists, in this introductory text Jagose identifies the various goals of queer theory as a methodology, while also tracing its roots to gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and the project of uncovering a history of same-sex love.

Metzler, Irina. *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

This text, which has become foundational in developing a disability studies approach to the medieval period, examines medieval medical treatises for discussions of the relationship between impairment and healing miracles from the 12th to 14th centuries. As a historian, Metzler makes an important intervention in modern assumptions about medieval culture by complicating the notion that all medieval people believed that disability automatically signaled moral deficiency.

Pearman, Tory Vandeventer. *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature*. New York: Palgrave, 2010.

Through readings of everything from medieval conduct manuals to spiritual autobiography, Pearman analyzes the formal and thematic significance of disability in medieval texts, with emphasis on the way in which various medieval discourses associate femininity with impairment. Contextualizing the Wife of Bath within the didacticism of medieval conduct manuals, Pearman argues that rebellious women are linked with bodily punishment, which reveals ideal femininity's inherent association with physical disability.

Sayers, Edna Edith. "Experience, Authority, and the Mediation of Deafness: Chaucer's Wife of Bath," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua Eyler. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010 (81-92).

Eyler's volume of essays not only brings together critical examinations of disability in a wide range of medieval texts and topics but also provides an important examination of the ongoing project of adapting the methodologies of disability studies to the historical particulars of the medieval period. Edna Edith Sayers' essay traces the critical history surrounding the Wife of Bath, critiquing the failure to consider deafness as an actual state of being rather than a metaphorical rebellion against patriarchal values and suggesting that the Wife's physical impairment enables her to exercise her independence and powerfully re-imagine her world.

Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.

This important and comprehensive text both introduces and transforms disability studies by assessing the state of critical inquiry around impairment and also pushing the field forward by placing it in conversation with current insights in queer theory and other relevant fields. Siebers outlines the way in which ableist assumptions construct disability by imposing the same expectations on all bodies and refusing to acknowledge the reality of a world composed of varied bodies. Significantly, Siebers also moves beyond constructionist models, considering the pain of suffering bodies often erased in analyses of disability as embodied rebellion against cultural norms.

Essay 5: Rose O'Malley (pass)

“A Disordered Mind”: The Body and the Brain in *The Coquette*

Hannah Webster Foster's 1797 novel, *The Coquette* focuses on the complex issue of middle-class women's place in eighteenth-century America, thereby encouraging its analysis by a variety of critical approaches addressing gender and class. A traditional feminist reading, for example, might focus on the strict policing of female sexuality throughout the novel, while a Marxist reading would view Eliza's romantic failures as attempts to traverse strict class boundaries. In contrast to these approaches, my reading, which is based in neo-materialism, concentrates on the novel's treatment of Eliza's body and brain to suggest a combined physical, neurological, and psychological foundation for her moral fall.

The Coquette is a sentimental epistolary novel, based on a true story, that details the seduction and death of Eliza Wharton, an educated middle-class woman seduced by a married man who dies giving birth to their stillborn baby. The novel begins soon after the death of Eliza's fiancé, a solemn, sickly man who was chosen for her by her dead clergyman father, and who she only accepted because she, correctly, assumed that he would not live to see their wedding day. After her fiancé's death, Eliza is keen to enter larger society, and feels “pleasure...on leaving my paternal roof!” (5). She soon meets two eligible men: one, Mr. Boyer is another serious clergyman who pursues her and seeks to marry her; the other, Major Sanford, is an apparently wealthy man, who appeals to Eliza's sense of fun and flirtation. She refuses to engage herself to Mr. Boyer, and loses his trust. Her flirtation with Major Sanford, a rake, who, though in love with Eliza, refuses to marry any but a wealthy woman, also results in nothing. Eliza is thrown by these rejections, and becomes a recluse in her mother's home. Eventually, she begins an affair with the now-married Major Sanford. When she becomes pregnant, she leaves her home in shame, and dies giving birth in a town where she is unknown.

The novel repeatedly considers the question of why a woman with so many worldly advantages – such as education, a stable upbringing, and a comfortable home – would end up in such dire circumstances. Julia Gransby, Eliza's steadfast companion, at one point directly writes, “I was surprised at her becoming the prey of an insidious libertine, with whose character she was well acquainted, and whose principles she was fully appraised would prompt him to deceive and betray her” (145). Ignorance, in other words, is never Eliza's problem; even as she moves toward her fate, her many friends warn her of the potential dangers of the path ahead, but still she persists in pursuing her downfall. Eliza herself claims that, “the cause may be found in that unrestrained levity of disposition, that fondness for dissipation and coquetry which alienated the affections of Mr. Boyer from me” (145). The fact of her coquetry is not, however, a satisfying

explanation, and several critics have employed more complicated methods and explanations in addressing Eliza's character.

One such critic is Gareth Evans, who owes much to Marxist criticism in his analysis of American sentimental novels. Marxist criticism concentrates on the "writer's social class and its prevailing ideology" as a way of analyzing a text (Barry 152). A Marxist reading of *The Coquette*, therefore, would consider it within the context of the establishment of the American middle class. Evans' reading in particular contends that *The Coquette* encourages the development of the middle class by "opposing the virtues of middle-class social models and norms to the vices of aristocratic codes of conduct" (41). In refusing to accept the more modest, middle class clergyman Boyer while enjoying the attentions of the apparently wealthier (and more European) Major Sanford, Eliza makes the mistake of aspiring to rise above her class in wealth, but below her class in morality. Through this lens, her downfall is not simply the result of flirtation, but rather a fall into aristocratic debauchery, and could have only been avoided by her following the middle-class moral codes set up by her deceased father, and continued by Mr. Boyer.

A traditional feminist reading of *The Coquette*, on the other hand, would emphasize the novel's negotiation of social constructions of eighteenth-century femininity in assigning a cause to Eliza's downfall.

Traditional feminist criticism is concerned with "exposing what might be called the mechanisms of patriarchy, that is, the cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality" (117). Cathy Davidson's introduction to *The Coquette*, in which she reads the novel as feminist in itself, offers a reading in the vein: she sees Foster as using the real-life tragedy of Elizabeth Whitman (the woman on whom Eliza is based) to question the social structures that limit women's freedom, concluding that "if the facts give us the choice that the protagonist did make, the fiction gives us all the right reasons for that choice" (x). In Davidson's estimation, Eliza's indecision is not based in love of pleasure or flirtation, but a real aversion to both of her suitors coupled with the unwillingness to commit to potential spinsterhood. In this reading, her initial unwillingness to marry, and even her flirtation, is something to be celebrated by modern feminists, even though it leads her to a tragic end, because it represents her rebellion against the narrow expectations of middle-class femininity.

There is, however, another aspect to Eliza's plight that emerges throughout the text that complicates the Marxist and feminist readings: Both Eliza and her mother express the belief that Eliza's downfall comes as a result of a combination of physical and psychic maladies that first manifest themselves when she is rejected by Mr. Boyer. In fact, Eliza continues her above-quoted explanation of her behavior by arguing that Boyer's rejection "fatally depressed and enfeebled my mind. I embraced with avidity the consoling power of friendship, ensaringly offered by my seducer..." (145). When she gave in to Major Sanford's attentions, Eliza believes, she no longer had the mental capacity to resist him because of her earlier disappointment. Her "enfeebled mind" is also paired with a weakened physical state, which further makes her susceptible to Major Sanford's demands; as Eliza states, her "health has fallen a sacrifice to a disordered mind" (146). This weak health is witnessed by her worried mother who, "observed, that Eliza's brain was evidently disordered. Nothing else, continued she, could impel her to act in the extraordinary manner" (149). A disordered brain and an enfeebled body leading to the moral and emotional collapse of the heroine is not something that fits comfortably as the focus of either a Marxist or feminist reading; to understand these moments in the text, I therefore had to look to another critical method.

The novel's allusions to the intricate connections between emotion, morality, brain, and body tie it to the relatively recent movement of feminist neo-materialism. The fundamental assumption of this critical

movement is that earlier forms of criticism, especially feminist criticism, overly de-emphasized matter and the body through theories of social construction. Critics following this method seek to re-emphasize the importance of matter in theoretical concerns, not to reassert the Newtonian-Cartesian duality between mind and matter, but rather to probe the complex relationships between what is thought of as matter and what is thought of as mind, especially in light of recent advances in neuroscience. This method assumes a fundamentally active vision of matter:

In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency. (Coole and Frost 9)

Insofar as women have been aligned with “matter” and “nature” in much of the traditional philosophical tradition, any reassessment of the agency or volatility of matter (or nature) must have far-reaching consequences for feminist thought.

With these assumptions and concerns in mind, Elizabeth Wilson takes a neo-materialist approach to Freud in her 2004 book, *Feminism and the Neurological Body*. In the chapter “Freud, Prozac, and Melancholic Neuralgia,” she explores the “neuro-psychology of depression” using Peter Kramer’s *Listening to Prozac* and Freud’s early conceptions of neurasthenia (16). Within this chapter, she figures depression in a way that is particularly resonant to readers of *The Coquette*: she sees as potentially the result of “neurological kindling.” “Maybe the brains of traumatized people have been stressed in such a way that it leaves them vulnerable...to attacks of depression. A substantial trauma early in life...may be sufficient to weaken the neurological system so that this person become susceptible to depression at a later date following a relatively minor trauma” (25). Instead of accepting a clear figuration of depression (in which depression results either from a neurochemical imbalance or trauma), Wilson argues for an explanation that denies clear causality and refigures brain- and body-matter as active; biological, neurological and psychic forces interact with each other over time to reinforce depressive tendencies.

In applying Wilson’s deployment of neo-materialist strategies to *The Coquette*, while keeping in mind the broader assumptions of those strategies, I arrive at the conclusion that Eliza’s weakness is more multi-layered and complex than a typical reading might suggest; if there is no clear causality between neurological, psychic and bodily interactions, Eliza’s downfall cannot be blamed only on her moral weakness, nor can it be merely a matter of class envy or sexual rebellion against marriage. Instead, all factors become a mutually implicated system in which the psyche and the soma are constantly interacting to produce her susceptibility. Her physical weakness becomes not only a symptom of her depression, but a factor in its perpetuation.

The “negative” impulse, or kindling, comes from what Wilson would term the “stress” of Eliza’s circumstances, which set off her spiral into depression, seduction and death. Though, as mentioned above, Eliza blames her rejection by Boyer, it could be argued that that is only the “relatively minor trauma” that is heightened by her previous exposure to some unknown “substantial trauma.” Perhaps the deaths of her father and her fiance left her brain “disordered” and vulnerable to depression, especially when she is abandoned by yet another serious clergyman. Or perhaps the pressure of the marriage dance as a whole shaped her psyche (and therefore her body) to be vulnerable to Boyer’s rejection and Major Sanford’s seduction. The very fact of being a middle-class woman of marrying age in the eighteenth century may

qualify as the “substantial trauma,” since Eliza is continually surrounded by well-meaning friends pushing her toward a safe and steady match, while issuing dire warnings of what may happen if she fails to choose wisely. Whatever the initial kindling, Eliza is primed for depression before she is rejected by her suitor, and her brain, body, and psyche are all ready to play a part in furthering her tragedy.

This inclusion of social factors into my neo-materialist reading demonstrates the connection between feminist neo-materialism and traditional feminist critique. Similarly, both Marxist theory and neo-materialism utilize material conditions, economic and neurological, respectively. Despite these connections, however, choosing to utilize one critical method over another leads to different readings of the same novel, and different views on who or what is to blame for Eliza’s death. In assuming that the body and the brain are important factors in Eliza’s susceptibility, my reading opens the question of her culpability and leads to a richer consideration of her physical and psychic connection to her environment and experiences.

Annotated Bibliography

Davidson, Cathy N. “Introduction.” *The Coquette*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

Davidson examines the novel’s treatment of gender, and is representative of a feminist reading. She argues that Foster altered the historical events on which her novel was based to give greater complexity to the issue of the sexual double standard; Foster made her protagonist’s romantic prospects both unappealing to demonstrate Eliza’s lack of choice, and rational desire for an egalitarian marriage, or no marriage at all. Davidson states “the fiction gives us all the right reasons for [Eliza’s] wrong choice” (x). She also sees the multiple deaths of children as a deliberate “tempering of the joys of domesticity ...” (xi).

Evans, Gareth. “Rakes, Coquettes, and Republican Patriarchs: Class, Gender, and Nation in Early American Sentimental Fiction.” *Canadian Review of American Studies*. 25:3 (1995). 41-64. *EBSCOHost*. Web. August 2012.

Evans considers three American sentimental novels, including *The Coquette*, and concludes that each of them reinforce the ideals of the middle class against those of the wealthy pseudo-aristocratic classes. Those ideals especially focus on following the dictates of a benign patriarch, even, as in Eliza’s situation, after he is dead. He concludes that American fiction in particular was invested in creation of the middle class because it saw itself as a nation as the virtuous middle class to Europe’s decadent aristocracy.

Foster, Hannah Webster. *The Coquette*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

This epistolary novel tells the story of Eliza Wharton, an educated, witty, lively young woman presented with two suitors: Reverend Boyer, a boring clergyman who proposes marriage, and Major Sanford, a rake who wants to seduce her. She is unable to decide, and so both Boyer and Sanford marry other women. She allows herself to be seduced by Sanford after his marriage, becomes pregnant, and flees her home for an out-of-town inn where she dies giving birth.

Wilson, Elizabeth. “Freud, Prozac, and Melancholic Neurology.” *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004. Print.

Wilson uses Freud’s consideration of neurasthenia as a lens through which to consider modern conceptions of depression. Freud’s model relied upon a complex interaction between the libido and the sex organs, the psyche and the soma, that denied any clear-cut causality, and refused to classify the brain as inert matter

that is only reactive to psychic trauma. Instead, he, and Wilson, advocate for a more complex set of mutual interactions and obligations between the physical brain and emotion.

Essay 6: Michael Shelichach (distinction)

The Symbolic, the Subject, the Body and Richard II:

Richard II Read Through Feminist Criticism, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, and Affect Theory

Shakespeare's King Richard II boldly asserts his divine right to the crown, then hands that crown to the invading Bolingbroke before Bolingbroke can even ask for it. As friends one after another betray him, he delivers elaborate speeches in which he compares himself to Phaeton and Christ, only to conclude in his final scene that he and all men are "nothing" (5.5 41). How do we approach a character who is at the same time so self-conscious and so self-contradictory? Can we make sense of his seemingly ceaseless metamorphoses? Jennifer C. Vaught, in a feminist reading of *Richard II*, suggests that Richard is an androgynous figure who confuses and subverts traditional late sixteenth century gender roles – but she does not engage with Richard's ontological provocation that he is "nothing." Slavoj Žižek, in a Lacanian analysis of the play, argues that Richard's downfall reveals the "pure void" of a subject cut off from the symbolic order – but it is difficult to situate Richard in relation to a symbolic order, as the play dramatizes a cataclysmic social shift, the usurpation by Bolingbroke. However, if we read *Richard II* through the lens of affect theory, with reference to John Protevi's *Political Affect*, and do not strictly distinguish between a subject and its surroundings, then we can account for the striking changes that Richard undergoes as his kingdom collapses, as well as understand his strange claim that he is "nothing."

In her book *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* – an avowedly "feminist project" aimed at "resisting... rigid classifications of male and female" (6) – Jennifer C. Vaught contends that *Richard II* reflects "the gradual crumbling of violent, militaristic versions of masculinity during the reign of Elizabeth I" and the rise of "the man of feeling," a conception of the male that would include many conventionally feminine traits, such as emotional expressiveness and a rich interior, private life (111). If Richard seems such an unusual king – so unlike his bellicose male political associates and his stoic opponent Bolingbroke – it is partly because his frequent tears and effusions align him with the play's female characters, such as the Duchess of Gloucester, who bewails the murder of her husband, and the Duchess of York, who, sobbing, begs Bolingbroke to spare her son's life. Indeed, at the play's end, imprisoned by Bolingbroke, Richard retreats into an explicitly androgynous inner life, invoking his "female" brain and his "soul the father" to beget "a generation of still-breeding thoughts" (5.5 6-8).

According to Vaught, what makes Richard a subversive theatrical invention, as well as a surprising one, is that these "feminine" aspects of his personality empower him. Though Richard is finally assassinated by Bolingbroke, he has, through his melodramatic speeches, turned his downfall into the myth of a "lamentable" king deposed by a brutal usurper (5.5 44). Not only do the Duke of York and a groom pity him; Bolingbroke voices concern that the assassination will "slander" his own reputation (5.6 35). Additionally, Richard's introspection leads to increased understanding and strength. As Vaught notes, his final speech, delivered during his imprisonment, is not only a subtle self-analysis, but also an "imaginative" "means of escape" (103).

Vaught's reading illuminates how *Richard II* echoed and perhaps contributed to changing

conceptions of gender in its era. It also, in accentuating Richard's androgyny, elucidates one reason he remains a character so difficult to define. Yet her analysis does not take us as far as Richard's self-analysis takes him. Vaught's feminist study critiques a culture: exposing inconsistencies and contradictions in sixteenth-century notions of male and female traits, she reveals Elizabethan misperceptions and manipulations of human subjectivity. However, Richard, who comes to the conclusion that he is "nothing," questions the reality of *traits* – the stability, the essence, of the human subject itself.

In his essay on the subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis, "No Man Is an Island," Slavoj Žižek provides a brief but penetrating reading of *Richard II*. According to Žižek, subjects in Lacan are "literally holes, gaps, in the positive order of being." A subject is a consequence of consciousness reflecting on its own existence, the experience of a kind of ontological vertigo. In a search for self-definition, a subject asks, "What am I for the Other?" – or, what am I for a (seemingly) more stable social, or symbolic, order? Yet if a subject feels uneasy in the symbolic identity it assumes, the result is hysteria: a state of "radical doubt and questioning...as to what [a subject] is for the Other" that can lead to psychotic breakdown.

For Žižek, *Richard II* is "Shakespeare's ultimate play about hystericization." Deposed by Bolingbroke, Richard can no longer define himself as a powerful king. His self-pity, his self-glorification, his wild shifts in temper, and his repeated requests for others to tell the story of his downfall are frenzied efforts to fashion an identity in the new symbolic order of which Bolingbroke is the center. In his cell at the play's end, cut off from all society, Richard suffers what Žižek calls "subjective destitution." His attempt to "people" his cell with his own thoughts leads him to the realization that he plays "in one person many people" – that his subjectivity has no consistency of its own, but changes with the social structure that contains it (5.5 9-31). Having recognized that he is "nothing," Richard reaches a state of near madness (5.5 41). As Žižek notes, only "sweet music" suddenly playing in another room saves Richard's sense of self, as Richard can interpret it as "a sign of love and love to Richard" (5.5 42-65). Given a sign of the outside world – of some symbolic order, however vague – he is able, in these moments before his death, to again assume the identity of a pitiable, but rightful, king.

Žižek's analysis seems to account for much of Richard's erratic behavior. However, if the symbolic order in which the subject tries to define itself is, as Žižek posits, "a specific ideological constellation," then it becomes difficult to read the fluctuations of Richard's character as the struggle of a subject to define itself in a symbolic order. Ostensibly motivated by a desire to reclaim an inheritance that Richard illegally denied him, Bolingbroke's invasion is justified if one believes rule to be based on common law, but treasonous if one believes in the divine right of kings. Bolingbroke's overthrow of Richard leads not to a new specific ideological constellation, but to an ambiguous and tenuous state of affairs that is interpreted and reinterpreted by many characters, especially Richard. These political complications tempt us to move away from a critical mode that relies on a symbolic order.

Affect theory assumes neither a symbolic order nor a subject. As John Protevi notes in *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*, affect theory focuses on "bodies": not discrete organisms or objects, but rather any – even momentarily – cohesive ontological individuations. At the human level, a body would be a physical human body plus all of its thoughts, passions, and physical encounters at a specific instant in a specific location. A body does not have stable boundaries. A body is always being changed by other bodies – which would include other people, but also the clothes it wears, the heat it feels, the vehicle it might currently ride – and always changing those other bodies. A body can be defined only by its various potentials to affect or be affected by other bodies – its "affects."

Subjects, Protevi writes, arise when bodies with cognitive capabilities identify with certain affects. However, he points out that a subject has a necessarily contingent and limited comprehension of affects. Since human subjects develop in specific social contexts – contexts in which bodies are arrayed in certain ways – human subjects perceive only “political affects”: not *all* that bodies can do, but only what bodies *appear* to be able, or allowed, to do.

Though Protevi does not write on literature, Richard II’s downfall seems to illustrate the tension between subjects and bodies. When Richard first learns of Bolingbroke’s invasion, he declares, “[T]his earth shall have a feeling and these stones / Prove armed soldiers ere her native king / Shall falter under foul rebellion’s arms” (3.2 24-26). Richard, assured of his divine right, believes that the earth itself will not allow Bolingbroke to take the crown from him. In other words, to the subject King Richard II, some bodily potentials, or affects – such as the people of England supporting someone else as king – seem impossible.

Later, after he learns that he has suffered an astonishing number of military and political losses, Richard finds that he can no longer think of himself as king, even telling those friends who still support him, “How can you say to me I am king?” (3.2 177). It is not that a new political, or symbolic, order has replaced the previous. Rather, now that the country and its military follow Bolingbroke instead of Richard, Richard’s body no longer has the affects it once did, rendering the subject called King Richard II unsustainable. Thus, after Richard hands Bolingbroke the crown, he remarks, “I have no name, no title...And know not now what name to call myself” (4.1 255-259). When, a few lines later, Richard appears to recover a sense of self, he explicitly, though sarcastically, refers to his diminished affects. Bolingbroke, newly crowned, asks Richard to name a request, and Richard snaps, “I am greater than a king...Being now a subject, / I have a king here to my flatterer” (4.1 305-308). A new, nearly powerless subject has arisen in this England under Bolingbroke’s control: Richard “being now a subject” of Bolingbroke.

Alone in his cell at the play’s end, Richard once more struggles to define himself. Though the political situation has not again changed, Richard’s affects have. Now a body in a bare space, he is physically enclosed but free to let his thoughts wander. His disconcerting epiphany – that he plays “in one person many people” – is the realization that he is “nothing” but potential, potential that can give rise to an infinite variety of subjects, all of them dependent on mere circumstance (5.5 8-41). The intrusion of the music, midway through Richard’s soliloquy, quickly and clearly shows us, and Richard, how a subject takes shape through encounters between bodies and modifications of bodies’ potentials, independently of a pre-existent symbolic order or any stable human traits. As he keeps time with the music, Richard remarks:

For now hath time made me his numb’ring clock:
My thoughts are minutes and with sighs they jar
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
Whereto my finger like a dial’s point
Is pointing still in cleansing them from tears.
Now sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
Are clamorous groans which strike upon my heart,
Which is the bell. (5.5 50-57)

Another subject forms in this scene, but not another political subject – not a king, not a former king, not a prisoner of a new king. The physical human body and the body of the music meet and become something

new, a subject that is not what we would typically call human. Richard, in these moments, no longer expresses thoughts or emotions: his “sighs and tears and groans,” as he notes, only “show minutes, hours and times” (5.5 278). Richard has the affects of a “numb’ring clock,” a machine that does no more than mark the passage of time (5.5 50). (The experience might not be so rare. Something similar might happen whenever we “lose ourselves” in music.) This new subject does not exist for long. “This music mads me,” Richard says, “let it sound no more” (5.5 61-62). A groom then enters and greets Richard as “royal prince,” and Richard assumes the subjectivity of a legitimate king until the assassins arrive (5.5 67). However, through the lens of affect theory, we can see how a body so long called a king can become many other things.

Works Cited

Protevi, John. *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Applying Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of affect to politics, Protevi argues that a subject’s sense of what its body can do is shaped by political or social contexts. Actions appear possible or impossible based on a shared cultural syntax, and a subject’s sense of potential tends to become increasingly restricted as it becomes more deeply immersed in its culture. However, Protevi also suggests that unexpected or traumatic events can disrupt a subject’s limited understanding and lead to possibilities for creative development. As Richard II’s sudden deposition drastically changes his character, Protevi’s book provides a useful schematic for reading the play.

Shakespeare, William. *Richard II*. Ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Written in 1595, Shakespeare’s history play traces the downfall of King Richard II. Though he can be almost maudlin when he expresses his love for his country, Richard is an arrogant king who exploits the English people. When Richard denies Henry Bolingbroke a land inheritance, Bolingbroke raises an army, most of Richard’s allies join Bolingbroke’s side, and Richard gives Bolingbroke the crown. Bolingbroke imprisons Richard and eventually has him assassinated, but whether Shakespeare is also condemning an irresponsible king critics have long debated. Richard’s elaborate, self-aware speeches have led several interpreters to see him as a precursor to Hamlet.

Vaught, Jennifer C. *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008.

Vaught’s study considers how emotional effusiveness becomes a powerful force for male characters in several works of Early Modern English literature, including Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, Marlowe’s *Edward II*, Sidney’s *New Arcadia*, and Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* and *Richard II*. Though “weeping and wailing” are often associated with female characters in the period, men who also demonstrate such supposedly “feminine” behaviors frequently do so to their advantage. Vaught links this literary theme to changing conceptions of the male in the late sixteenth century – particularly, to the rise of to prominence, and esteem, of the “man of feeling.”

Zizek, Slavoj. “Ideology 1: No Man Is an Island.” *Lacan.com* 5 Jan. 2008. 28 July 2012. <<http://www.lacan.com/zizwhiteriot.html>>

With references to Hegel, the Jennifer Aniston comedy *The Break-Up*, Alfred Hitchcock's thriller *Vertigo*, and Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Žižek's essay elucidates Jacques Lacan's understanding of the subject. Žižek argues that the unconscious in Lacan is "not some kind of prereflexive, pre-thetic, primitive substrate later elaborated by conscious reflexivity," but rather a subject's very relation to his consciously-held desires. The subject is precisely the very gap between a feeling and the feeling about that feeling. As *Richard II* cannot identify with any feelings, but rather plays "in one person many people," he seems an excellent candid

Part I-B

Anonymous (Passed with distinction)

G.M. Hopkins: "I Wake"

Like his oft-anthologized poem, "Can-ion Comfort," G. M. Hopkins' "I wake..." is an untitled sonnet addressed in anguish and despair to God. In form and content, Hopkins' "I wake..." harks back to Donne's Holy Sonnets in their personalized spiritual concern for how a clergyman can reconcile his sin and fallibility - his very humanness -with his love for, and anger towards, a distant God.

"I wake..." was written, along with most of Hopkins' work, in an intense period of creativity that lasted from 1885-1887, in the final years of the poet's life. Hopkins wrote poems as a young man, but after completing his university education, he burned his work and ceased to write for many years. This act of destruction, and the ensuing silence that followed, was concomitant to Hopkins' conversion to Catholicism and his entry in the Jesuit priesthood. It was the loss at sea of a ship, carrying several catholic nuns, that inspired Hopkins to take up writing again; in this case, the occasional poem elegizing those nuns and the lost ship, entitled "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

Hopkins' work was not publicly received during his lifetime, but was "rediscovered," in a sense, after the First World War. His poems were published in 1918 to a nascent Modernist audience receptive to his oddly muscular, alliterative "sprung rhythm" as well as his social and spiritual disillusionment. Although Hopkins was very much a late-Romantic, Victorian poet, he also seemed to look forward toward the industrialized destruction and suffering of the early 20th century. Like Wordsworth, Hopkins was a poet of nature and of the seemingly "simple," rustic souls who live in and embody nature's purity, as his poems "Felix Randall," "Binsey Poplars," "Pied Beauty," "Margaret why are you Grieving," and "The Wind Lover" make clear. These poems are concerned with the usual Romantic tropes of unseen symbolic birds whose cries are heard from afar and the lush perfection of the natural world. Like Wordsworth's "We are Seven," and "The Luck Gatherer," Hopkins' "Margaret Why Are You..." and "Felix Randall" consider the passage of time seen through the eyes of a child, and the role of solitary rural work in the lives of agrarian people (and presumably, Romantic poems!), respectively. And, like Shelley's "Skylark," and Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," Hopkins' "The Wind Lover" concerns skylarks, nightingales and wind lovers, and their haunting, invisible cries, in the context of the poet's imagination and his role in a rapidly industrializing society. This late-Romantic work, in its lyric generosity, its lush description, and its literary conventions is conversely related to Hopkins' later sonnets in which, "I wake..." is included. Throughout, Hopkins utilizes his particular sprung rhythm, "an invention meant to combine the metrical traditions of Anglo-Saxon

alliterative verse with the rhymes and musicality of iambic pentameter. In sprung rhythm, Hopkins often introduces a lurching, thumping, alliterative quality using trochees and triple rhythms at moments of rhetorical tension, only to ultimately resolve that tension with the metrical evenness of iambic pentameter.

"I wake..." is a modified Petrarchan sonnet; it follows a 4-stanza rhyme scheme of ABBA, ABBA, CCD, CCD. In his seminal *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, Paul Fussell has argued that the sonnet is a form particularly suited to argument and balance. In its halves and splittings, the sonnet requires of the poet an ability to negotiate description, rhetoric and resolution. Introduced into English, from Petrarch, by the 16th C. poets Wyatt and Surrey, the sonnet is the premiere English literary form of love and argument. In its most classic definition, perfected in Italian by Petrarch and in English by Shakespeare, the poet-lover directs his argument about love towards an idealized beloved. If the sonnet's rhetoric is successful, presumably, the lover will convince the beloved to enter into a tryst with him. This all works quite well if one sticks to traditional gender binaries in which the lover/poet, are masculine and the beloved/poet are feminine. As long as Petrarch's Laura remains silent, idealized, and thoroughly passive, the sonnet's love rhetoric reigns hermetically supreme. But Donne's introduction of God into the sonnet's equation thoroughly unsettled - arguably to its, and to the reader's, benefit - the usual conventions. In Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, as in Hopkins' "I wake...", the poet-lover is speaking to, wrestling with, arguing against, not a female lover but God himself. Clearly, the rhetorical position in these spiritual sonnets.

John Hollander, in *Rhyme's Reason*, has argued that as the sonnet was altered by - and itself actively altered - the 19th and 20th centuries, it became of form less of love than of reflection and meditation. In the case of Hopkins' "I wake...", meditation takes the form of inconclusive, perhaps unconsummated prayer. Hopkins begins the poem as he wakes at dawn, after a torturous night spent in self-reflection and disillusioned prayer. There is an invested, ironic aubade. Instead of stirring, as Donne himself does, in his aubade "Busy Old Fool...", with the beloved at dawn after a night of passionate love making, Hopkins awakes to barely staved-off madness. He wakes to feel "the fell of dark, not day/" The sun's rise brings no respite from the mind's ceaseless machinations; dark's "fell" qualities pervade the speaker's consciousness and set the poem's overall tone of despair. The initial 2 lines of the poem confirm to the qualifications of iambic pentameter - they sound like formal English metrics are supposed to sound - but Hopkins turns to sprung rhythm in the third line, and prosodically, literally, all hell breaks loose. "This night," establishes a lurching, incantatory trochaic rhythm. Anna Deanene Smith has asserted that where the iamb holds a sense of mere statement the trochee shifts that statement more towards threat. In her example, this is accomplished by comparing the profane imperative "Fuck You" - iambic stress on the second word - with "Fuck You" -trochaic stress on the first word. Although this 3rd line is roughly pentametric, its torque into trochaic meter embodies the speaker's insomniac torture of inward scrutiny and no reprieve. "What sights you, hear, saw; ways you went," immediately following that initial declarative "this night" establishes an emphatic series of spondees. Hopkins points his finger at the previous night, and at his own heart.

In the second stanza, Hopkins resolves the meter back into a smooth iambic pentameter. He discusses, declares, bemoans the ways in which his house of abortive prayer are like his misguided life. It is in this stanza that Hopkins upends the love-rhetoric of the sonnet, as well. He's been sending cries, "like dead letters sent" to a dearest beloved who lives painfully far away. This stanza establishes the parameters for the sonnet's turn in the third stanza, at the culmination of the eighth line of the poem. Where the first 4 line stanzas followed the Petrarchan envelope rhyming pattern ABBA ABBA, Hopkins shifts his structure towards a looser, though no less restrictive double tercet CCD CCD. In a Shakespearean sonnet, the

concluding GG couplet allows for a kind of "ta-da!" moment, an often false-sounding resolution that can feel a bit too-neat.

But Hopkins' use of the Petrarchan style allows him considerably more rhetorical wiggle room. He turns the poem's conceit from a description of abortive prayer to an unceasingly, depressively analytic of his own sins and flaws. In a series of analytic declarations, he states "I am gall. I am heartburn." It is only after the turn has occurred that Hopkins can introduce God, but even then, only God's deep decree - original, bodily sin - is apparent. Throughout this bleak poem, God is thoroughly, postmodern-ly absent. Hopkins uses his sprung rhythm trochees again in this third stanza, describing his body's bitterness, its gall and purgency, the way his "blood brimmed the curse," placing spondaic emphasis on both "blood" and "brimmed" a viscerally alliterative pairing. Hopkins wrote the final tercet with a trochaic invention, "self yeast," a pairing of noun and adjective similar to the "fresh firecoal" description in his much happier and more positive God-poem, "Pied Beauty." This "self yeast of spirit" establishes in its quirky syntax that the reader has reentered the realm of sprung rhythm. That "self yeast" is the subject of the sentence, but its corollary verb "sours" is found at the distant end of the sentence. The speaker is merely a body, "dull dough" that's been soured not just by original sin but by his own bad self. It is this which allows the speaker to introduce the sonnet's final, concluding, turn: he is like all "the lost." But, more painfully than this, he is not merely "like" the lost, he is "worse." As in the poem "God's Grandeur," which resolves in a similarly depressive, unrelenting focus on the human body and the destruction it can unleash not just upon itself but upon the natural world, Hopkins here turns the poem's focus towards a "sweating" self, a human who - taken out of the throng - still succeeds in sinful perfidy against God and against himself.

Throughout the poem, Hopkins has used primarily masculine end rhymes, and in this last tercet he boils down his rhymes to single, terse syllables. The effect is one of utter grief and self-loathing. "Curse" is rhymed with "worse" in a sonic and rhetorical pairing. Hopkins' use of seamless iambic pentameter in the sonnet's final line provides no respite for the reader, or for the speaker, from the unrelenting self-scrutiny that he's used throughout the poem. Where "Pied Beauty" can end with the grateful, graceful imperative "praise him," "I wake..." merely ends as bleakly and blackly as it opened. Hopkins' aubade ironically shouts out to an absent lover, a misbegotten invisible God. The preceding night of meditative passion has had neither resolution nor consummation. Hopkins' speaker remains as he began, alone.

Anonymous (Passed with distinction)

Shakespeare Sonnet 29

Since this sonnet falls within the first part of Shakespeare's cycle, it is presumably addressed to the young gentleman. This sets the context of the sonnet, then, within the public realm, within the realm of masculine power play and rivalry. The public realm was precarious for both part and courtier alike who jockeyed for the fickle fervor of prince and/or patron. The first line points to this fickleness = "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes." The "when" indicates that this disgrace is a recurring experience for "will," the speaker (regardless of whether we link him to Shakespeare himself). In ascendance with being out of favor, this line's meter as well as most of the sonnet's meter. While all but two lines are pentameter, few lines are regular, or unforced links pentameter is quite irregular, with only two iambic feet. The speaker (over) emphasizes his "outcast state" not only with its triple stresses, but with the redundancy of "I all alone." "I" is itself singular, of course, and the repetitive of the "I" sound reinforces this singularity with its hollow ring.

When he "trouble[s] deaf heaven with [lives] boot was cries," he continues to emphasize his isolation, sealing himself off - his cries do not escape his "outcast state" because heaven wither cannot or will not hear him.

And yet, not only is the speaker isolated from favor, from the other men's company, he is isolated from himself: "And [I] look upon myself and curse my fate." At this point the speaker has so far internalized the gaze of other "men's eyes" that he looks upon himself and becomes, in effect, a divided self. As a result, he sees himself as he imagines they see him. He becomes envious, rivalrous. He wishes he were "like to one more rich in hope/Featured like him, like him with friends possessed/Desiring this man's art and this man's scope." Within these lines, he establishes the standards of worth in the public realm he's been ousted from. While he wishes he had more hope, the use of "sick" implies such hope is of future (monetary) prospects. And "possessed" indicates that he not only wants friends for comradery, but for material gains, for networking or patronage. From line five to seven, the speaker becomes increasingly less himself as his desire to become like other men becomes stronger. Indeed, we move from "wishing" to "desiring." The structure of line six mimics its content quite effectively. He wants to be featured like another man, so the line becomes a mirror as it repeats "like him, like him." In line seven, his desire becomes more greedy as his object of desire shifts from being singular ("me," "him") to plural: he "desire[s] this man's art, and that man's scope." In one sense, he longs for their intellectual and personal talents here. But at the same, this longing includes a desire for wealth and material possessions. On the one hand "art" could refer to artistic ability, or on the other, actual paintings or perhaps artifice (a skill like to win possessions.) "Scope," likewise, could refer to the breadth of a man's knowledge and talents, or to the scope of his influence or favor. Line eight culminates his self-rejection and envy of other men in favor, suggested by the opposition of "most" and "least" and the semi-colon which separates this first section from the last which signals a shift in perspective. At this point, he cannot truly enjoy what he enjoys because his internalization of public values, those of other men, prevents him from being content with his own personal values.

"Yet" in line nine signals the shift. He has come to almost despise himself, but thinking upon "thee," the young gentleman, allows him to reverse the process of internalization. This reversal in fact is portrayed as an ascension (sp?) as "arising" suggests. Moreover, its parallel relation to "despising" in the rhyme scheme further emphasizes this reversal from descension to ascension. Whereas he wished to be like other men, here he achieves transcendence as he becomes "like to the lark at break of day." In other words, he has transcended the internalate of public values by transcending out of the public altogether, using natural imagery. By having lines ten and twelve rhyme with two and four, the speaker further emphasizes the reversal. Whereas he weeped in line two, he sings in line twelve. Whereas his situation was fixed, determined (his "fate") in line four, he now sings at "heaven's gate" which before was closed to him, "Deaf to his cries. Remembering his "sweet love" brings him "wrath," but this wrath is now spatial rather than momentary. Line fourteen culminates the reversal by completely reversing his position. He began as an isolated, pervuless, hopeless outcast who envied all men and all things public. Now is the one to scorn, not only the public, but the men enjoying the supreme power of the public - kings.

Ann K. Hoff

When Ann Bradstreet first came to the New World, she struggled to come to terms with a new faith and a rough new civilization. She writes about how she first rebelled against her new circumstances, but soon

found youth and "bent " to the will of God. Many of her poems, the first to be published by any author of the New World, speak of the comfort and happiness she derives from faith.

The poem "Contemplations" is more than a celebration of New England fall foliage, it is a declaration of faith written by a woman who struggled continuously with her health. The poem contemplates autumn, the end of the summer season. This metaphoric choice indicates an awareness of decline into winter - a symbol of death. Still, the poem is not moribund, but laudatory. It speaks of a greater life to follow this are of claims that if this "under world" can be so delightful, that heaven must be quite splendid indeed. The scenery gives her an unmistakable sense of eternity.

To see how Bradstreet weaves this extended metaphors, we must examine these first four stanzas carefully considering form, and content, meter, rhyme, diction, and metaphor. Bradstreet skillfully chooses the for that best corresponds to her "Contemplation." The rhyme scheme is simple but interesting. Each stanza follows the pattern ABABCCC. Each group of seven lines follows this strictly, using only a few near rhymes such as "eye"/"infancy." Her rhyme scheme does not often intrude on the readability of the poem, but it does somewhat alter her diction. The best example of this is the somewhat awkward choice of the word "dight" in line 13 which might have been more clearly written as "clad," "decked," "decorated" or "formed" (the list goes on but for the necessity of rhyming with "light" and "night" in the CCC Lines of stanza 2. For the most part, though, her rhyme pattern, while strict, does not slow the poem or make its diction awkward, merely marks it as colonial... or at least familiar to a 17th century ear Bradstreet's meter in "Contemplations" is also deceptively simple. The first six lines of these four stanzas flow in rather rigid iambic pentameter: (if so much excellence abide the law ...). However, the last line of each stanza bursts forth out of iambic and even out of pentameter. The sixth lines do not follow the same rhythmic patterns between verses either. They are all six feet instead of five, but combine trochees, and dactyls with its regular iambs. This does two things, it changes the reader's rhythm, slowing them down somewhat to force a pause between stanzas. This prevents the poem from hurtling forward ruining the contemplative mood and pace. It also mimics the content of the poem. The iambic pentameter grows, straight, rigid like the stark trunk of an oak while the 7th line explodes with variety like a burst of yellows and reds and greens.

Anne Bradstreet words too are chosen to carefully construct an extended metaphor and to convey her strong sense of the eternity represented by the autumnal scene. She opens by speaking of Phoebus being "but one hair to be" meaning that we are at the pinnacle of fall and there is little time left to enjoy this splendor. This gives the "contemplation" a sense of breathless urgency.

Her description of the foliage too is careful. She writes that while they are "richly clad yet void of pride" and marvels that though they seem gilded and painted, they are real indeed. This display of wonderment at the trees' naturalness bespeaks an increasing appreciation for what Bradstreet once saw as a rough wilderness.

Working for the alliterative XXX in line seven, stanza two begins "I wist not what to wish, yet sure thought I..." that if so much "excellence abide below/ How excellent is He that duels on High." While strained sounding do a modem reader, Bradstreet's invocation of God (instead of Pheobus now) marks her as an inspired poet. The lines have a simpler resonance, though, that if earth can be this grand, surely heaven's glory must be unimaginable. Still, Bradstreet's question ends by pointing out that we know God's power and beauty by his "works" and this suggests that she has caught a glimpse at the eternal. This sentiment (that the peak before the decline to writer provides a momentary glimpse at eternal delights)

develops further in the third stanza when Bradstreet's contemplation turns its focus to the "stately oak."

Here, Bradstreet ponders how old the oak might be and suggests that it grows so tall that the clouds "seemed to aspire" to be its height. The sixth line of this stanza is somewhat perplexing due to her use of the word "scorn." The most logical reading of this line is that if it has indeed been 1,000 years since this tree burst from its acorn ("shell of horn"), then the tree seems to scorn eternity - for it will last longer just as it seems higher than the clouds. This use of hyperbole prepares us for the fourth stanza in which Bradstreet turns her "gaze" toward the "glistening sun."

As she gazes at the sun's beams through the shade of the "leavie" (leafy) tree, she "grew amazed." Bradstreet contemplates the glory of God compared to this sun -- again assuming it to be greater, wondering how it could be. She calls the sun the "soul of this world" and exclaims that it is "no wonder some made thee a deity" and says that if she had not known better, she too would have deified the sun. The most stunning word in this fourth stanza is the word "alas" wedged into the last line. The syntax is constructed so that the reader must interpret whether she feels "alas" as in "I wish I had not known better" or "alas" as in "alas, I too would have thought this."

A reader who knows how Anne Bradstreet struggled with her faith would probably favor the latter, since her poems express a sense of gratitude to God at having "saved" her. Still, the ambiguous syntax leaves a haunting sense of melancholy that she is not able to fully surrender herself to the glory of the scene, but must mitigate it through her knowledge of still greater things to come.

Throughout, this poem flirts with the idea that nature is grand beyond God, that the oak scorns eternity and alas she cannot worship the sun. Still Bradstreet is careful to recall herself and her reader to the "glory" of "He that dwells in High" and qualifies her wonderment as a glimpse of future heavenly glory.

This celebration of New England nature in a moment of decline seems to have embedded in it an extended metaphor. While Bradstreet contemplates Fall, she contemplates life's end and the beyond. This poem contemplates her faith, her new world, and new worlds still to come.

Jody Rosen

Shakespeare's sonnet 73 portrays the narrator's movement toward death through the use of graphic and symbolic images. The sonnet provides a good form for this, as the use of the quatrain followed by a final couplet provides a sense of completion and closure, which echoes the poem's content.

The poem begins with the speaker comparing his life to a year, and he has reached the point at which the leaves have all but died, leaving the near-bare branches to shake in the cold wind of winter. It has reached a point in this year-life that birds no longer perch and sing there because of such inclemency.

This quatrain, following the *abab* rhyme pattern with lines in iambic pentameter, focuses on comparing the speaker's life to phenomena in nature. This is a traditional comparison, using visuals such as bare trees ravished by autumn. Addressing our sense of sound, we learn that the pleasant sounds of birds have vanished, leaving near silence, perhaps discord even, where these "sure ruined choirs" stand in for birdsong.

The second quatrain, also in iambic pentameter and continuing the rhyme scheme *cdcd*, moves from nature to self. It begins by comparing the speaker not with a year but with a day, suggesting a closer end, a

quicker end. He employs a frequently used metaphor of the sun setting, twilight beginning, and the gradual "by and by" entrance of night. Night, it appears, is the double of death personified. Acting in accord with Death black night seals the fate of that which Death himself does not.

In the third and final quatrain, which follows the same meter and efef rhyming pattern, the speaker speaks almost exclusively of himself, rather than nature, although he makes another comparison of dying to a conventional death image. He suggests that he is the "glowing of such fire," the embers that remain, since embers, not fire, glow. "His youth" is gone, represented by ash that these embers will soon be as well. It is unclear, though, whether he switches to speak in third person about himself, if he refers to a male outside of the poem, or if the referent of "his" is "fire," and that the ashes are from the fire when it was first set. This is an interesting ambiguity, since the final explanation would mean the speaker is personifying fire. This would add evidence to the fact that the poem moves gradually away from nature and into a more social grounding.

The poem, much like the speaker's life, nears an end by the end of the third quatrain, leading into the final couplet, also in iambic pentameter but following the rhyme scheme gg. The speaker praises the other in the poem by commenting on how strong their love must be for this other to stay, realizing the end is near and that soon death will separate them forever.

The progression of the images from the natural world into the realm of mankind or society (Fire is often associated with civilization rather than nature.) is a necessary progression for the couplet to effectively portray the love between the two characters of the poem. It is interesting that the poem gains closure without the speaker dying, thus creating a slight rift between the well-matching form and content of the poem. The poem has closure in its form and in the speaker's life, clarifying the relationship between the speaker and the other as important, loving and "strong," the omission of the death could leave on with the sense of lingering, rather than closure. However, such closure is impending, and then the actual death need not be included.

Furthermore, the final couplet traditionally represents a shift in the poem. Were it to focus on the death of the speaker (Shakespeare had had characters in plays, e.g. Hamlet, proclaim their own death) there would be no turn in the poem. Switching the focus from the images of death to the relationship between the two characters provides this shift and elevates the sense of closure since it brings out the sense of both the speaker's life, through his relations, as well as his death.

Part I-C

Anonymous (Passed with distinction)

Wordsworth: Prelude

In his epic *Prelude*, Wordsworth set forth the lofty imperative project of not merely discovering but charting in verse the development of his own poetic mind. He sought to uncover and then poetically reify a "true self in a rambling blank verse poem that he was never able to completely finish. Contemporary theory has worked to deconstruct that notion. Steadily chipping away at the idea that a "true self could ever be discovered. Postmodern theorists have focused specifically on the social and historical construction of

that self, as a way of parsing how both identity and literature are created. Foucault and Barthes, in their dialogue of essays on the author and authority, have concluded that the author - and presumably that author's "self - are dead. The author, and her quest through writing for a clearly bounded sense of self, are elaborate fictions. Although we have only begun to utilize this theory, since its introduction, in the past 25 years, the concept of the author- self as shiftily, unlocatable, multiple and fictive, has a long literary history. In medieval literature in particular, the author-self and the "identity quest" concomitant to that self are questions that are never conclusively resolved. As a means of analyzing the strange and pervasive concept of the author-self, I'd like to examine three medieval texts: *The Letters of John Ball*, William Langland's *Pier's Plowman*, and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Steven Justice has persuasively argued that the "Letters of JB" although long attributed to the literate priest John Ball, were likely authored by several people. Although the traditional notion of self was long used to understand these texts, a post modern analysis allows for a deeper sense of what and how the "Letters" mean. Written during the Peasant's Rebellion of 1381, the Letters are a series of poetic exhortations and incantations roughly welded to an initial, brief prose exposition. They declare the speaker's identities, and then list a catalogue of social types. In each letter there are millers, carters, "true men," robbers, priests, and also the emblematic literary character Piers Plowman.

Because the 1381 Rebellion sought to destroy archival records, and because those who witnessed and recorded the events were highly literate (and likely fearful for their livelihoods and lives) much of what has long been posited about the "Letters" have attributed them exclusively to one person, the only "educated" member of the Rebellion, John Ball. Froissart and Bower each recorded incidents from the Rebellion, and each describe the seemingly illiterate peasants as an animalistic mob. Clearly, to those members who policed the archival canon, the peasants were no better than squawking birds and screaming dogs - clearly they were not selves, much less authors.

Medieval literacy, at the end of the 14th c. was only beginning to include a notion of the vernacular. Justice has argued that the Rebel Letters, in their "broken" vernacular poetics, are indeed proof of literacy; moreover he argues as well that dialect subtleties point to the fact that the texts perhaps had multiple authors. Medieval witnesses, literate in Latin, could not conceive of anyone other than Ball as being able to write. Foucault's notion of authorial multiplicity - that a text has no author, has many authors - can be used to more closely analyze the "Rebel Letters" emphatic insistence that it takes justice welded to righteousness, right to might, skill to will, to make the community function smoothly. It takes many people to foment revolution, and multiple people to create texts representative of themselves and their political aims. John Ball was the author of some of these texts, and he also clearly wasn't the singular self behind each and every one. The Rebel Letters make iconic reference to Langland's massive and complicated allegory

Piers Plowman, in their inclusive catalogues of who and what is part of their authorial grouping. In this, they highlight the contemporary idea that the author - and the characters she creates - are discursive fictions. While Langland wrote *PP*. and in three separate versions, no less, it is his humble warn character Piers who is psychically powerful enough to enter into the Rebels' consciousness and their texts.

Langland introduces himself, and provides an apologia pro vita sua, and several points in the text. In Passus V of the C-text, he calls himself by name, "Long Will," states his occupation as a writer, and engages in an allegorical dialogue with the figures of Reason and ?. at this point in the text, he's woken

from his dream vision to find himself "yeloathed as a lollere," in bed with his wife in a seedy section of London. Throughout the texts - A, B, and C - Langland has agonized over the role of poetry, of making and editing, of "jangling" versus telling the truth. His discursive back and forth begs the question of whether poets, and their productions, socially and religiously matter. More than this, his immense tinkering and reworking of the text points to a material anxiety over meaning itself. Can poetry matter if the poet can't ever definitively finish his project? Middleton has argued that Langland's fumbings, his inability to directly identify himself as anything - clerk? poet? lollard? laborer? - could in fact be linked to the Acts of Vagrancy, statutes declared after the social upsets of the Black Death and the Peasant's Rebellion which required people to document their identities, occupations and places of residence. In Langland's double speak, then, perhaps is a critique of a political power that would force people to identify themselves as just one, static thing. Langland's *Piers Plowman* introduces the question of who, how, and what the author's self is. As an allegorical journey towards truth itself, the text(s) - in their multiplicity - speak to the fact that truth may be personal and mutable. And that authority and selfhood need not be discrete, severely bounded entities.

While we know next to nothing, historically, about Langland, the record is full of concise workers pointing the way towards the bounded self of Geoffrey Chaucer. Langland seen as the (grand) father of English literature, Chaucer can be identified as self, citizen and author, although his *Canterbury Tales* are even less of an identity quest, ostensibly, than Langland's allegory. The pilgrims never reach their destination in the CT, and it's often unclear as to when and where the characters are, given the interlocking conceits of Chaucer's narrative frame.

In the General Prologue, Chaucer does introduce himself as an "I," and the reader can presume that the *Canterbury* project itself is proof of a discrete "I." Chaucer made this we can say as we lug the Riverside with us, and Chaucer was real he was a self. Within the narrative conceit of the text however, the bounds of self are constantly - even unpleasantly - eroded. Chaucer is asked, by the

Host, for some brevity. He is described by Harry as "a puppet," a tiny doll-like man. There is Chaucer the author, then, and Chaucer the fiction, just another pilgrim telling a tale. And the tale he produces - Sir Thopas - is decidedly goofy. In the form of a romance ballad, Chaucer-the-pilgrim tells the weirdly diminutive tale of little Sir Thopas and his encounter with the giant Oliphant. The description focuses on pretty inconsequential details - Thopas' clothes, his accessories, and the rhymes and rhythm of the form feel too-easy, if not trite. Harry interprets, declares Chaucer's skills are not worth a turd and demands a different, better tale, something both moral and virtuous. Chaucer then provides the didactic prose deadweight of *Melibee*, the allegory of Prudence and her student *Melibee*. Lee Patterson has asserted that Chaucer-the-author's motive here is to prove himself as morally and pedagogically skilled. He can produce light verse, popular children's ballads as well as rhetorical literature for students, then he clearly has the earmarks of a "skilled" poet, in the most conventional sense. This concept is in keeping with Chaucer's own retraction, at the end of the CT. Following *The Parson's Tale*, also a lengthy, didactic tale, this time in the form of a confession manual, Chaucer provides a curt apology for what he's done. He takes back the CT, and many a bawdy lay, as well as the majority of his oeuvre, but those works of moral virtue he leaves as proof of good Christian teaching. By the late 14th c., the sense of "truth" in writing had been powerfully eroded. Michael

Camiller has argued that the hands of 11th c. scribes might become sanctified and placed in reliquaries because they wrote down the direct words of God. But with the spread of vernacular literacy and the

Wydifite translation of the Bible into the English vernacular, the questions of "truth" and "authority" had fewer clear answers. Translation meant difference, instability, interpretation, and ultimately, subjectivity. In a post lapsorian world of social, religious and economic chaos, what mattered more than anything was the salvation of a Christian self. And necessarily, the Christian self was universal, nameless. The temporal class identity of the self mattered little before the gates of heaven.

Authorial invention is closely connected - for writers - to the parameters of the self. This was no less true for medieval writers that it is for early 21st century ones. For poets like the 1381 Rebels, Langland, and Chaucer one's poetic work was tied morally, aesthetically and quite literally to the individual. John Ball and his cohorts were publicly chastised as examples and then summarily executed for their murderous destruction of the archive as well as for their presumption that their vernacular writing might actually change society. For Langland and Chaucer, themselves established members of the literary intelligentsia, the stakes were somewhat less perilous. They weren't risking their lives by writing. Nonetheless, their respective poetic projects establish - and embody -the author's quest for a true self. Langland looks for truth, and Chaucer retracts his most enjoyable, aesthetically pleasurable work. Yet neither ends up actually getting anywhere, and in Chaucer's case, the narrative joy of the CT far outweighs his didactic, reader protestations that he only meant his work to morally instruct.

WJT Mitchell, in his essay, "Representation," has argued that literature is inherently problematic and complicated because it seeks to represent the human world. The space between representor, and represented is itself contested, and blurry. Things get complicated when words must stand in for ideas, people, objects, beliefs. They grow more complicated, however, when political and religious power is introduced, given the anxieties over how and when literature should mean and what it should expressly avoid meaning. Poetry is a made thing; necessarily it has a maker. But who that maker is, and how her work embodies - or does not embody - her sense of self is inherently problematic. Wordsworth's quest, though ostensibly towards an agreed upon truth, a dearly demarcated self, never found its conclusion any more successfully than the Rebels', Langland's, or Chaucer's did. The socially, literarily, and constructed self exists only in literature and even there, uneasily, ambivalently, ambiguously.

Anonymous (Passed with distinction)

To examine the relations between sex and power, I would like to focus on three of Shakespeare's plays: *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Twelfth Night*. With these plays, I would like to explore the way early modern conceptions of male friendship and marriage in turn construct or disrupt conceptions of gender and sexuality.

In *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, the relationship between sex and power is rather violently delineated in terms of male friendship and the exchange of women as commodities. In this play, marriage is subordinated to male friendships which results in an extreme objectification of women, one that posits women as interchangeable.

According to Montaigne's tract "of Friendship," ideal friendship should involve a dissolving of identity boundaries, in absolute ? which results in one's friend becoming a second self. Such a fluidity then would imply a fluidity of possessions, which would imply for our purposes the fluid exchange of women who are perceived as property "(as a dowry, in effect.) the two gentleman of Verona follow in this tradition. Both

grew up together and developed a deep love for one another. However, at first it would seem that their separation (Valentine leaves for Milan and Proteus stays home with Julia, his love) would imply that they valued marriage over friendship. Bruce Smith's "myth of combatants and comrades" provides the framework for such a relationship. Once Proteus unwittingly contracts himself to go to Milan, he meets up with Valentine again, thereby also meeting Valentine's new love, Sylvia.

But it is not Sylvia's intrinsic with a beauty that inspires Proteus' love and consequent dismissal of Julia; instead it is a rivalry with his friend. At first, Proteus argues for Julia's equal merit, but in the end steps up to the challenge and positions himself to challenge Valentine's claim to Sylvia.

In this demonstration of the myth of combatants and comrades, women (specifically Sylvia here) are denied subjectivity by being relegated to prizes awarded to whoever "wins" her. Although Sylvia attempts to exercise [sic] control, to assert her ability to chose, in the end, she is rendered powerless; indeed she is rendered speechless. Proteus attempts to rape her, to "conquer" her, but Valentine appears in the nick of time to "save" her. We would expect at this point at least some prolonged resentment on Valentine's part, but instead he immediately forgives Proteus once he apologizes and reinstates their friendship as supreme to his intended marriage with Sylvia. Sylvia fairs equally in Valentine's "Saving" hands: she becomes ? a spoil of war as Valentine offers her to Proteus, reimplemented the "what's mine is yours, what's yours is mine" principle.

Greg Erickson

Question 1

Innovations in a literary work's narrative structure may reflect shifting perceptions of the self as such or at the same time as reflecting a changing world view. Analyze this statement with regard to at least three works of one author, one period, or movement. The years from around 1890 to 1925 saw perhaps more changes in the social, scientific, artistic, and epistemological fabric of Western society than perhaps any other time in modern history. Although it is impossible to point to specific forces (and while Foucault's "episteme" with its unconscious forces makes this problematic) it is useful to look at some of the parts of this epistemological revolution and then see how the influences are reflected by several modernist authors.

Innovation in technology changed how people saw the world. For the first time in history people viewed things from above (The Eiffel Tower, airplanes) and from a moving perspective (the world looks different from a moving train than from a horse). More people were living in cities, and the look of cities changed. Crowded streets, factories, and billboards offered a whole new landscape.

The role of science is also important. As early as 1870 mathematics theories offered an infinite amount of numbers between 1 and 2, and dissolved the possibility of any pure number. Of course the major shift here was the theory of relativity, which, although not generally understood, contributed to the feelings of flux and subjectivity that came to dominate the era.

Freud was another influence on the general mindset of the time. "Things may not be what you think, " he seemed to say, "what you can't remember may be more important to who you are than what you can."

What this over all atmosphere contributed to art and literature was a feeling of subjectivity and doubt. No longer could an artist feel he was representing any depiction of the self or anything else with certainty or

objectivity. As art historian Barbara Rose says, "'This is what I see' was replaced by 'This is what I think I see.'"

Philosophically this can be categorized as a collapse of dualism. The separation of subject and object now seemed naive. It became clear that, for example, the Renaissance's one-point perspective required an unmoving one-eyed observer capturing an unmoving subject at a single instant in time.

Narrative was questioned. Causality was questioned. For Arnold Schoenberg one not no longer had to influence or lead to the next. In literature, the long drawn out syntax of Henry James finally snapped. In painting, the post-impressionism of Cezanne gave way to the Cubism of Picasso and Braque and the Futurism of Boccioni. Each in their own way questioned the role of the self in the suddenly more complicated world. What I intend to do (if I have time) is look at four works of literature from this period that reflect these changing views in different ways. Because of WWI and such events as the 1913 Armory show the European/American boundary is blurred so I will look at two European works (Proust's *Search for Lost Time* and Joyce's *Ulysses*) and two works by Americans heavily influenced by Europe (Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*).

Marcel Proust's *Search for Lost Time* is perhaps the most introspective work ever written. The 3000 page narrative follows a narrator (Marcel) through most of his life trying to make sense out of his experience and his memory. Proust's novel reflects the themes of his time most clearly through the instability of the novels, the narrator, and the reader's sense of reality. Although apparently Proust never read Freud many of his theories are clearly reflected in the novel.

The opening scene is an effective microcosm of the entire work. Marcel lays in bed, half awake, and tries to make sense of his surroundings. His vision of the room becomes blurred with bedrooms he has had in the past and with memories connected to those bedrooms. His sense of where he is, when he is, and who he is becomes hopelessly intertwined and function as the starting point for the whole work.

For Proust, the self is truly a narrative told to yourself through time and memory. The characterization in the novel also reflects this theme. Told through the shifting mind of the narrator their personalities are constantly changing. Often, to enforce this, we are given different names for major characters early in the novel. The composer Vinteuil, the painter Elster, the violinist Morel and others appear early in the novel under different names and with different personalities.

It is perhaps in the perception of art that Proust most clearly shows the subjective thinking of his time. Marcel's experience with works of painting, music, and literature all follow a similar pattern. He will go from non-comprehension to following false paths (often a 19th century identification with a person) to finally realizing the "essence" of a work through his memory. All perception is a process, it is never stable he finally realizes. It is this realization that allows him to see himself this way and will lead to his epiphany and salvation through art at the novel's end.

For James Joyce, it is also a deep exploration of the inner workings of a character's mind that supplies *Ulysses* with its central themes. But rather than the spirals of memory upon memory that Proust give us, Joyce tries to look at his characters' L. Bloom, Stephen, and Molly, and his Dublin as it exists. Rather than the piling up of theories and experiences told by a narrator in retrospect, Joyce allows his characters only what they feel in the moment; To use an analogy from the visual arts, Proust is like Cubism, an object perceived through time as we look, ponder and look again; while Joyce is more like Futurism a swirling

world with which an observer can only grab at scraps as they go by.

Although, as F. Jameson points out, the three main critical approaches to Joyce have been 1) Mythical: looking for Odyssey parallels, 2) Psychoanalytic: Bloom/Stephen as Father/Son, or 3) Ethical: the supposed "happy" ending of Molly and Leopold. For the purposes of this essay (with my time running out) I will look at a couple of narrative strategies.

In seeing Bloom walk around Dublin in the early chapters (4-8) we are given a narrative of a character not seen before in fiction. For as carefully plotted as S. Gilbert makes *Ulysses* seem, our impression is the randomness and repetition of a normal day. Bloom eats breakfast, he buys a book, goes to a Funeral all the time occupied with everyday thoughts.

Joyce, too, reflects Freud, most clearly in the "Night Town" or "Circe" chapter where a drunk Stephen and Bloom visit a Brothel. Thoughts from the day, visions of horned Shakespeare and dead sons or mothers all appear in an explosion of surreal unconsciousness. The stability of memory and consciousness (in a much different way than Proust) are experienced by characters and reader here.

John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* takes the instability of vision, the European concepts of Cubism and Futurism, and adds the American City. Although his novel follows two main characters (Jimmy, Elaine) and a handful of minor ones, the main character is New York City. No longer in Proust's cerebral bedroom, or Joyce's quiet Dublin, we are in the cable and billboard filled world of American painters like Joseph Stella and Stuart Davis.

Although contemporary reviews compared *MT* to *Ulysses*, its vision of the role of the self and the 20th century world are very different. While Joyce's work is essentially non-visual, *MT* bursts with colors. In short descriptive vignettes his light and color become physical, "oozing" and "flowing" across apartments and railways. In contrast to the deep psychological probing of *Ulysses*, Dos Passos' characters stay essentially flat. They make decisions, they have sex, abortions, commit suicide, but we do not understand their personal growth.

Dos Passos both celebrates and condemns the modern city. It is both beautiful but overbearing. His characters cannot understand and are often defeated by it. The narrative style supports this. The novel is choppy. It jumps from place to place, description to description, and rarely into a character's mind. Fire trucks and trains are constantly interrupting conversations. D. H. Lawrence was the first to describe it as cinematic, and that is still a good description.

While Dos Passos describes the alienation of a post-WWI American city, in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, he depicts similar mental states in a different narrative style with a different landscapes. Like *MT*, Hemingway's novel has no real hero, his characters don't really understand their worlds and no one really succeeds in finding any type of Proustian salvation ("only bull fighters really live").

Hemingway's reaction to the world results in yet another narrative style and structure. Not introspective like Proust or Joyce and not filled with incomprehensible descriptions like Dos Passos, he strips the narrative of adjectives to present a world a reader must react to.

Each of these works finds different narrative solutions to the new world of doubt and subjectivity. Apollinaire described the main feature of Cubism as the act of "disassociation and recombination" that a perceiver must participate in." Although different, each of these modernist novels finds a way to require a

reader to do this. As Marcel discovers fragments of memory the key to his aesthetic response and life, the reader must participate in the same experience. Remembering fragments of Proust's "Leitmotifs" 2000 pages later we put together our own reality. In *Ulysses* each word develops its own mini-narrative. In the "Circe" episode each twisted speech, word, or object has been in the novel before. We can never remember them all and each readers recombination will be different *Manhattan Transfer*, as the quintessential "cubist" novel perhaps most completely (if not as strongly) uses these elements. Colors, characters, words, smells, letters on billboards all start to seem equally important as disparate objects we need to recombine. If Dos Passos challenges his reader by addition, Hemingway does by subtraction. We are forced into the text by its lack of comment and of detail. While at times *The Sun Also Rises* might seem to fall back into the dualism and objectivity of a previous time, its sparseness and seeming lack of structure force the reader into an act of "recombination."

Ann Wallace

Question 1

Innovations in a literary work's narrative structure may reflect shifting perceptions of the self as such or at the same time as reflecting a changing world view. Analyze this statement with regard to at least three works of one author, one period, or movement.

Narrative structure has been used in interesting ways recently by African-American authors trying to reclaim a lost past. By merging black history (what little is know of it) with the fictive imagination of the writer, African -Americans have depended upon narrative strategies in order to emphasize the difficulty of making known that which has been ignored and devalued. As new emphasis has been placed in reclaiming history, these writers use techniques that reveal the difficult process they must go through. Alice Walkers' 1982 novel, *The Color Purple*, employs a fairly simple but effective narrative structure. The narrator, a black girl named Celie, writes letters to God about her life. She must do this because her experiences are too painful too talk about, but also because the only person in her life she has ever loved, her sister Nettie, has been forced out of her life. Celie's letter writing shows that she places value in her experiences. Even though she can express or understand it at the beginning, Celie knows intuitively that writing is a way of affirming her own existence - an existence that has been belittled and abused by everyone around her throughout her life.

In the course of the narrative Celie meets and falls in love with Shug, her abusive husband's lover. Shug, in turn, learns to love Celie back, and teachers her to stand up for herself and to search out some joy in life. Celie's confidence grows, but her life is still full of pain, so she continues to write to God. One day Shug finds a letter from Nettie in Mr. __'s pocket (Celie's unnamed husband).

Nettie had promised to write to Celie but Mr. had never given Celie any of her sister's letters. Celie reads the letter -- and now Nettie's letters become part of the narrative. Shug and Celie find all of Nettie's letters written over the years, recounting Nettie's life with the family that adopted Celie's children (by her step-father). Even though she never hears from Celie, Nettie keeps writing.

Nettie's letters, in addition to telling of her own life, also reveal suppressed information about Celie, her children, and her father. Nettie finds out that their father was actually their stepfather, and that their own father had been lynched years ago. She learned this from the minister who had adopted Celie's children.

What is interesting is that the minister did not have the full story, and neither did Nettie, but by piecing the two versions together Nettie and Celie were able to discover the truth.

As soon as Celie finds that first letter from Nettie she stops writing to God and begins writing to Nettie — though she does not actually send them because Nettie is on her way home. Celie has so much to tell her sister that she can't hold it inside until her return. Then Celie finds out Nettie's ship has been lost and her sister may be dead; But she continues to write to Nettie, and continues to record her story. The last letter in the book is addressed once again to God - for Nettie has returned, so Celie does not need to write to her. But Celie still feels the need or desire to record her experiences and the way she best knows is by writing to God.

Alice Walker's novel is not based on an actual, specific historical event, but tells a story that has bits of truth in it for many black women. The next three works I will consider all are based in an historical event, the records of which are lacking or missing altogether.

James Baldwin's "The Blues for Mr. Charlie" (1964), though it is a play, has a compelling narrative structure. Baldwin wrote the play in response to the murder of a young black boy, Emmett Till, in the south in the 50's, and the murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers in 1963. Both murders were officially unsolved, but the black community (and white officials, too) knew who committed the crimes. Baldwin was angered and saddened by the fact that the guilty parties were never caught.

"The Blues for Mr. Charlie" uses the scenarios of those two events as its basis. Richard, a young black man, returns home to the south after years in NYC. But the play doesn't open that way. It opens with a white man, Lyie, leaving a dead black body facing down in the weeds. The "present" time of the play follows from that point, with the after math and investigation of the murder of Richard, culminating in the court room.

Baldwin critiques the way black history has been distorted by showing many characters, both white and black, lie on the witness stand. The blacks, such as Richard's father, Meridian, lie to protect Richard. For instance, Meridian testifies that he never saw Richard with a gun. The truth, which we learn through flashbacks, is that Richard brought a gun from NY but gave it to his father because he did not want to be the kind of man who killed. Meridian knows that if he tells this story on the stand no one will believe him, and the story will be distorted. So, he edits the truth.

Conversely, Lyie's wife, Jo, lies in order to protect her husband, who actually did commit the crime. She claims that Richard came into their store one day high on drugs, and came on to her sexually. She denies that he tried to rape her, however. Once again, flashbacks (this time Jo's — while she's on the stand) tell the truth. Richard did not attack her and he was not high, though her was too friendly. By the end of the trial the "white court" distorts Jo's testimony even further and puts the official record that Richard tried to rape her.

In the end, Lyie is acquitted because no one can contradict the word of a white woman. Lyie's friend Pamell was prepared to tell the truth as he knew it, but he felt he had to reconfigure his story so that it matched Jo's.

What is interesting about Baldwin's play is that it so blatantly reveals the inadequacies of both the legal system and of the official historical record. The court case, which occurs in the present, is continually interrupted by the flashbacks of those testifying. These memories hold the truth; it is not to be found in the

trial transcript.

The Chaneyville Incident by David Bradley (mid 1950's) offers yet another narrative structure. Bradley's project is that of uncovering an incident involving some runaway slaves who killed themselves in Chaneyville, PA. Rather than be caught, the slaves chose to end their lives. But the novel seems to have absolutely nothing to do with that at first. John, the protagonist, is awakened in his Philadelphia apartment by his mother phoning to tell him Jack, an elderly neighbor, was sick. John takes a bus back to Chaneyville to see Jack. From there his journey takes an unexpected turn. While home, John begins to search for an explanation of his father Moses' death. The main narrative of the novel takes place in the 1980's and centers around John and Jack, but the story is about John's ancestors. John becomes a hunter, like his father, but not of animals. Jack used to hunt with Moses and so teaches John what his father never had the chance to, to hunt - both literally and figuratively. Jack gives John the information he needs to put together the clues his father left him, for he soon realizes that his father did leave clues for him. John works in his father's study, trying to piece together the various written documents and oral histories he has gathered. He makes a systematized index card system of ordering the information he has.

As John begins to hunt down the truth, there are substantial breaks in the narrative. It is interrupted as he learns little bits of the story, but it always returns back to the present. John's present quest for his father is echoed by what he realizes was his own father's quest for his own father. So, John not only tells his own story, but also tells his fathers, and his grandfather's.

By the end of the novel, John is able, by tracking his father's footsteps, to piece together what happened. Moses had been found dead near seven triangular stones by an old farm.

No one could ever explain his death, until John unraveled the whole story. John takes his girlfriend Judy to the actual site where his father's body was found. As he tells her what he had discovered, he starts piecing more of the story together. Eventually the narrative leaves John in present and travels to John's grandfather who John had realized had been one of the runaway slaves who had died. In fact, the grandmother and grandfather had been the organizers of a runaway plan, and had given up their lives and those of the other slaves in order not to be taken back into slavery or to have the escape system revealed. The seven stones were the unmarked headstones of the slaves, and Moses had merely gone to that spot to, in African American tradition, speak to his father. His death was not an ending but the beginning of a long-sought-after conversation. Bradley's narrative structure is what gives meaning to the story John discovers. Bit by bit John reimagines his ancestors' lives - and as he does the narrative becomes theirs. He allows them to tell their stories to him; it is just up to him to put the pieces in place so they can.

The last work I will briefly look at is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. It has much in common with Chaneyville, both narratively and in terms of the history it reveals and re-imagines. Morrison based her novel on a clipping she found reporting that a runaway slave killed her daughter in front of the slave catchers, so the girl would not have to grow up in slavery. Morrison attempts to understand and explain that action. The narrative begins long after the murder of the baby has happened. Sethe, the mother who killed her baby, is living in freedom in her mother-in-law's house. Her other children are almost grown. But strange things have been happening at the house; it seemed to be haunted. Sethe's sons had already run away out of fear of the ghost, but Sethe and her daughter Denver stayed.

Soon a mysterious girl shows up, named Beloved, and Sethe believes it is her daughter. From there Sethe's whole past is revealed. As the last pages of the book say, "This is not a story to be passed on." And it is not

story that is easily told through the course of the novel. Bits of the past are offered up here and there, by various sources. Sometimes Sethe tells Denver about the past, sometimes it's Sethe and Paul D remembering the old days at Sweet Home together, and sometimes it's people in town rehashing the stories they know. No one has the full truth, and that which they have is also filtered through their memories - or mismemories. But as a whole, the story of Sethe's escape and the baby's death is told in its entirety. So while it is not a story to pass on; it is passed on -but only to those who are willing to hear it bit by bit and work at putting it into a coherent whole.

The innovative narrative strategies of African-American authors examined above all seem to have one thing in common; they all tell stories that have been suppressed, almost entirely forgotten, or distorted, yet they all do it in a way that reveals just how it is that the stories were constructed. None of the authors attempt to create the illusion of a seamless narrative; part of their goal is to show the very struggle of reclaiming black history and of recording black experience.

Anonymous

Question 2

Authors in various periods and genres have been concerned with the "difference" between hetero- and homosexual nature and/or behavior and/or desire. Comment on at least three works in which this difference is either accepted and clarified or occluded and rendered problematic.

Literature-including memoirs, autobiographies, journals and poetry-about illness has proliferated in the late 20th century. Often the focus of such work is a desire to build community around the traumatic experience-to bind together those afflicted or affected by common crises and to pull others into the advocacy communities created around the experiences. To that end, this trauma literature frequently is written by and/or about those whose identities have already placed them outside of the mainstream: gays and lesbians. Perhaps this is because some of those who are identified as gay or lesbian already have developed a sense of communal struggle around their sexuality. Not only do they thus have the basic apparatus in place to form community in a potentially abjecting environment, but they have also learned that it is their right, indeed their responsibility, to fight for the protection of their bodies against catastrophic illness and disease. While this does not hold true across the board - certainly not all gays and lesbians have such power of voice or feel such a communal responsibility - many do speak out strongly against certain diseases, and in the process they speak out against silence and for communal awareness.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this voicing against disease is ACT UP'S slogan "Silence=Death." In the case of gay men and AIDS, this slogan is a disarmingly serious and literal equation. Silence can indeed mean death. And since it was gay men who were first so notably afflicted with HIV, the speaking out was not only in response to AIDS but also in response to homophobia itself. The two seemed indelibly intertwined. David Feinberg, in his collection of essays, *Queer and Loathing*, (c. 1990) documents the activities of the gay community in protest of the AIDS crisis. He writes about their efforts to make the loss of life very real and to give that loss not only voice but also a visible presence. The Names Quilt project actually dedicates a 3'X6' panel of fabric to each body, or life, lost to AIDS. Additionally, Act Up asserted the bodily presence of those who died of AIDS-related complications by spreading their ashes in the lawn of the White House. This was a way of giving voice to those who had been silenced by AIDS. Using a

relatively recently acquired voice, queer activists have made their anger known, first in response to silencing and oppression of homosexuality itself, and now in reaction to those diseases that are decimating the queer community. Anger is not an essential part of homosexual identity, but gays and lesbians have come to realize that it is unfortunately a very necessary tool (as well as a justifiable emotion).

In conjunction with his documentation of clearly political activities, Feinberg also records his own experiences, primarily his health complications and fears, as an HIV-infected gay man. He talks of his fading vision and the ever-increasing number of warts covering his body. He shares his sexual life and his relationships with other gay men. And he does all of this in a bitterly biting, yet funny, tone; many of his stories have a heartbreaking humor or irony. Feinberg brings his audience not only through empathy but through humor; indeed, it is a very effective means of forming community. The reader feels that he or she is sharing in some of Feinberg's pain, even if he or she is not a gay man with HIV or AIDS. By making his essays accessible, Feinberg invites his readers into the struggle, not only against AIDS, but also against homophobia itself. Indeed, the intimate details of his health problems told with humor allow the reader to feel that Feinberg is not different from him or herself. Except that the routine visit to the eye doctor that Feinberg, just like everyone else, puts off for months is not routine. Unlike everyone else, Feinberg knows he will most likely lose his vision within a few years, if not sooner. And while readers begin to feel the horror of AIDS and the need to speak out against it, they also begin to understand the effects and prevalence of homophobia, and the need to combat such hate.

Now to backtrack a little in terms of history, AIDS activists like Feinberg are not on uncharted territory. They learned much from the struggles voiced a decade earlier in Audre Lorde's seminal work, *The Cancer Journals* (c. 1980). In her journals Lorde discusses her desperate desire for a community of women with breast cancer. Specifically, she is looking for women like herself those who might approach the disease much like she herself does. After wondering where all the black lesbian poets who had had mastectomies are, she states that "The call went out." Lorde's friends tracked down a couple of other lesbians for her to share her fears with.

Lorde seeks out other lesbians possibly because she feels they have a different attitude towards their bodies than heterosexual women have. Or at least her experiences tell her that is so. While in the hospital, Lorde is visited by a Reach for Recovery volunteer, a perky white post-mastectomy woman who tells Lorde that as soon as she is properly fitted for a prosthesis she will feel and look "as good as new" and nobody would even know the difference. Lorde protests, "But I sure as hell know I'd know the difference." And in fact, Lorde wants to feel the difference; she has been through a life-threatening trauma and has no desire to pretend that it never happened. She needs to affirm her experience by not hiding the "amputation" of her breast. Indeed, she wants to get together an army of one-breasted women to walk into Congress demanding action against the spread of breast cancer.

Lorde starts by calling out for other lesbians because that they are less likely to feel a need to look "good as new." They might realize more readily they need to make visible that which marks one as abjected or different. They have already openly asserted their sexuality and so might know the power of claiming and revealing one's identity. It is Lorde's experience that the lesbians surrounding her accept her one-breasted condition, and do not judge her self-worth based on the presence or absence of her breasts. Further, these are women who already know how to support one another in the face of discrimination - for they have learned to live as gay women in a heterosexist world. They know how to bond together in a time of need.

Lorde's *Cancer Journals* tremendously inspired those battling life-threatening diseases. One such person is poet Marilyn Hacker, who herself is a post-mastectomy lesbian. In a series of poems, "Cancer Winter," Hacker documents her own response to watching others die of breast cancer and then later her own diagnosis with and treatment for the same disease. In the first of the poems, Hacker writes of being interrupted while making love by a phone call announcing another woman's death from breast cancer. The news of this death is surrounded by women-centered love; Hacker receives the news while making love and after the call goes back to making love. Her love making takes on the tone of a memorial, a final embracing of that lost woman.

In the second of her poems, entitled "Cancer Winter" like the series itself, Hacker describes her own sense of the betrayal of her body, countered by the love of the women around her, taking care of her. And in the final poem, "August Journal," written after her recovery, Hacker focuses on expanding her vision of community. She realizes that most lives are "unexceptional" in that they are marked by one trauma or another. It is indeed the exceptional who live to old age, having experienced no life-threatening crisis. Hacker realizes that if she had lived in another time she could have been "one of the two year olds" killed in the Holocaust, not even old enough to know their own names. Her very body is marked as an Ashkenazi Jew and so she tries to recover the lost, unrecorded memories of her ancestors who died deaths of horror. She feels it is her responsibility to look beyond the window frames that obscure her vision, to search out the unexceptional in her community (just as Lorde searches out other lesbians with breast cancer), and to claim a common identity with them. These poems begin with a very intimate focus on lesbian women because that is a group Hacker easily identifies with and has identified herself with publicly in the past. However, the poems begin to expand outward, searching for a larger community in a world where people all too often catch glimpses of one another through windows or quickly brush by one another in apartment building stair wells.

Hacker's poems about cancer are clearly not about an essential or innate bond between homosexuals (the same holds true for Feinberg and Lorde). Rather, she draws on a commonality she already knows and has experienced based on her sexuality and expands that communal vision outward infinitely. She asserts that we all have something in our lives that marks us as "unexceptional," whether it be one's sexuality or one's diseased body. And we all yearn for others to acknowledge and appreciate our differences. Indeed, it is critical that we realize that these are not actually differences between us, but something that we have in common. So Hacker uses sexuality merely as a starting point, borrowing a model of community formation that has served her well in the past, but then opens up her vision of community.

In order not to mistakenly imply that all gay men and lesbians suffer from AIDS or cancer have a sense of communal voice and responsibility, it is important to consider one other work, Jamaica Kincaid's memoir, *My Brother*. Kincaid's book is about her brother Devon who is dying of AIDS in Antigua. Devon is so distraught by his condition that he cannot even name it, referring to it simply as "da chupidness" (the stupidity). And in Antigua, where AIDS patients are cloistered off into their own wing of the hospital, often ignored by family and friends, sentenced to death essentially, this denial or silencing is perfectly understandable. Kincaid does all she knows to do for her brother, bringing him medicine from the US, consulting doctors, and most notably, watching Devon. But for

all her diligent observation of her brother, what Kincaid cannot see is his sexuality - and he refuses to talk about it. Or rather, Kincaid sees what her brother wants her to see - his crude sexual advancement towards women. Kincaid does not even think to look beyond this behavior and Devon ultimately fools her. It is not

until after Devon's death that Kincaid learns that her brother was part of a small, hidden gay community in Antigua.

While his disease was obvious, Devon's sexuality remained a secret to the end. Clearly Devon, who could not even name his own disease and could not reveal his sexuality, could not "act up" against either homophobia or against AIDS. He leaves that task to his sister, who writes about his death and about his secret sexuality in *My Brother*. Antigua did not offer Devon any communities other than a small group of gay men who met furtively at an open-minded woman's house. But this group was too frightened to create a political presence or to make demands against homophobia or the ostracization of AIDS patients. It is Kincaid herself who places her brother within a community, by writing his story which is now read alongside other forms of literature about disease and homosexuality. She places his story within a tradition forged by Audre Lorde when she first asked where all the dykes with breast cancer were. Devon cannot himself respond to such a call for gay men with AIDS, but his sister can. She can affirm his sexuality and his disease-afflicted life, by writing it out, even the parts she could not see for herself.

Audre Lorde refuses to silence her disease, refuses to wear a prosthesis, and refuses to endure cancer alone. She makes demands on those around her, by forcing others who are sick to come forward and by forcing those who are not to see her. David Feinberg makes a similar gesture in *Queer and Loathing*, by vividly describing his deteriorating body — voicing his terror about becoming one of the panels on the AIDS quilt or some of the ashes on the White House lawn. He does not want to die, and he is tired of watching those around him die one by one. He knows that the voice the gay community already learned from people like Lorde is the only way to fight both the homophobia and the HTV virus he and his community are afflicted with. Marilyn Hacker expands this community (and its demands) by placing everyone in it. A community she too learned from Lorde and others like her becomes open, accepting all whose lives are marked by abjection, trauma or terror. She knows that there are far too many Devons out there, suffering horribly yet silently, and takes on the responsibility, as Jamaica Kincaid does, of looking out for those whose lack of voice hides them. And, using the techniques she learned from the queer community, Hacker begins to speak out in their names, giving voice to that which they themselves can hardly acknowledge, let alone articulate. She reaches across differences in order to focus on those traumas that bind us all together, and in so doing, forces us all to do the same. By pulling out that which makes her different - her sexuality, her disease, her Jewishness - Hacker (along with Feinberg, Lorde and Kincaid) asks us to reflect upon and reveal that which makes every one of us "different," but ultimately "unexceptional."

Wendy Ryden

Question 7

Choose any three rhetorical theories or schools of thought (for example, expressivist, cognitivist, social-epistemic, feminist, cultural studies, postmodern, Vygotskian, contact zone theory, writing- across-the-curriculum, collaborative learning, etc.) and discuss how each defines the elements of the rhetorical setting, how each understands "context" and "subjectivity" in writing and communication, and how each has implications for writing instruction.

Expressivism, Dialogism, and Feminism

Expressivism, or expressionist rhetoric, has been an important component of the so-called process

paradigm that is generally considered to now dominate composition studies and language instruction. Expressivism variously defined, often concerns a search for or expression of one's "voice" or "self through writing. It is often connected with such genres as diary or journal writing and privileges the idea of exploration. The so-called "free-writing" of Peter Elbow is also often associated with expressivism, a mode in which the writer writes without regard for constraints of audience and other inhibitions. This kind of writing is often used in the classroom as part of the rhetorical art of invention ("brainstorming") that envisions a later, more mature stage of the work that takes audience into account. As such, "free-writing" is often appropriate by current- traditionalists operating under the guise of process.

Expressivism, despite Elbow's defenses, has been criticized, most notably by Berlin who claims that what he terms "expressionist rhetoric" fails as an epistemic rhetoric in that it attempts to position itself outside of ideology. The rhetorical act is always ideological for Berlin, situated in contexts of power relations. Berlin's and other's critique of expressivism may be seen as hinging on the question of audience. Again despite Elbow's arguing to the contrary, expressivism may be seen as attempting to adopt a rhetorical position and conception of self that renders audience irrelevant. As such we can classify expressivism as a "univocal rhetoric" (as distinct from monologic, which views the audience as an object of manipulation), which is based on an Enlightenment principle that there are truths independent of context that can be expressed. The goal of univocal rhetoric is not to persuade as such but merely to express the self or find the self.

Such a view of language and subjectivity differs greatly from that envisioned in the dialogism of Bakhtin and others. Bakhtinian dialogism helps pave the way for a view of language, and hence writing, as a dialectical mediation between the self and other. As Bakhtin says every word is a bridge between the speaker and receiver. In dialogism, unlike in expressivism, audience is always relevant in the construction of language. Indeed utterances are inconceivable without audience, even so-call "private" language that is only possible through the internalization of audience, an idea similar to Vygotsky's "internal speech." For Bakhtin language is an inherently social phenomenon, although he is careful not to nullify individual agency by emphasizing the dialectic of self and other. It is the co-constitutive nature of self/rhetor and audience, or perhaps, more properly, community that differentiates dialogism from univocal or expressionist rhetoric, where audience can be irrelevant, and from classical monologic rhetoric, where audience is important but only for strategic purposes for the rhetor to accomplish his goal of persuasion. In dialogism context and process are key features of language as well as the audience/community/receivers as being contributors to the making and determining of meaning. It is this principle of dialogism that underlies much of critical pedagogy, such as Freire's critique of what he termed the banking system of education: a monologic model that views students as passive receivers of knowledge rather than participants in the making of knowledge. It is interesting to speculate what a truly dialogical classroom would look like, but one might imagine a pedagogy that features dialectical process, such as an electronically mediated classroom, at the expense of emphasizing individual product, such as a completed written essay. Such a classroom and pedagogy might allow the social nature of writing and language to be featured — and not merely as a preliminary stage to a more univocal understanding of knowledge.

But just as expressivism is subject to appropriation by current traditionalists, dialogism may too perhaps be co-opted under a non-critical veneer. This issue is an important one for feminist treatment of rhetoric and composition. The importance of community is attractive for feminists interested in redefining rhetoric form classical modes of hierarchal, combative persuasion. Dialogical models of rhetoric offers an

alternative to this - one where writer and community together create knowledge without necessarily trying to persuade. Much has been made of persuasion as a kind of art of violence.

Compositionists such as Belenky et al and Elizabeth Flynn, responding to feminist psychologists such as Chodorow and Gilligan who pose theories of "difference" feminism, have explored and adopted feminist positions of composing that sound remarkably like the ideas of Elbow in his *Writing Without Teachers*. "No response is wrong," wrote the early Elbow with regard to writing groups. Belenky and Flynn suggest that women may write and respond in a way that is non- dominating and therefore not understandable under masculinist models of rhetoric.

But besides leveling charges of essentialism, feminists such as bell hooks and Susan Jarratt maintain that a "woman's way of knowing" rhetoric is no rhetoric at all in that it allows for the maintenance of the status quo through the effacement of political differences. Jarratt has called for a more rhetorical model of persuasion for feminists, one that would allow for political negotiation of differences. The key here perhaps lies in the concept of "community" as it is understood in terms of a dialogical classroom. Rather than "community" a better term might be Pratt's "contact zone," a space of inherent inequality and clash. If community is understood in this way it perhaps changes our understanding of dialogism and makes Jarratt's call more compelling and understanding - and important - for a feminist rhetorical model.

Part II

Anonymous (Passed with distinction)

The notion of a discrete "homeland" is necessarily a fiction, albeit one policed by hegemonic power. In and through war, actual violence is done to actual physical bodies in the name of establishing, protecting, defending, an intangible "nation." Clearly, the power attendant to "nation" is felt by those enemy bodies deemed outside the bounds of that concept, that place, which a group of people call their- and only their- "homeland." Post-colonial and psychoanalytic theories have done much to explicate the, interrelationships between Occident and Orient, self and other, and have sought to dismantle the tired binaries by which we have often separated and defined ourselves. The questions of the homeland and the values attached to those questions, are often embodied by literature, they have long been put to propagandist use as a means of clarifying and solidifying a gathered slues of national identity. Often, this project of unity against an enemy "other" is accomplished through a Manichean exposition of good vs. evil, i.e. George Bush's most recent declaration of the world's order, we are "good" and our goodness is defined because we are not like those people over there, who thus must be "evil." This nationalist binary occurs in the public realm, between heads of stats, most often. But in literature, itself attendant to the aims of nationalism, obviously contains more than public political propaganda. It is in literature that one finds the ways in which the private realm is affected by nationalism and used to show up and defines the nationalist project. Because they embody the private sphere, the lines and very bodies of women are often used as a means of creating and defending a sense of "homeland." As weak, domestic, innocent creatures - and also as the vessels for the engendering of patriarchal political power - women are the moveable objects that trade hands in war. And it is in, and through, women's bodies that the problem of "homeland," its shapes and boundaries, can often be seen.

Chaucer's late 14th c. *The Canterbury Tales* is a series of tales set within an overarching narrative framework. Twenty nine pilgrims set forth towards Canterbury, and individual expository sketches are laid out in the General Prologue describing each pilgrim according to his or her place in the medieval estates system. At the top there is the Knight, and aristocratic warlord who has recently returned from battle abroad, and who tells the classic Boccaccian Teseida - tale of the romantic triangle between Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye. The majority of Chaucer's tale tellers are quite unlike the Knight, who himself could presumably defend, create, and or enforce a viable little nation-state of his own, however feudal that homeland might actually be. Instead, the pilgrims arc largely from the emerging bourgeois class who are still technically defined as peasants, despite their urbane wealth and nascent capitalist power. Their tales, then, enact a squabbling, messy, and pragmatic (though no less rigid, violent, and conservative) a notion of the medieval Christian "homeland," in this case, the body of the Christian subject. Medieval people were Christians first, an ethnic culture second, but the nascent bourgeois class had begun to question the efficacy of that kind of Christian identity. Church schisms, political wars, and rising economic mobility allowed this class to begin to question the meanings of religious and national identity. Particularly, *The Man of Law's Tale*, in its presentation of the Islamic Occident and the pagan edge of Britain, attempts to establish a homeland in and through the body of the long suffering female protagonist, Custance. Custance is everything that newly-bourgeois women like the wife of Bath was not: chaste, compliant, not-economically sufficient, and servile to church doctrine.

Described as "the mirour of curteisye," Custance is an ?-woman, a female saint. Her hagiographic experience of unendurable hardships and journies establishes her as a perfect Christian, devoted only to her father and to her father-God; her boundless, universalizing faith and constancy prevails against all odds. Throughout the text, Chaucer uses the binary oppositions of female/male, mother/father, Christian/heathen as a means of shoring up the distractions between good and evil, establishing Custance and her tale as completely out of this world, and out of time. He sets the tale safely in the distant past, and begins the story in Rome, where Custance is introduced as the daughter of the Emperor. The setting of a murky past isn't too far past from Chaucer's own chaotic late 14th c. - this tale is not an early Christian saint's life - because soon enough, Custance is wooed by the muslim Sultan of Syria. Islam is sufficiently ensconced, politically and spiritually, in this fictive Syria that the reader can presume a rough history of perhaps 300-400 years prior to Chaucer's telling the tale. The Sultan is so impressed by Custance's Christian patience and her good bearing, her good example, that he decides to marry her. She is taken to Syria, alone, to marry the Sultan, only to discover that the Sultan's mother - the Sultanness - will not have her as a daughter-in-law.

The figure of the Sultanness is Chaucer's reigning Orientalist accomplishment. She is described as an Islamic agent of Satan who cannot bear the presence of the Christian Custance, and so evilly deigns to cast her out of Syrian. The Sultanness' control over her own son the actual inheritor of patriarchal power is so complete - and so perverse - that he throws order to the wind and agrees with his evil mother to dispatch Custance. The Sultanness is a virago, a queen who does not rightfully rule but instead uses her Sultanic influence to infect men. She is Custance's sure fail, for, not only has Custance converted to Christianity, but Custance declares that as a woman it is her role and duty in life to be passive to the overriding rule of men. She goes where her father sends her, and she goes - uncomplaining - when her husband casts her off. And cast-off she becomes, as she sails by herself in a ship all the way to Northumberland.

Chaucer's use of early medieval Northumberland allows him to further parse the distinctions between Christians and pagans, and to do so using the geographical schema of the medieval world. It also allows

him to further distance himself and the readers from contemporaneity. Custance begins in the epicenter of Christendom, Rome, travels from one end of medieval universe, to Syria, to the other, Britain. She is moligued by heathens, by muslims, in Syria and then finds herself on the shores of an England where no one - at first - understands her speech. The Syrians, despite their disparities of faith, and despite the clear workings of evil within the Sultaness, understand her language, with Chaucer vaguely describes as "like Latin." But the pagan Britains take a while before they can make sense of C.'s tongue. And it is in Northumberland where Custance meets her worst trials, and where she finds her greatest salvation, through the use of language and text. Despite their inabilities to fully comprehend her, Custance's British hosts soon convert because of her good example. She is so popular that, Chaucer tells us, Satan moves within a local knight, eliciting his desire. She rebuffs him, he's angry, and thus he decides to slit the throat of her companion, Hermengyld, and leave the knife by distance's side. After she is accused of the crime and about to be convicted, the Northumbrian king asks the guilty knight to swear he's telling the truth in his witness. In a scene horribly, ironically reminiscent of Augustine's mystical "pick it up and read" conversion, a holy book by the Evangelist is brought in upon which the knight must swear. The pervasive force of the book's Christian power is so overwhelming that the evil knight's eyes burst from his own head, and he dies. Everyone in the room is immediately converted, the king marries Custance, and then proceeds to "correctly" have sex with her on their wedding night. He follows the medieval sexual conscriptions so exactly - after marriage, missionary-position-style, for the purposes of procreation - that he quickly impregnates her with a son, Mauricius. Custance is the perfect mirror to her husband's, and to Chaucer's, desire for a Christian wife. She has allegiance only to her husband; she is chaste and will not sleep with the knight; she possesses little desire of her own for anything other than sanctified, procreative sex. More than this, she is a mirror for God's desire as well. Her good example causes mass conversions, and is so powerful that God's own power and voice intervenes to save her life and prove her just innocence.

Just as Chaucer used the Sultaness to establish a binary between good and bad women in this tale, he cannot provide Custance with any female allies who might muddy the clarity of the pure female Christian subject. Hermengyld is slain, and King Alla's Wife, Donegyld, is just as evil and filled with inappropriate desire for political power as was the Sultaness. Custance must remain alone if we are to see her as a universal Christian, a homeland for Christian piety in a fallible human body. Yet where the Sultaness overtly, through speech, poisons distance's standing, Donegyld employs writing - and all the anxiety and duplicity attendant to literacy - in her attempt to annex power. All of this anti-feminist conniving leads one to question, however, how powerful Chaucer's nationalizing project could actually ever be. The Man of Law's Tale follows, almost too-neatly, the medieval binaristic conventions concerning gender, power, and the Christian subject. In order for Custance to fully embody the notion of medieval Christian femininity she must be utterly solitary, removed in all ways from the solace of *communitas*. Further, Donegyld's manipulation, interception and fabrication of Alla's letters to Custance speaks to Chaucer's own anxieties over whether literary texts - thereby his own massive Canterbury project - were reliable, viable sources of civic worth. Donegyld's false letters succeed in banishing distance yet again, this time with her son, back to the sea, and ultimately back to her father in Rome.

Custance is a vessel for masculinist desire, and in the traffic of her body - between her father and the Sultan, and then, albeit circuitously, between King Alla and her father again - establishes her as an example of the universal Christian subject. Yet Chaucer's creation of perfect femininity, this tale in lilted, air-tight rhyme of so many distinct binaries, has a claustrophobic quality as well. Custance is so constant that she

never changes; she has no sin, and for that reason she must remain wholly fictively, ideal, an "other" to her readers.

Published in Quarto form in 1600, Shakespeare's *Henry V* is a play meant to establish and police the boundaries of the nascent British nation-state. Ostensibly, a conclusion of the Henry history plays. *Henry V* is an effort in soldering a history play to a romantic tragic-comedy at the behest of patriotism. The result of that effort is borne by a woman's body in the form of the French princess Katherine, whom Henry marries as a way of solidifying and enforcing his political conquest of France.

Shakespeare composed *Henry V* during the successful aftermath of the Spanish Armada of 1588, and the play is in many ways an attempt to further cement a sense of Britishness, a homeland distinct from foreign enemies. In the play's narrative, that enemy is France, but Henry is a young king who is primarily seeking conquest abroad. Shakespeare consequently spends a great number of lines attempting to rationalize - and nationalize - Henry's war with a not-quite distant enemy. Harry, in his "Channel Firing" can easily identify the sound of WWI cannon fire in the fields of France from across the English channel because the distance between the 2 countries is so geographically slight, and Shakespeare establishes in *Henry V* a sense of British nationalism at the expense of France and Frenchness, perhaps because France is so close - historically, culturally, physically, and linguistically. Henry is a Plantagenet, his ancestors were French, and as the fumbling, funny, but ultimately transparent bilingualism in the play makes clear, the French are not an alien people. Katherine is his "cousin," after all.

One of Chaucer's primary nationalist accomplishments were his enduring creations of a standard vernacular and a rough kind of Anglicized iambic meter. Chaucer, and Shakespeare as well, are intelligible still to use - in ways that *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* are not - because of the political standardization of a London hybrid dialect. Chaucer was himself bilingual; his CT is a linguistic amalgam of French and English because the rulers of England were French, Norman, colonizers. As a member of the king's court, Chaucer had to speak French. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare looks back from the historical present - a time of social and political anxiety, when Britain was an awkward 4- part nation of England, Wales, the ever-rebellious Scotland, and the newly colonized Ireland ruled tenuously by a female monarch whose power was actively challenged by the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world, Spain - towards an idealized, medieval past. In the historical time of *Henry V*, the early 15th century, things were a little clearer, presumably, or so Shakespeare would have us believe.

King Harry, his clerics and his court decide - illogically and tortuously argue - that France belongs to him because of an obscure medieval law. Somehow France is being ruled by someone who received power matrilineally, out of accordance with the "Law of Salique." Because Harry is a true patriarch, he must inherit the French throne and sets out to take France by force. In the play, gender is an ever present problem resolved by patriarchal force. After Harry and his men threaten the town of Harfleur with mass rape, as a means to wrenching from them a capitulation, Shakespeare gives us Princess Katherine's central and most verbal scene. In it, she takes English lessons from her maid, learning the words for body parts in comically "broken" English. All goes smoothly until she encounters the words "foot" and "count," cognates for French profanities describing genitalia. She is startled and shocked, but continues her lesson. Presciently, it seems, she knows that her conqueror is soon to arrive, that he will arrive bodily and with her body particularly in mind.

The play's great conceit, or perhaps its nationalistic success, is in perpetuating the English myth of

England-as-underdog. Vastly outnumbered at Agincourt, Harry exhorts his "band of brothers," a motley army of merely "a happy few" to head once more into the breach. They do, despite their own interval nationalist identities. The fight scene between Fleuellen and MacMorris in which the Scots MacMorris angrily asks "what is my nation," is particularly redolent and exemplifies Shakespeare's attempt to portray the lived realities of welding together a nation of disparate parts.

When the English have won, 25 to 8,000 plus, miraculously, all Harry must do is "woo" Katherine. The penultimate love scene between the two is painful and frightening in its rhetoric. Katherine declares early in that she "cannot speak your England." But Harry Anglicizes her name to Kate, and unleashes a torrent of Renaissance arguments concerning love, soldiering, royal rule, and the vagaries of the heart. He declares he loves Kate's France so much, and thereby her, that he wished to own every village of it. The scene is less one of courtship as it is a kind of verbal almost - rape. Although Harry presents himself and his offer to Katherine under the guise of her subjective decision to say no, to refuse him, she has no real choice. She bemoans, "how should I love the enemy of France?" but the question has only one answer: she must.

In acquiring Katherine, Harry acquires the symbolic body of France. In the play's final scene he sighs that he might have all the towns of France but for one French maid who stands in his way. Kate relents, and Shakespeare gives us a requisite scene of patriarchal marriage in which Harry and Kate's father, the King of France, make the economic transaction of her female body. The play concludes with a sonnet by the chorus in which Shakespeare provides a kind of apologia. He declares himself "a bendable author" with an uncertain pen. But the question of how the nation can be defined, and the uses of women's bodies as a physical means of establishing those bounds, continues to trouble the text and history. Katharine and Harry's male progeny, Henry VI, we're told by the sonnet's turn will ultimately relinquish his father's conquest and lose France.

Where Chaucer's Tale and Shakespeare's play each set forth a public narrative that uses women's bodies as a kind of economic payment for the cause of creating a clear nationalist identity, C.P. Oilman's novella *The Yellow Wallpaper* tells the private story of the women who pay the price for the idealized "homeland." Oilman's novella, published in 1892 was initially rejected by the editor of Harper's because he sought to "spare the public" such a dire tale of madness and domestic horror. In the text, a young married woman suffers from a depression following the birth of her first child. Like Gilman herself, as well as Virginia Woolf, the protagonist of *The Yellow...* is forced by her husband and doctor to take "a rest cure" as a way to solve her problem. Yet the protagonist's main problem is that she is female, and as her newly produced infant makes clear, she has now fulfilled her function within the patriarchal system. Why then is she so unhappy? Her "rest cure" requires her to not write, to not express herself, and to remain alone in the former nursery at the top of the rented house her husband, also a doctor, has procured for them so that she might be cured. This is a woman who has no homeland, so much so she doesn't even have a home, much less an adult's bedroom. Instead she must occupy the nursery room, with its bars on the windows, its old gymnastic iron rings set into the walls, and most symbolically, its horribly patterned yellow wallpaper. The protagonist tells her story in the first person, using short phrases and mere sentence-long paragraphs. At the onset of the novella, she is presumably lucid, reliable, but as the narrative progresses - if this can even be called progress - her sanity clearly begins to erode. She is denied the ability to write openly, and so the novella is presented as her secret text, the one she writes when no one's looking. Her husband infantilizes and abandons her. Gone to work all day, often for days at a time, he returns to dismiss her attempts at clearly discussing her emotions and her experience. He calls her "a silly girl," "a little goose," and tells her

only to not think and to rest. The protagonist is thus both literally and figuratively imprisoned, and she must stay there until she can participate successfully in the dictates of the domestic, upper middle class, American home. She cannot work, she certainly cannot vote, she cannot even be a mother because the sight of her child upsets her too much. Her only respite, her only ability to create and shore up her own slues of a subjective self - writing - is denied her.

Predictably, then, the protagonist rapidly loses her mind. She believes that patterned wallpaper oppresses her, in its pervasive color, its sulphurous yellow swell, its weirdly inconclusive pattern. The paper's like a fungus, and one day she sees women -she sees herself - trapped within its confines.

As she grows more insane, the protagonist looks out of her barred windows at the land, the grounds, below. She tries to tell herself, in a falsely objective, cheery tone, that they are really quite nice. She lists the lawn, trees, the paths in the gardens. And she begins to think she's seeing women, freed from the domestic spheres, "creeping" through the landscape. Her servant, her husband's sister, who herself is described as quite pleased with her lot, as a housekeeper, happily deferential to the needs and wishes of her patriarch, grows alarmed. Finally, the protagonist locks herself in her nursery prison. She ? the bed posts, rips the wallpaper off the wall, and tosses the key out of the window, where it falls under an ornamental bush. She begins obsessively circumvent the room, one shoulder rubbing the paper to a smear as she creeps along the wall. Her husband arrives in shock and demands the key; she tells him its outside, repetitively. When he finally enters the room, he faints, and she steps blankly over his body as she continues to circle the room.

As in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Oilman sees the upper middle class home as a kind of prison, a place diabolically out of time. These little spheres, entire domestic universes, are ruled hegemonically by men, and female bodies and female insanities are lodged in the prison-schema of the attic. In many ways, it can be argued that these "'Women in the attic" a la Gilbert and Gubar, one guiding, directing and destroying the house. Lodged in the manor's brain, these women are the perverse rationality of nationalism gone to its extreme bad end. They bear the consequences of the hermetically sealed discourse of the homeland. If the members of the homeland are wholly good - and they must be because their opposite, the outsiders are wholly evil - then the homeland can brook no dissent, no disagreement. The Yellow... 's protagonist pays the ultimate price for that enforced agreement with the nationalist project - her own sanity.

True community, just like true literature, contains multitudes. The concept of the homeland is ultimately airless in its rigid binaries. Defining the nation's self against another is a miserly, teleological dead end, namely because a negative definition only works in the realm of the ideal. No one person, text, nation is completely one thing - a perfect Christian, a true underdog, a happy, happy wife - and the efforts to continually prove the rectitude and impermeability of those ideals eventually fails. They begin to crumble, for both author and (this) reader, around the sites of female bodily experience. The traffic in women, seen most obviously in the patriarchal traditions of heterosexual marriage, is a traffic not simply of sex and romance but of politics as well. Chaucer's Custance is the female saint out of time, as unlike the bawdy, self-sufficient, scandalous Wife of Bath as any other of Chaucer's characters. Custance is orthodoxy personified, and passively, her body goes - geographically, sexually - where men wish it to go. Shakespeare's *Henry V* sets forth a project of reifying the British homeland. Harry is the great star of England who succeeds in (miraculously) uniting squabbling nation against an invented enemy, and he uses gender not just to forment his war but - with Katherine's symbolic French body - to successfully capture it as well. And C.P. Gilman's crazed protagonist in *The Yellow...* provides her body for the uses of the

patriarchal homeland, only to find her mind at odds with the social requirements inherent to the moniker "wife." She looks out, from her prison bars from the attic of a home that cannot ever be her own, at a land teeming with fragments of her fractured self, who creep along the garden paths.

Chris Iannini

Question 3

The nature of the heroic can be said to be a function of the kind of adversary the hero/heroine faces. In three works that claim the status of the heroic or epic because of scale, theme, or genre markers, from three different periods, show how the heroism depicted is directly or inversely related to the characteristics of the adversary.

In considering the nature of the heroic as a function of the kind of adversary the hero or heroine faces, in works that gesture toward epic status written since the English Reformation, we have additional complexities to deal with. At least since Milton's 1664 epic poem *Paradise Lost*, in order to examine the direct or inverse relation between hero/heroine and adversary, we first have to decide who the hero or heroine is, and then, whether the adversary they face is internal or external. In response to the political and religious controversies of the Restoration and Protestant Reformation, Milton's epic undertakes a radical redefinition of heroism that causes the label of hero or heroine to appear to slide from one character to another as the poem progresses. This redefinition of heroism has a direct impact on Romantic debates over whether Satan is in fact the true hero of the poem, as reflected in Blake's assertion that Milton was "of the devil's party without knowing it," or Percy Shelley's qualified admiration for Satan in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*.

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* (albeit a novel that, as we shall see, deploys many of the signatures of epic writing) undertakes a subtle critique of (male) Romantic "misreadings" of Satan as hero of *Paradise Lost*. In doing so, she recovers many of the strategies Milton used to complicate and redefine the notion of the heroism in the first place. A parallel effort can be found in American Romanticism, in Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby Dick*. As has been often noted, Ahab, the ostensible hero of the novel, bears a striking philosophical and rhetorical resemblance to ideas of heroism expressed in the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson. As *Frankenstein* may be read as a critique of high Romantic conceptions of heroism purportedly derived from Milton's Satan, Ahab's monomaniacal quest for the White Whale may be read as a subtle (and highly ambivalent) critique of Transcendentalist accounts of heroism. It is the contention of this essay that *Frankenstein* and *Moby Dick* rely on Miltonic strategies for questioning what proper heroic action might be, to suggest that the true adversary of the epic hero (whether bodied forth in an epic poem or a novel with epic "ambitions") is the epic hero himself, or more precisely, the cultural definition of the epic hero as isolated, narcissistic and self-destructive genius that drives those ostensible heroes to tragic ends. Those ostensible heroes merely project an adversarial status onto the monster or the whale. The adversary is found to be internal, though not by Victor or Ahab themselves. Ahab and Victor remain closer to Euripidean heroes. Their conception remain more or less fixed, as opposed to the Sophoclean hero who learns from his or her mistakes. In those works it is the main narrator and author (be it Ishmael and Melville, or Robert Walton and Mary Shelley) who evolves in a manner roughly parallel to a Sophoclean hero. It is not hard to see why Romantic readers often judged Satan to be the hero of *Paradise Lost*. Milton appears to give Satan pride of place in the poem. The first two books are devoted

almost exclusively to Satan, whose situation as fallen overreacher, cast down to Hell after his thwarted rebellion against God's glorification of Jesus, is depicted with a kind of grandeur.

In many ways, Satan is allied with classical epic notions of the hero, especially the anger of Homer's Achilles in the Iliad. And at first *Paradise Lost* purports to be classical epic. Milton lays claim to epic status through the use of epic invocation in Book I. He asks the assistance of a strangely Christianized muse to bolster his poetic powers, so he may express "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme."

Given this generic marking Satan seems the logical choice as hero. Like Achilles, he has rebelled against a hierarchy that has denied him what he feels are his just rewards. His speeches to the fallen angels in Books I and II are full of heroic rhetoric. He has the tortured grandeur of the epic hero in his realization that "myself am hell," and in his refusal to submit to divine authority, though ruins, even if such submission holds the possibility of divine forgiveness and grace. After the counsel in Hell, when no volunteer comes forth for the journey through Chaos to test the truth of that late prophecy of a new-created world, and beings, upon whom the fallen angels might exact revenge, Satan "heroically" volunteers.

It is here that what critics have called a "process of exposure" begins, through which Satan is effectively discredited as hero, and returned to a more orthodox status as adversary.

Satan carefully rigs the council in Hell so that none of the angels can usurp the heroic stature he has claimed by being the first volunteer for the journey through chaos. Satan emerges as a little to politically adept, and cunning.

This is hinted at in Book II, and underscored by the conversation between God and Jesus in Book III. When God declares that because Adam and Eve will transgress against him they must be punished with death ("die he, or justice must"), Jesus immediately steps forth to offer to suffer punishment in place of man, and thus allow them to receive eventual grace. Unlike Satan, God does not begrudge the Son his heroism. Jesus in turn, deflects attention away from his own sacrifice and praises the infinite mercy of God. It is here that the epic begins to revise notions of heroism. True heroism consists not in self-glorification but in humiliation. God tells Jesus, "therefore thy humiliation shall exalt" him. Two critics are useful here. William Empson argues that in Book III God announces his intention to abdicate his heavenly throne. He will pass his "regal sceptre" to the son, who will in turn lay that regal sceptre aside on the last day, when "God will be all in all," or will become merely immanent by distributing divine authority, in the form of inward conscience, amongst what Milton calls in his prose writings "the priesthood of all believers." Heroism is framed as abdication rather than as usurpation.

Stanley Fish argues that the reader is here chastened for his sinful misconception that Satan was the hero, and called upon to revise his or her notions of heroism along the lines sketched out by God and Jesus. The reader is again called upon to test his or her notions of heroism in the Prologue to Book IX, where Milton explicitly redefines heroism in a way more fitting to the New Dispensation of Christianity. Milton expresses his impatience with the militaristic heroes of classical epics, and Spenserian romances, with their pomp and "tilting furniture." The better part of heroism has been left unsung, and consists in "patience" and "heroic martyrdom."

The question of who is the hero of *Paradise Lost*, however, is far from settled. Jesus of course best fits the notion of the "martyrdom," but there are also suggestions that Adam, Eve and Milton himself could be the hero of the poem. Eve might be the hero because she must patiently await the fulfillment of the prophecy,

conveyed through Michael, that her progeny will bruise the head of Satan with their heel. Adam might be the hero in that he must resign himself to the will of God, must endure the impending calamities and hardships revealed to him on the mountain-top by Michael, and patiently await the attainment of a "Paradise within thee, happier far." Milton himself might be the hero. Throughout the epic, Milton's autobiographical prologues have framed him as heroic. Further, his notions of his own potential heroism have evolved along the lines Fish claims the reader's are expected to. Milton evolves from the bravado of the prologue to Book I (the "soaring" that suggests a connection between his poetic pride and Satan's pride), to his difficult resignation to blindness in Book III (with its deferential question "may I express thee unblam'd"), to the profound humility of Book IX where he disavows any agency in creating the poem. His words will fade "if they be mine/not hers who brings it nightly to my ear," if they are a product of self-pride rather than an utter abandonment to a Christianized muse. Milton seems to learn the virtue of "humiliation" Jesus possessed all along.

What are we to make of these multiple heroes? Are we meant to choose between them, or does heroism consist of our willingness to remain in interpretive uncertainty? I would modify Fish's argument slightly to argue that Milton intends the reader as both the hero and adversary of the poem. The reader is the hero because he or she must rely on their "inward oracle" (as *Paradise Regained* calls it) to adjudicate between the poem's disparate potential meanings. The reader is his or her own adversary to the extent that they sympathize with, or are seduced by Satanic notions of heroism, or erroneous notions of heroism expressed by Adam and Eve.

Milton foregrounds the notion of interpretation as heroism through this use of narrative frames. The prologue to Book III both affirms and questions the legitimacy of prophecy. Can we assume then that Milton actually channels God's voice? Similarly, Raphael (in Books V - VIII) or Michael (in XI and XII) often narrate heavenly events that they were not present for. Further, they constantly warn that to narrate heavenly events according to earthly notions of time and space requires inevitable distortions. To what extent then are their narratives reliable. Readerly heroism consists in ceaselessly questioning the authority of whatever voice is carrying the poem, relying on one's own inward oracle rather than retreating to any comfortable religious or political orthodoxy. The increased textualization of Protestant religion (its emphasis on the temple in the heart) and the turmoil of Civil War and Restoration made such a redefinition of heroism essential vital to the health of England and spirituality in general.

The reader may also be the hero of *Frankenstein*. In such a reading, the hero might be the silent recipient of Robert Walton's letters - Margaret Saville. Alternatively, Margaret Saville as silent reader may stand in for Mary Shelley who asserts almost no authorial presence throughout the whole novel. Interestingly, the only moment when Mary Shelley appears to speak of herself, to introduce herself as a character in her own text (in the 1818 version) is written by her husband Percy Shelley. Mary Shelley's refusal of authorial presence can be read as an extension of Blake's critique of Milton as a poet in Milton. There, Milton must correct the errors of *Paradise Lost* by "annihilating his Satanic selfhood." Shelley in turn critiques the satanic self-hood of many of her (male) Romantic contemporaries. The adversary of her novel turns out to be its ostensible Romantic hero - Victor Frankenstein; or what she sees as the dangerous cultural climate that would designate such a socially destructive figure as hero in the first place.

Mary Shelley thus extends Milton's critique of epic heroism. *Frankenstein* is framed as an epic, though much of that framing is done by Percy Shelley. Percy ventriloquizes Mary to claim a wish to "avoid the enervating effects of the novel" and compose a work more epic and classical in its moral ambitions. The

subtitle, "The Modern Prometheus" also gestures toward the epic. M. Shelley alludes to Percy's internal epic drama *Prometheus Unbound* (largely modeled on the brief epic format and psychological topography of Milton's *Paradise Regained*). Further, throughout the novel characters attempt to draw correspondences between their own plight, and the plight of characters in *Paradise Lost*. Victor aligns himself with Satan by echoing his "myself am hell speech." The monster aligns himself with Satan as well, through his rage at this creator. The point of these allusions is not to construct fixed correspondences between the texts, but to show the moral Christian landscape of *Paradise Lost* cannot be superimposed over the secular and social world evoked by the novel. The correspondences won't stick. The Satan reference slides from the Monster to Victor. The monster at times compares himself to Eve (by echoing the account of Eve transfixed by her own reflection in Book IV) or to Adam (by echoing Adam's account of coming to consciousness in Book VIII). But how does all this relate to the question of the nature of the heroic as function of the relation of the hero/heroine to his or her adversary? I would argue that the aim of these strategies is to render the question of the novel's hero more or less undecidable, by allowing connections between the novel's characters and heroes or adversaries in *Paradise Lost* to constantly shift.

Mary Shelley also complicates the notion of heroism through her novelization of Miltonic narrative strategies. *Frankenstein* is a series of nested narratives. The epistolary frame of Walton's letters to his sister contains within it both Walton's journals, and Victor's narrative as mediated by those journals. Further, the frame of Victor's narrative (itself framed as noted above) contains within it the Monster's narrative as mediated by Victor and Walton. Because of these elaborate frames, the reader of *Frankenstein* is called upon to judge the authority of various voices, and to reconcile competing accounts of episodes in the same way as the reader of *Paradise Lost*. The reader must place themselves in the position of Margaret Saville. They must balance and contain an elaborate web of voices in order to draw meaning from the text of Walton's letters. Is the reader then the hero of *Frankenstein*? If so, who or what is the adversary? Victor is the obvious choice as hero. He is ambitious in his quest to discover and put to practical (and at first, humanitarian) use the "principle of life," by assembling a man out of parts of corpses. He is a creature of solitude. He continually flees the domestic world to partake of nature in extreme states (like Byron and Shelley in the novel's preface). He resists failure until the bitter end. "O be men, be more than men" he tells Walton's crew when they ask to turn home from their quest. Thus, like a Euripidean hero, he does not evolve.

If Victor is the hero then clearly the Monster is the adversary. But if we believe the Monster's account of how he came to wage war against humanity, Victor becomes the adversary. The Monster was merely a Rousseau-like tabula rasa at his creation. He becomes malicious because when his creator rejects him, he denies him the social connections human inherently desire. Further mistreatment and poverty only exacerbate this social isolation.

Heroes and adversaries could continue to be suggested, and discredited with similar ease. In my own reading of the novel Mary Shelley paradoxically becomes the hero of the novel by revising conceptions of artistic creation until they hold no implications of heroism as Romantically conceives. The Mary Shelleyan artist does not create anything. Her function is essentially editorial, a cobbling together and juxtaposition of received texts. As such, her function is essentially collaborative and social. Walton begins to learn this collaborative mode of artistic production. He gives over huge portions of his narrative to Victor, and allows Victor and the monster to add to his journal, to make corrections. Further, Walton writes to create an intimate domestic connection between himself and his sister. He does not pitch his voice to the universe

in an inspired Romantic apostrophe. In doing so Walton begins to overcome the true adversary of the poem, which Mary Shelley frames as a Romantic conception of the heroic, isolated artist that has socially destructive implications when it carries over into society in general, especially our perceptions of scientific genius as removed from consideration of the social benefit of the knowledge science gains. It is important to note that Mary Shelley's "heroic" adversary is not "evil" in any metaphysical sense. In her profoundly secular world the only test of the worth of a character or action is its impact, for "good" or "bad," on the social and domestic connections the novel repeatedly evokes.

Melville's *Moby Dick* is another novel that also gestures toward the epic, if only in its sheer scope. Further, throughout the novel Ishmael's almost documentary descriptions of whaling in the 19th-century widen out to take on cosmic significance. This habitual compositional rhythm has led Laurence Buell to argue that in *Moby Dick* Melville attempts to write a sacred text, an ambition shared by Milton's 17th-century "epic prophecy." Throughout the novel "literal" description of, for instance, a whale's tail are first metaphorized (the tail is compared to an elephant's trunk), and then aggressively mythologized (Ishmael half-jokes that if someone wanted to annihilate all matter the tail is the instrument for such a job). When these mythological interpretations are then undermined (Ishmael says he is not sure if the whale's tail has any meaning at all), Buell argues, that cosmic mystery of the whale is augmented (by its very unknowability) rather than reduced to materiality, to a commodity, as in certain New Historical readings. If Buell is right, and Melville writes a kind of Miltonic sacred epic, an exploration of the nature of heroism should be a central theme?

On its surface the novel offers an allegory with Ahab as (tragic) hero and the white whale as malignant adversary. On the previous voyage, Ahab has lost a leg while pursuing *Moby Dick*. The wound is strongly associated with castration, or a loss of sexual potency or desire. Faced with such a loss (it is important to remember Ahab was almost a newlywed at the time of the amputation) Ahab reads the white whale as the embodiment, the "incarnation" of all worldly and cosmic evil. The novel offers Ahab as hero largely through the use of tragic conventions. Ahab's preferred mode of speech is a highly rhetorical version of a Shakespearian soliloquy, especially in chapters like "Sunset" and "The Symphony."

But Melville's novel also critiques (or even satirizes) the notion that Ahab is heroic, largely through its subversion (its near deconstruction) of the adversarial role Ahab has monomaniacally projected onto the whale. The logic of Melville's critique runs something like this: if *Moby Dick* is not an adversary at all, if he is merely a projection of Ahab's subconscious need for an adversary to help him derive meaning from what amounts to a random accident, then how can his pursuit of the whale be heroic at all? As in *Frankenstein*, we find that the text's hero is his own (and everyone else's) adversary.

The question of Ahab's heroism, then, turns on the prior question of whether he (or anyone) can make any definitive or even helpful statement about the nature of the whale. This crisis of meaning is alluded to by Ishmael at the opening of "The Whiteness of the Whale." Ishmael finds himself unable to make any definitive explanation of why the idea of the whale has such a profound psychological (almost mystical) influence over he and the crew. He goes on, "But explain myself I must, or all these chapters are four naught." By the end of the chapter, after discovering that the "whiteness" he feels is the whale's most powerful trait can symbolize anything from the virginity of the bride, to the ferocity of sharks, to a cosmic blankness ("a colorless all-colour, as of atheism from which we shrink") all but abandons the notions of knowledge and teleology Ahab so treasures. Ishmael's book realizes it can never say anything final: "This whole book is but a draught, nay, but the draught of a draught," begins to overcome the true adversary of

the poem, which Mary Shelley frames as a Romantic conception of the heroic, isolated artist that has socially destructive implications when it carries over into society in general, especially our perceptions of scientific genius as removed from consideration of the social benefit of the knowledge science gains. It is important to note that Mary Shelley's "heroic" adversary is not "evil" in any metaphysical sense. In her profoundly secular world the only test of the worth of a character or action is its impact, for "good" or "bad," on the social and domestic connections the novel repeatedly evokes.

Ishmael's book realizes it can never say anything final: "This whole book is but a draught, nay, but the draught of a draught," because its provisional understandings of the whale are always subject to revision. Ahab becomes his own adversary because he lacks Ishmael's conceptual fluidity. He cannot abandon the fixed correspondence he sees between the white whale and a cosmic malignancy.

It is interesting to note that through this provisionality and fluidity Ishmael arrives at a version of reading (here, of the hieroglyph-covered whale) similar to the open-ended (possibly heroic) reading demanded by *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein*. Ishmael is able to hold disparate meaning in his head simultaneously, or to abandon one meaning when a seemingly better one arises. It would be too much to say that Ishmael survives because of this fluidity. The point of the novel seems to me that there is no reason Ishmael survives. Attempts to construct such a reading would only embroil us in the "heroic" interpretive hubris that destroyed Ahab and all but one of his crew. But it may be true to say that the fluidity Ishmael demonstrates when he comes to write his narrative of the voyage is a measure of how much he has learned from Ahab's tragic demise. Ishmael is thus a kind of Sophoclean hero, albeit one who learns from other's mistakes rather than his own. Further, if Ishmael is heroic at all it is because of his seemingly non-heroic refusal to be an over-reacher or over-reader. He is heroic because he realizes that he does not have an adversary at all, that those who read brute nature, as embodied in the whale, as adversarial are merely caught in the labyrinth of their own perceptions. *Moby Dick* is finally, an "allegory of unreadability," as recent critics have called it. Right reading consists in learning to be comfortable, like Ishmael, in the face of that unreadability. *Moby Dick* is relentless in its deconstruction of the conceptual categories on which a binary relation between hero and adversary would depend. "The Whiteness of the Whale" has been discussed above. There a kind of Levy-Straussian structuralist attempt to universalize the meaning of the "whiteness" quickly transforms into Derridean post-structuralist send-up of such a project. Further instances of such a process could be found in the "Etymologies" and "Extracts" which frame the book, or in chapters such as "Cetology" (where the only classificatory scheme in which the variety of whales can fit is the hopelessly inept one of folio/quarto (octavo) or "The Doubloon" (where there are as many interpretations of a single gold coin as there are interpreters).

Finally *Moby Dick* critiques the "heroism" of Ahab by denying him individual agency. "Is Ahab Ahab" he asks himself at a crucial moment. Can a character be a hero is his identity is as profoundly contingent as Ahab's? As Ishmael puts it, Ahab is a daemonic character (in the Angus Fletcher sense of the word). He does not control his own actions. He is impelled by the intense bitterness that has subsumed his agency "when what seemed Ahab burst from his cabin."

In exploring the relation between the hero/heroine and his or her adversary across four centuries and an ocean, this essay has attempted to read Milton into a Romantic tradition. It has sought to do so, however, in a manner directly opposed to Romantic readings of heroism as properly Satanic.

The 19th-century writers I have discussed attempt to undo the category of heroism altogether (and in the

process collapse the binary between hero and adversary.

Michelle Pacht

Question 1

The idea of chance is one of the constant literary themes, but how it is conceptualized and how it is reflected formally are intrinsically connected both with particular historical moments and with the demands of genre. Discuss the way chance is treated thematically and stylistically in at least three works from three different areas as listed above.

The idea of chance has long been prevalent in literature. Seen alternately as a disastrous element in an otherwise ordered universe and an unexpected opportunity to break out of an unsatisfactory situation, chance is often most notable for its absence. Three works which exemplify this "lack" of chance are Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Austen's *Emma*, and Eliot's *Middlemarch*. These works acknowledge that chance plays a role in the world, but refuse to accept it as part of the particular world which is created within the text. Chance does not play a role in the action or drama of these works — at least not in the way it does in other works such as *Tom Jones* or *Joseph Andrews*, works by Fielding which rely on coincidences and random encounters. Each author has his or her reasons for presenting the text in the way they do and are affected by both the times in which they lived and the genres which they chose to use.

John Milton read the Bible as a literal document truthfully recording the word of God. His effort then to "justify the ways of God to man" is informed by the teachings and concepts of the Bible. For a man who believes in an omniscient, beneficent God, chance is merely a notion created by man, not an actual force in the world. In *Paradise Lost* there are moments which seem left to chance — Satan's clandestine roamings in Eden, Eve's desire to tend the garden alone for a change, etc. When viewed within the larger Biblical context, however we see that these events must occur the way they do to allow for what we know must happen. God has created man free to act as he would but demands obedience. We know before even opening *Paradise Lost* that man falls. God even tells his son of the fall several books before it occurs. It's not random or unexpected - it's necessary in order to tell the story the narrative is filled with warnings - from God, from the Son, from the Angels, from Adam - which are ignored or conveniently forgotten at the crucial moment. This may indicate an inability to listen carefully but not the workings of chance.

The poem begins in the middle of a story that is happening but has also already happened. We know we're already fallen the narrative moves both backwards and forwards as first Gabriel and then Michael share then-knowledge with Adam. Events and outcomes have been prophesied or seen — we are merely reading about the events which led up to the outcomes we already know. There is no other way for Milton to write this story since he believes that, to a degree, it was pre-ordained to happen the way it did. Even moments which seem to allow for unexpected results turn out to be benign - as we realize when we hear the story recounted of war between God's angels and Satan and his followers. Each day of battle is described - first good seem to be winners, then evil. On the third day, however, we find out that God had a plan all along — he was saving the final victory for his Son, prolonging the battle to give the Son an opportunity to thunder by on his chariot and drive Satan and his followers over the precipice into chaos. It was not a battle left to chance - the results were carefully modified and controlled by the only one who knows and is everything.

Milton's belief in the Bible and in God's power is exemplified by his choice of genre — the epic poem.

Epic poetry by nature tells of large, important stories in which man's fate hangs in the balance. Supernatural beings play a role in determining the outcome and entire nations or civilizations are affected. The loftiness of his topic is perfectly suited to the epic genre as is his belief in God's power to determine events. The arguments which precede each book of *Paradise Lost* reiterate the predetermined nature of the events which are to follow as does the fact that the story is not told in chronological order. Many scenes are recalled, recounted and retold, reminding the reader of the inevitability of it all. The epic genre also counted on inspiration from a muse who allowed the poet to express himself and tell the story. Again, this confirms the story's immutability. Muses and angels and God Himself made chance seem made chance seem impossible to allow. Writing about events which were past and at the time, universally acknowledged made issues of plot seem irrelevant. Milton's purpose here wasn't to tell us what happened but to show us why and how it happened. Chance simply does not play a role. What makes *Paradise Lost* wonderful to read is the way in which Milton helps us make sense of the one event which changed humanity for all time.

In Jane Austen's *Emma*, the stakes are slightly less dramatic, but the sense of order and predetermination exists as well. Life for Emma Woodhouse and her contemporaries was quiet and placid and regular. In fact, the boredom felt by Emma in this ordered world leads to her efforts to change the way things are (efforts which, by the way, fail). She lives in a world of set social and economic rules and as we find out during the course of the novel, efforts to break with these rules end in disappointment. Jane Austen has been criticized for her lack of attention to the social and economic changes occurring in the world around her, but she excelled at presenting for her readers a distilled, rarefied view of a very particular class in England. The characters that do try to rise above their predetermined station (the vulgar Mrs. Elton and the untethered Harriett) may find temporary elevation but find themselves ultimately stuck in the position to which they were born. This sense of order is reiterated at the end of the novel with Emma's marriage to Knightly who represents the highest and best family in the community (alongside Emma's own). The one instance in which chance seems to play a part is the encounter with the gypsies upon exiting the carriage — an encounter which causes an unnatural amount of fear and consternation considering that no one was actually threatened. The randomness of it penetrated briefly the highly ordered world of the novel, causing such an extreme reaction the encounter is brief, though, and soon forgotten as our characters return to their world in which chance does not figure.

Austen's own sheltered life accounts for her preoccupation with issues such as manners and marriages. She lived in a world very much like Emma's - a world where things were ordered and predictable and safe. She was protected from the miseries of everyday life - the chance happenings which affected others. Her choice of the novel as genre fits in with this picture as well. The novel was known to be a form friendly to moral and romantic stories -- the perfect genre in which to explore an isolated portion of society, their thoughts, feelings and motivations without having to deal with realities of the outside world. Unlike Milton's world, Austen's is not determined so much by history or a text such as the Bible, it is driven by the inexorable movements of a social environment which plants people and entire communities firmly in place. Despite her attempts to remain true to her father and negotiate the marriages of others, Emma seems destined to many rightly from the beginning. Her efforts to marry Eton fail because of the disorder such a union would represent, just as her interference between Harriet and Martin fails to prevent the match from occurring. Though Emma seems to be rebelling against the fixed order of her world, she is doomed to failure. Even her success, however, would not have introduced chance into the novel, since her efforts were

premeditated and well-planned out. Though her background and her milieu were vastly different from Milton's, she too creates a world in which chance plays no role.

While George Eliot does include a vast array of socially and economically diverse characters, her world in *Middlemarch* (a study of provincial life) seems as ordered and chance-resistant as Austen's. Chance moments do seem to occur here but often they are actually revealed to be the result of planning and stealth (such as the revelation about Bulstrode's past). The choices made by her characters seem rather inspired by their upbringing, their experiences, and their influences. The novel focuses on the "three love problems" of Dorothea, Lydgate and Mary Garth who each chooses his/her mate based on rational (though not always correct) assumptions made from their past experiences, things are planned carefully and planned well — and often fail anyway but not by chance, by design. Eliot's work has often been likened to a web of interconnecting threads brought together to create a cross section of society. The web image is apt here in that it implies order, structure, planning - webs are not created haphazardly or by chance. Dorothea, Lydgate, Rosamond, Casaubon all have carefully thought out plans of action which they feel will make them happy and give them what they need. That they are miserable is by design not chance. Only Mary Garth and Fred Vincy promise to be happy, although they too are forced to plan. Though they are in love, Mary refuses Fred until he proves that he has given up his risky behavior (gambling) and proves he has the stability to be a good husband. Fred's excision from Old Featherston's will may seem to represent "chance" but it really is a result of the behavior he had exhibited. Everything seems to happen for a reason in this highly patterned novel, only Ladeslaw floats slightly along the edge — dependent on others, leaving his future to chance. But it is exactly these qualities which eventually attract Dorothea to him, completing the predictable cycle of the marriage plot. Though the choices Dorothea makes when deciding who to marry seem odd and a bit out of sync with what's going on around her, they make perfect sense once you consider her background and upbringing. She longed to be brilliant or at least associate herself with someone who could bring out the intelligence she had. She denied herself things that were beautiful or frivolous (unlike her sister Celia) and her inheritance made it unnecessary for her to seek wealth in a mate. Using these criteria, Casaubon is perfect for her and her union with him seems well planned. The problem occurs after the marriage when she realizes that he is not what she thought him to be. Similarly, Lydgate's choice of Rosamond fits exactly his preconceived notions of marriage. She plays on his weaknesses skillfully and effects the match through perseverance and effort — not chance.

Eliot's novel has an attempt to capture the fullness of her historical moment by expressing and elaborating on the many levels of society in *Middlemarch*. Her characters reveal a great deal about the time of her youth-evoking a fondness for the simpler pastoral existence which prevailed before the industrial revolution changed the social landscape. In *Middlemarch* she explores none of the themes relevant to her own life and, as in many of her works, forces her characters to make agonizingly difficult choices which affect the rest of their lives. It is significant that these are choices and not random occurrences which determine happiness. As in Eliot's own life, some major decisions often change the course of one's existence. As in *Middlemarch*, however, these decisions are made by the individual who must then assume responsibility for the consequences. Eliot links the various social and moral institutions - the law, marriage, hospitals, etc. - to the influence they have over members of society. Rather than be subject to random, unexpected events, characters find themselves struggling to break free from social, constrictions. This is different from Austen's world in which characters find happiness in the roles prescribed for them. Like Austen, Eliot used the novel to portray her image of provincial life using the complexity and scope it

offered to fully elucidate the many levels and layers of web-like threads which trap the characters in place. The novel also allows for a focus on the love problems which are used to demonstrate the pitfalls of surrendering to mistaken notions. Eliot seems to warn against getting what you wish for since those that do are, for the most part, unhappy as a result. Perhaps more opportunity for the rare and unexpected would have given Dorothea and Lydgate the happiness and fulfillment we feel they deserve.

Though they are vastly different in many ways, *Paradise Lost*, *Emma*, and *Middlemarch* share an orderedness which precludes the presence of chance in the worlds they describe. Milton relies on his faith in God and his all-knowing, all-powerful beneficence, while recounting the story of man's disobedience. While man was created perfect, he was also created free and he chose disobedience

as a result of what Milton describes to be a series of eminently human mistakes and miscalculations. Adam decides to fall with Eve after numerous warnings, examples, and discussions designed to prevent him from relying too heavily on her for his happiness. Yet God created her for him as a reward for knowing his own worth, and she was created to be beautiful and loving - a perfect complement. It's as if God planned to create her as a weakness for Adam to allow for the fortunate fall and the ultimate salvation by Christ (in the same way he allows Satan to "win" during the second day of battle). Milton merely recounts the story as it was written with elaborations to help fill in some of the blanks without changing the end result. Chance has no place in this world ordered and overseen by God.

Emma's world seems just as ordered although for Jane Austen God is not as prominent a figure. Determinations of class and social status define this world, and all efforts to break free of the limitations imposed on the characters fail. Inappropriate and unexpected matches do not last, and by the end of the novel, all see the error of their ways. Emma's resistance to her confinement is overcome and she joins at last the structured world to which she belongs. That world is similar to Austen's own world and the world of many of the novel's readers who often read aloud to their families from books such as this one. The novel of manners was a specialty of Austen's and the presiding stability and lack of the unexpected made them enjoyable reading for a public perhaps concerned with the instability of the real world.

George Eliot wrote about characters who also succumb to the structure of the world around them, although for them the end result is not as satisfying as it is for those in *Emma*. Most are trapped by what they are expected to wait and what they think they want which turns out to be the opposite of what they actually want. Casaubon's death could be seen as the result of chance but Eliot has used this device before to "save" her heroines from poor decisions making it seem more an authorial tool rather than a significant example of the unexpected. Besides, from the moment we met him Casaubon exudes death and lifelessness making his early demise less surprising. The intricate web created by society is reproduced by Eliot and we watch as her characters struggle to free themselves from its grip.

These three works view chance as something foreign to the worlds they inhabit but for different reasons and with different results. Each reflects the author and his or her times as well as the chosen genre of presentation. Milton, Austen, and Eliot found life to be made up of more than mere random, unexpected or unpredictable events and each creates a world in which we can witness the individual's response to order.

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Question #4

It is observed in a review of a new biography of Tecumseh that bravery, eloquence, and the abilities to

mediate and relate are virtues that pass across cultural boundaries; one people can honor them in another. In actual history, however, how people fight, how they speak and write, and how they negotiate are all at least partially culture-bound; generals, orators, poets can find their skills ignored in a society dominated by the idea of a single culture. Drawing examples from at least three of the areas as described above, define this problem as it is presented in its changing contours by the writers under consideration.

In the three works that I will analyze in this essay, the abilities of characters to fight, to speak, to write, and to negotiate are necessarily bound up with issues of language. Because the use and the structure of language are culturally determined, each of the works I will discuss reflect the dynamic changes of the periods in which they were written. In Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), authors demonstrate the fact that in the face of major societal changes, the ability of people to communicate with one another is irrevocably altered.

Brown's *Wieland* is a novel that takes the issue of the authority of voice, and the ways in which that voice can be manipulated, as its central theme. Twenty years after the United States had declared itself a free nation, Brown's novel serves as a warning to those who would consider themselves liberated. The political allegory of *Wieland* demonstrates the danger inherent in the very voice of the constitution of the country - the pitfalls that could ensnare a nation when a small group of privileged white men could speak as "We the People."

Brown begins *Wieland* by telling the story of Theodore and Clara Wieland's father and grandfather. When their father was orphaned in Germany, the child was put to work in an apprenticeship. He lived a life of hard work until he happened upon a religious text which enthralled him. He then read the Bible, which he misinterpreted because his knowledge did not have sufficient foregrounding. Upon moving to America, and buying farmland, the elder Wieland sought to become a missionary, spreading the word of his religion to American Indians. When this scheme failed, he constructed a temple on his property in which he would pray. After producing two children wife his wife, the elder Wieland died by mysterious circumstances when flames engulfed his temple.

The temperaments of his two children were partly determined by this catastrophe — while Clara, a rationalist, retains some doubts about whether her father died by the hand of man or the hand of God, Theodore, aka Wieland, believes that the cause of his father's death was divine in origin. Soon after Wieland marries a woman named Catherine, her brother, Henry Pleyel, comes to live with them.

The four characters share an idyllic existence on the farm — perhaps exemplifying the Jeffersonian ideal of the idyllic farmer. They use their father's temple as a meeting place of philosophy, literature, and art. They put up a statue of Cicero — this emblem of rational wisdom becomes their domestic deity. While Wieland is something of a religious determinist, who looks for guidance from the divine, Pleyel represents rational man, who trusts no guidance but that of his own reason. Clara falls somewhere in between the two. Brown sets up this scenario to show how both the rational and the religious mind can be corrupted by a misplaced trust in the voice of authority. For into the idyllic life of the four characters walks the figure of Carwin, who we later learn has the ability to mimic and to throw his voice. By playing upon the vulnerabilities of the four main characters, Carwin is able to turn the devout Wieland into a raging murderer, the logical Pleyel into a man who disregards logic and the truth of his own experience, and the fearless Clara into a woman who cringes at sounds in the night and considers taking her own life when

faced with a situation that she might be able to negotiate her way out of.

The subtitle of the novel — *The Transformation* — refers both to these changes wrought by Carwin and to the changing nature of the society he describes. Brown was convinced that the freedom of the new American nation was compromised by its structures of power. In his view, the loss of a fixed and stable set of power relations, such as those that existed under English monarchy, created a vacuum of authority in which multiple voices competed for power. Because public dialogue, after the American Revolution, was based not on the ability of a speaker to convince people by logic, but by performance, expression, and entertainment - i.e. not to sway people's minds but to create desire within them - democracy, according to Brown, was extremely dangerous. Without a centralized authority to command them, people were capable of being manipulated by those in whom they had placed their trust.

People have always been capable of being manipulated, of course, but the danger Brown perceived was that under the old system, one knew where power and manipulation came from, whereas under democracy, the manipulation could come from any source. This, of course, is where the character of Carwin becomes central. When Clara confronts Carwin near the end of the book, she finds that Carwin's ventriloquy were not the result of evil motivations, but were the result of a love of manipulation itself. Carwin simply enjoyed playing with people's minds. When he confesses to Clara, he tells her that he used his powers of mimicry on her because he had heard so many positive things about her — how smart, how beautiful, how rational she was - that he wanted to test her. Clara fails Carwin's test, and thus shows that the rational mind - even that of the idyllic farmer proposed by Jefferson - is susceptible to manipulation. The fact that Carwin didn't even know what he was doing, that he didn't even have a plan, renders this scenario all the more frightening. When Brown finished his novel, the first person he sent it to was Thomas Jefferson.

The counterpart to *Wieland* is Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*. Both works were affected by the Lockean notion of the mind as a tabula rasa — the notion that personality is constructed not by nature, but by the culture in which one lives. For Brown, this idea is frightening, because he sees all of the ways in which identity can be "transformed" by a misguided trust in authority.

For Franklin, however, the idea that the self was no longer fixed and stable was positive.

Like Boswell before him, the ability to construct layers of self-identity allowed him to constantly create and recreate his identity in his *Autobiography*. Written at a time when the ways in which people spoke, wrote, fought, and negotiated underwent radical changes, *Wieland* is an example of a text that shows the ways in which those skills are culturally bound and can thus be ignored or manipulated. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is another text that is very much concerned that the possibilities of communication between people. Faulkner published his text eleven years after the first World War, and mere months before a major stock collapse would plunge America into a deep depression. Like other modernist texts, such as T. S. Elliot's "The Waste Land" (which I will discuss later in this essay), *The Sound and the Fury* is about the many kinds of loss in modern life. Foremost among these losses is the ability to speak across cultural boundaries.

The Compson family is a family in the midst of great deterioration and strife. The name Compson, which at one point signified Civil War heroism and southern nobility, has, by the start of the novel, come to signal decrepitude, blindness, and decay. The four main characters of the novel - Benjy, Quentin, Jason, and Caddy - all evince similar movements from honor to corruption, from sanity to insanity.

Faulkner begins the novel with the voice of Benjy. Benjy, an "idiot," can not communicate through words. By beginning the novel with Benjy's voice, Faulkner emphasizes his point that modern life has become meaningless, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Moreover, as a narrative choice, Faulkner's decision to begin with Benjy calls into question the reader-writer relationship - and, by implication, the ability of any human to communicate through the culturally mediated language that we share, but that can often divide us.

Benjy is unable to speak (except through incoherent wails), write, or negotiate with those around him. When his family sells off his pasture to raise money for Quentin's Harvard tuition, a golf course is built next door to the Compson home. Benjy is unable to fight this decision, or to negotiate another arrangement. All he can do is look longingly at the golf course across a fence — to follow his loss around like a sick puppy. Similarly, when he senses that Caddy has lost her virginity, he can only scream and wave his arms. He is incoherent and without the ability to communicate across the fence of this limited intelligence.

Although Benjy's brother, Quentin, is blessed with a brilliant intelligence, he too finds himself unable to communicate with the society around him. Obsessed with sexual desire for his sister Caddy, Quentin's mind unhinges itself from reality. Quentin's problem is that his deepest desires can never be fulfilled — living in a culture that condemns those desires, Quentin is doomed to a life of failure and frustration.

As we follow Quentin throughout a day in which he makes preparations for his suicide, we see numerous incidents of his inability to "mediate and relate," or to fight and negotiate. When he wanders through the outskirts of Boston, he meets a little Italian "with eyes like two currants floating in a cup of coffee." The girl, who never speaks, follows him around. At first, he enjoys her company. But when he tries to find out where she lives, the little girl does not seem to hear him. Although Quentin tries to communicate across cultural boundaries to the little girl, his efforts are unsuccessful. While she follows him around, Quentin becomes consumed with memories of his desire for his sister. Although we never find out whether the consummation of those desires really happened or are merely the product of Quentin's obsessed mind, we know at the very least that such scenes are on his mind. When the little girl's brother finally finds Quentin with her, we learn that he may or may not have touched the girl sexually during their walk. In either case, Quentin finds himself unable to communicate with the brother, who threatens to kill him.

At another point in Quentin's narrative, he sits in a car with friends from school. Overcome with fragments of memory and desire, Quentin shouts at one friend, "Have you ever had a sister? Have you ever had a sister?" A fight ensues, and Quentin's friend beats him up in front of his peers. This episode emphasizes what Faulkner shows us throughout Quentin's section - that Quentin has been rendered incapable of communicating coherently with those around him.

Although Jason's section of the book is more coherent than the first two sections - the general movement of the book is from incoherence to coherence - he too has problems being understood across his cultural boundaries. The loss of a bank job that has been promised to him by Caddy's husband condemns Jason to life in the Compson family home and to a job in a hardware store. As Jason siphons money sent by his sister Caddy to her daughter, Quentin, his hopes for the future grow. His cruel treatment of those around him, however, leads to his own downfall - because he cannot communicate productively with his family, friends, and business associates, his own niece- steals his \$4000 nest egg and runs off with a circus clown.

The Dilsey section of the book represents the one hopeful light in this novel of dark visions. Faulkner has

said that Dilsey was his favorite character, and indeed, it is notable that of all the characters in the book, she is best able to speak across cultural lines. In a house in which all hell threatens to break loose at any moment, Dilsey alone is able to coordinate the motions of the family. Whether she is cooking dinner, helping the hypochondriac Mrs. Compson get out of bed, making sure that Luster isn't playing with his saw in the basement, or taking care of Benjy, Dilsey keeps the household functioning. Her ability to fight, to speak, to fight, and (most of all) to negotiate with the nearly insane members of the culture she operates in make her the one character in the book who communicates across cultural boundaries. It is notable, too, that Dilsey's identity as a black servant in a modern Southern household makes her the only main character in the book to be racially othered. It is perhaps because she lives in a culture not her own that she is able to keep her wits and her sanity about her.

The final text that I will consider in this essay is T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." Although Eliot was born in America, he is considered by many to be English because of his eventual move to England, and I will consider his work as part of the 20th-century British period.

If *Wieland* is a text that discloses doubts about the dangers of many voices competing for; power and authority in early America, and if *The Sound and the Fury* is a text that reflects the disjointed nature of the modern consciousness, then "The Waste Land" is in many ways a combination of the two. Originally titled "He Do the Police in Different Voices," Eliot's poem is concerned with both the multiplicity of voice, language and discourse, and the fragmented aspects of the modern period. "The Waste Land" contains many passages in which characters find themselves unable to communicate across the torn fabric of their cultural milieu. In the bar scene, for example, two women begin to talk about one of the women's husbands, who has just come back from the war. In answer to queries such as "What you get married for if you don't want kids?" the woman refers to an abortion procedure that left her infertile. While this woman's friend insinuates that there are plenty of women around who could take her place, the reader feels compassion and sadness at the stories which are being told. Any expectations on the reader's part, however, are frustrated when the loud voice of the barkeep interrupts the dialogue to repeatedly shout, "HURRY UP PLEASE. IT'S TIME." The abortion, the image of the shell-shocked soldier returning home to an infertile wife and the jealous desires of this woman's companion are all left unresolved as a voice of cultural authority interposes itself into the scene and closes it.

Another example of characters unable to communicate effectively is the passage about the "carbuncular clerk." When the clerk comes to a female typist's home at teatime and apparently rapes her, he leaves without a word. After the rape, Eliot describes the typist putting a record on the gramophone "with automatic hands." In this scene, then, a period of peaceful domestic activity - teatime - is interrupted by a perfunctory rape which leaves its victim empty and senseless.

The many scenes of violence in the poem are often followed or interrupted by snatches of lines from other works of literature. Eliot once credited James Joyce with showing that, by intercutting textual action with allusions to other texts, an author could give meaning to a fractured modern world while creating a text of many levels. Eliot uses this technique throughout the poem", often the quotes he chooses are negative and downcast, and they deepen the melancholy of the poem. For example, the epigraph of the poem describes the sybil, who only waits to die.

The poem is also populated by characters who seem afflicted with "diseases of modernity," such as neurasthenia. Indeed, it would be fair to say that a neurasthenic consciousness seems to pervade both "The

Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In "The Waste Land," the primary example of this is a passage of paranoid chatter often interpreted as the voice of Eliot's wife, Vivien. In this passage, one voice frantically asks questions such as "What was that noise? What? What?" while a melancholy series of replies answers those questions cryptically.

Although those voices might well have characterized the relationship between Vivien and T. S. Eliot, other interpretations exist. It is possible, for instance, that the voices are representative of those in Eliot's head. He did, after all, suffer from neurasthenia, and he even wrote "The Waste Land" while under treatment for this condition at Lausanne. These passages, and indeed, much of the poem, may have been the result of a kind of talking cure—by setting down on paper the multiple voices that existed in his head, Eliot may have hoped to escape his own troubled reaction to modernity.

The interesting historical point about conditions such as neurasthenia is that, like all medical diagnoses, they are culturally defined and culturally mediated. The list of symptoms for neurasthenia, for example, encompassed everything from "a lack of energy" to "a state of excitement." Although I obviously don't have the means to historicize these points fully during this exam, my point is that Eliot's methods of writing and negotiating were culturally bound.

Wayne Koestenbaum has written provocatively about the textual history of "The Waste Land," suggesting that a feminized Eliot submitted an overwrought, bloated text to Ezra Pound, which Pound then edited and sliced until it reached its present form. The fact that the text of "The Waste Land" comes to us through the possibly sexually-charged consciousness of two poets suggests yet another way in which any text is tied to the cultural fabric of its day.

Wieland, *The Sound and the Fury*, and "The Waste Land" are all texts that dramatize the difficulties of speaking across cultural boundaries. Each, in its own way suggests that the idea of a "single culture" is itself a cultural fiction. By probing the ways in which human interactions are mediated by a multiplicity of cultural forces, these texts dramatize the ways in which we all "shore these fragments" against our ruin.