PHILAMENT

Philament is an open-access journal of scholarship by postgraduate and early-career researchers in literature, arts, and cultural studies. All articles in Philament are peer-reviewed. For more information about Philament, please see http://www.philamentjournal.com.

Copyright in all articles and associated materials in this journal are held exclusively by the respective authors, unless otherwise specified. All other rights and copyrights in this journal, including material published on the journal’s website, are held by Philament and their respective creators. No portion of this journal may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without written authority of the managing editor.

For more information about the journal, including submission guidelines, please visit http://www.philamentjournal.com. To contact the editors, email philament.usyd@gmail.com. Books for review may be sent to the following mailing address: Managing Editor, Philament: A Journal of Literature, Arts, and Culture, Room N305, The John Woolley Building (A20), The University of Sydney NSW 2060, Australia.

Philament gratefully acknowledges the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) without whose support this volume would not be possible.
CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

1  BODIES OF WORK: AN INTRODUCTION
   ISABELLE WENTWORTH

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

9  ENTRAPMENT AND ESTRANGEMENT IN SHIRLEY JACKSON’S GOTHIC FICTION
   ELIZA VICTORIA

25 “MUSIC BOX” AND “MEAT GRINDER”: CORPOREALITY AND METAPOETICS IN TERRANCE HAYES’S AMERICAN SONNETS FOR MY PAST AND FUTURE ASSASSIN
   CLARE PRYOR

37 CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMODITIES: CONSUMABLE BODIES IN MELINDA BUTFON’S “CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRISTOPHER LANGTON’S I LUV YOU SCULPTURE, 1993”
   JULIA COOPER CLARK

51 FREE TRADE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING BETWEEN BRITAIN AND CHINA: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF AMITAV GHOSH’S SEA OF POPPIES
   JEBUN GEETI
73  ERIC ANDRE AND MIKHAIL
    BAKHTIN’S CARNIVALESQUE BODY
    LUKE BEATTIE

91  THE ASSASSINATION
    OF AN ANDALUSIAN POET
    MARTÍN GARCÍA CALLE

99  INTERSECTION IN
    MUSIC AND LITERARY STUDIES
    ROGER HANSFORD

115 DESTROYING NEW YORK CITY:
    THE EMOTIONAL WORK OF FICTION
    ELLA COLLINS-WHITE

EXCURSIONS

145 ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES
    ALLAN MCCAY

153 A CONVERSATION WITH
    THE PERSONIFICATION OF DEATH
    PHILLIP DUPESOVSKI

161 CONTRIBUTORS’ BIOGRAPHIES
BODIES OF WORK: AN INTRODUCTION

ISABELLE WENTWORTH

THIS TWENTY-SIXTH ISSUE of Philament is based on a conference held at the University of Sydney in 2019. With the theme “Bodies of Work,” the event brought together interdisciplinary research exploring how the body shapes our mind, interactions with others, and the creation of self and art. The breadth and depth of the speakers’ different perspectives compelled the conference organisers—Vivien Nara, Ruby Kilroy, and me—to facilitate a broader forum for these discussions. With that goal in mind, this special issue of Philament was born.

Corporeality has long taken centre stage in the humanities, propelled by feminist and postcolonial studies. Both fields of scholarship position the body as a vocabulary and a site for the continued violence of empire and patriarchy. Recently, concepts of embedded, embodied, and extended cognition have interacted with theories of transhumanism and posthumanism in ways that make us question the limits of the body. The questions have been useful prompts for new inquiries into the demarcation between the mind, body, and world. Problems of bodies and their boundaries challenge not only normative performances of the “human” but reframe the question of what it means to be human. These are always already ethical questions. After all, to see a mind embodied and embedded in the world is to explicitly destabilise the idea of a discrete and autonomous

1. “Embodied” and “embedded” cognition are terms associated with second-generation cognitive science, which deals with “the embodiment of mental processes and their extension into the world”; see Karin Kukkonen and Marco Caracciolo, “Introduction: What is the ‘Second Generation’?” Style 48, no. 3 (2014): 261. Recently, neuroscientists have found that embodied cognition, which reframes our understanding of the cognitive processes and perhaps consciousness itself, is likely spurred on by the creation of “additional structures” in the brain, including the somatosensory cortices, “which enable our brain to create an ‘embodied mind.’” See Michael Schaefer and Georg Northoff, “Who Am I: The Conscious and the Unconscious Self,” Frontiers in Human Neuroscience 11 (2017): 1–5.
humanist subject. While academic emphasis on the body may seem a well-worn focus at this point, there is still more that we may learn from the biological conditions of existence.

Although the body constitutes a considerable presence in much scholarly thought, recent events have brought the body from academic sphere into public life. Sick bodies and black bodies are no longer peripheral subjects in public discourse, with the novel coronavirus making its home in more than 50 million bodies worldwide. That number will be much higher by the time this issue is published. In the search for a vaccine, it is understandable that a general perception has formed that science will save humanity. Yet ironically, it is the humanities that have proved necessary to save science. It has become clear that we need an interdisciplinary approach to understand the widespread mistrust and rejection of medical advice and scientific reasoning: 5G conspiracies, extreme partisanship, and mask wars cannot be defeated with science alone. Furthermore, the virus has exposed sociological problems that extend beyond science’s grasp: racial inequalities, unequal access to medical care, mental health crises, and antisocial behavioural patterns.

The humanities are called on to analyse these areas. Why, for example, do we comply with social distancing regulations but make almost no effort to examine the activities that likely led to the emergence of the virus, such as wet markets or ecological destruction? There are also questions surrounding the unfolding biopolitics of the pandemic. As social anthropologist Sarah Czerny asks, will COVID-19 become a “trojan virus,” smuggling unrelated agendas into our public discourse? The long-term impact of the deployment of emergency powers is yet unknown. In this new world, hypervigilant surveillance and sousveillance—surveillance from beneath, often recorded on smart phones—render our bodies objects of inquiry, sites of compliance or deviance. The


disciplinary character of measures used to control the movement of bodies in space (quarantine, lockdowns, social distancing) are fairly clear, as are the resulting optics. The hypervisibility of the body (and black bodies in particular) is linked to the foreground/background logic of disciplinary power. As people stay at home, those remaining in public spaces are thrust into the foreground—something the Courier Mail made blatantly clear by doxxing two POC teenagers who breached quarantine measures.

The ethics of these policies and reactions requires a humanities perspective; yet the pandemic has placed the humanities under significant pressure. For one, it has brought into focus how much the body matters in the humanities. Even as we write about the importance of the body in our research, our work is considered to be somehow separate from the body that produces it. The assumption is that this work is something we do only with our minds: “We humanist intellectuals generally take the body for granted because we are so passionately interested in the life of the mind and the creative arts that express our human spirit,” writes Richard Shusterman. Yet the pandemic has exposed how much academic work relies on the material conditions that surround it. Without access to the offices, libraries, or public spaces in which we share ideas, our research changes—or even disappears. A survey of 1,020 students at the University of Sydney found that 45 percent of these students expect to be forced to suspend or withdraw from their studies in the next six months due to financial hardship. In-person classes, meetings, and conferences have been a particular loss to our academic life. The proceedings giving rise to this issue, the “Bodies of Work” conference, was a fertile forum to consider the collisions and commonalities of many interdisciplinary perspectives. The productivity of these kinds of spaces cannot be adequately replaced by a computer screen.
In the COVID-19 environment, with the humanities both under threat and increasingly necessary to analyse our changing world, the Australian Liberal–National government’s proposed changes to student fees seem to be moving in the wrong direction. According to Professor Joy Damousi, President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, these fee changes are “potentially the greatest hit to Australia’s humanities sector in a century.”

At the moment, federal funding covers around 60 percent of the cost of a degree. This will fall by about 20 percent under the proposed budget cuts, so that only about 40 percent of a degree’s cost will be publicly funded. On average, university fees will need to increase by 30 percent to compensate for the loss. This move is implicitly ideological. As Commonwealth Minister for Education Dan Tehan asserts, the changes are intended to incentivise students to “study in areas of expected employment growth.”

Such an emphasis on vocation is propelled by a utilitarian, anti-intellectual impulse. These proposals will hamstring an already limping sector. The loss of income from international students in the context of the neoliberal model of the modern university has dealt a devastating blow to most Australian universities. And with 70 percent of staff working casually on semester-to-semester contracts, the academic community will suffer.

Journalist Jeff Sparrow has likened the experience of the sector’s casual staff to that endured by members of the Waterside Workers’ Federation—the “wharfies”—who walked the so-called Hungry Mile of Sydney’s waterfront, hoping to be picked for a day’s work. For casual staff at Australian universities, it may indeed be a hungry mile for the next few years. A contingent labour force is not a resilient one. Hundreds of full-time jobs are being cut, and casual positions are drying up in many disciplines.

A government report from May 8, 2020, estimates that some 7,000 full-time research-related academic positions will be lost in
the coming months. The University of New South Wales has announced cuts of 493 full-time positions, and these reductions will see the Arts and Social Sciences and Art and Design faculties merge with the Built Environment faculty. Even for the beleaguered humanities, well used to political, cultural, and economic attacks, things are looking particularly grim.

Many aspects of the challenges facing the humanities (and humanity) are explored in this issue’s contributions. The experience of having just emerged from a period of lockdown (only to look down the barrel of another) has brought the affective and political dimensions of confinement to the fore. Relevant to these ideas is Eliza Victoria’s article on Shirley Jackson’s gothic fiction, which shows how being confined to the home is a familiar form of oppression for female bodies. Victoria’s article analyses how Jackson’s gothic fiction estranges—and thus makes visible—the entrapment of women in the domestic space. Clare Pryor, in her article on the poetry of Terrence Hayes, explores how various forms of being “boxed in” have harmed Black Americans for centuries, including through segregation, injustice in the justice system, and racial stereotyping. Pryor’s article is particularly resonant at this moment as the global Black Lives Matter movement intersects with the global pandemic. (It is no coincidence that those most at risk of dying from institutionalised racism are also most at risk of being harmed by the virus.) Pryor’s analysis of Hayes’s poetry and the metapoetic images it encodes illuminates both the confines and potentialities of the sonnet form, and its complex relationship with the oppressions it observes.

The tension, identified by Pryor, between the body as a subject and a consumable object becomes equally apparent in Julia Cooper Clark’s analysis of Melinda Bufton’s ekphrastic poem “Conversations with Christopher Langton’s I
luv you sculpture, 1993.” Clark’s analysis shows how late capitalism has frayed the boundary between inanimate other and biological self. A capitalist critique aimed in another direction appears in Jebun Geeti’s article. Geeti shows how the capitalist impulse has operated throughout the colonial history of India. In an historiographic analysis of Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, Geeti examines the impacts of inequality, poverty, and addiction on coloured bodies in the name of “free trade.” Of course, the body is not only a site of oppression but one of collective humanity too. This point is advanced in Luke Beattie’s analysis of *The Eric Andre Show*. Beattie’s article examines André’s provocative comedy through the lens of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque and its vision of the “collective body” as a source of radically egalitarian power. Finally, in Martín García Calle’s historical article, Calle reflects on the untimely death of the Andalusian poet Federico García Lorca and his long literary afterlife. One of Calle’s most interesting contributions is to underline the interaction between an author’s physical body—which, in the case of Lorca, has never been found—and the author’s body of work.

Though a number of this issue’s contributions were received prior to “The Bodies of Work” conference, they still find consonances with its theme. The interdisciplinary turn has brought new meaning to “the body” as well as to “bodies of work,” throwing up new ontologies and epistemologies. This point is reinforced by Roger Hansford’s exploration of received reception in musicology. In his article, Hansford argues that interactions between bodies of work—music and literature—may guide contemporary theory and criticism. Moreover, Hansford draws attention to the importance of literary and musical reception, where authors’ and composers’ identities intersect with the scholar, listener or reader’s body. In a different vein, Ella Collins-White, in her article on Nathaniel Rich’s novel *Odds Against Tomorrow*,...
explores how the embodied mind functions in relation to place and space. Collins-White takes up the problem of the Anthropocene and reviews its critiques of the damaging ways that humans—and human bodies—engage with the physical world.

The issue’s excursions (creative works) include Allan McCay’s “Alternative Possibilities,” which revisits the problem of free will through a pinhole camera. In McCay’s short essay, photography and philosophy weave together what may or not be, represented by an image of his own body simultaneously occupying three possible worlds, unsettling received understandings of space and time. Finally, in Phillip Dupesovski’s excursion, the author engages with a personification of death, which in turn describes its own various embodiments in myth and art. Here the biological is held in tension with the divine, only to be dissolved into the infinity of the universe.

I extend many, many thanks to all of our contributors, both for their research and patience during the publication process. I also wish to express enormous gratitude to my co-editors, Vivien Nara and Ruby Kilroy, and to managing editor Chris Rudge, for making this volume possible. Last year, in 2019, when we received the bulk of the submissions published in this issue, we could not have imagined what lay ahead in 2020. Yet each of these contributions offers unexpected insights into our current predicament, variously reflecting on the body and bodily experiences of oppression, inequality, capitalism, determinism, and death. In doing so, each also makes a powerful case for the importance of the humanities—even in a period of global emergency.
ENTRAPMENT AND ESTRANGEMENT IN SHIRLEY JACKSON’S GOTHIC FICTION

ELIZA VICTORIA

GOTHIC FICTION estranges the horror of female entrapment. This article analyses the interaction of entrapment and estrangement in the gothic elements of Shirley Jackson’s fiction. Through an examination of Jackson’s life and social context and through attentive readings of Jackson’s stories, including her most celebrated novel, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), this article will argue that the devices of estrangement developed in works of gothic fiction give Jackson a means to explore and assert her voice, body, and agency as a woman in postwar America.

Gothic fiction was popularised by eighteenth-century novelist Ann Radcliffe, and it is a genre whose themes and conventions appeared two hundred years later in the work of Jackson. In their entry on gothic fiction in the *Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper define gothic fiction as fiction “dealing with supernatural or horrifying events and generally possessed of a claustrophobic air of oppression or evil,” typically occurring in “enclosed and haunted settings such as castles, crypts, convents, or gloomy
mansions.” As Gina Wisker suggests, the genre was mostly written during periods in which various phenomena, including women’s experiences— but also family abuse and slavery—were “hidden.” At this time, women were confined to the domestic sphere and unable to participate in the public sphere, not in terms of education, owning public property, or electing (or being elected) representatives in public office. Where women’s entrapment is systemic and thus imperceptible, gothic fiction, with its “images of ruin and decay, and episodes of imprisonment, cruelty, and persecution,” estranges women’s entrapment to make invisible women visible again. The genre makes women’s oppression strange and horrific instead of ordinary and commonplace.

The concept of estrangement, which is sometimes retranslated to enstrangement, was first defined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. In his seminal essay “Art, as Device,” Shklovsky writes,


3. Ibid., 213.


7. Ibid., 163.


He continues:

Things that have been experienced several times begin to be experienced in terms of recognition: a thing is in front of us, we know this, but we do not see it. This is why we cannot say anything about it. Art has different ways of deautomatising things...

Radcliffe, in works including The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), established the central figure of gothic fiction: “that of an apprehensive heroine exploring the sinister building in which she is trapped by the aristocratic villain.”

Jackson employs this narrative framework of entrapment in her most celebrated novel, The
Haunting of Hill House. It also appears many times in her collection of stories, The Lottery and Other Stories (1949), albeit on a smaller though by no means less horrifying scale. In these stories, there are no signs of the “aristocratic villain,” and often the “sinister building” is only a small house or apartment. But, as Wisker argues, in Jackson’s stories the “promise and security of the home, hearth, and family are revealed as oppressive nightmare.”

Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery,” and Postwar America
In the abstract for her introduction to and translation of Shklovsky’s “Art, as Device,” Alexandra Berlina writes that “We get used to horrible things and stop fearing them.” Comparing Shklovsky to the Romantics, Berlina then notes that Shklovsky “sees art also as a way to make [the world’s] horrors felt.” Jackson explores the same sentiment in her widely anthologised short story “The Lottery.” The story opens with a peaceful scene in a small village: “The - of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day.” The narration is matter-of-fact, so that it comes as a shock when the titular “lottery” is revealed to be a method of choosing which villager to stone to death as part of a ritual sacrifice.

“The Lottery” first appeared in the New Yorker on June 26, 1948, just three years after the end of World War II. It upset and disturbed so many readers that hundreds were moved to write to the magazine, threatening to cancel their subscriptions. According to Jackson’s biographer, Ruth Franklin, the story generated “the most mail the magazine had ever received in response to a work of fiction.” Jackson herself received 300 letters and, of those, only thirteen, which she stated were “mostly from friends,” were complimentary. Franklin pored over the letters and reported that, while some were certainly unkind, calling Jackson “perverted” and “gratuitously disagreeable,” with “incredibly bad

---

10. Shklovsky, “Art, as Device,” 151.
13. Ibid.
taste,” many were simply confused.14 “I suppose I hoped,” wrote Jackson, that “by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village, to shock the story’s readers with a graphic dramatisation of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives.”15 As Jackson’s comments suggest, the story aimed to estrange her readers from their political and social context, to use art to make life’s horrors felt.

In the late 1940s, instances of “pointless violence and general inhumanity” were happening in America’s own backyard—and kitchens. Postwar America for the white middle class was an idyllic suburban life characterised by material prosperity and modern home conveniences. However, it was also marred by paranoia, mass anxiety, and the cementing of gender roles. In the months following the war, “Rosie the Riveter,” a symbol of the empowered female-led wartime workforce, was soon replaced by the white-gloved “Kelly Girl,” who was named after the 1950s temporary employment agency. Historian Erin Hatton argues that Kelly Girl became the iconic image of a respectable white, middle-class housewife “with a little extra time on [her] hands,” the model housewife who could join the workforce but was still able to “keep up with [her] domestic duties.”16 Where Rosie the Riveter worked in patriotic service to her country, the Kelly Girl worked “for glamour, self-fulfilment, and independence.”17 However, in both cases, female labour was seen as transitory and marginal, because women’s domestic duties took precedence. As Hatton notes, “Rosie was working only until her soldier came home from the war; Kelly was working only until her kids came home from school.”18

The years 1948 to 1953 also marked the peak of the Cold War, the nuclear stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union.19 The American government waged war on the propaganda front by emphasising the importance of the nuclear family, normatively defined as a married heterosexual couple and

---

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
their biological children, and glossed as an “antidote” against Communism—a representation of American “civic virtue” and the “triumph of capitalism.”

After the war, young couples were awarded government subsidies that facilitated the baby boom. But, as Elaine Tyler May contends, “those who did not conform to that norm, such as unwed mothers, or gay men and lesbians, faced ostracism,” attracting “suspicion” in the feverish anti-Communist crusades of the postwar decades.

Several notable publications during this time mirrored the anxieties, beliefs, and institutionalised gender roles in America. Ayn Rand’s ode to individualism, The Fountainhead (1943), was published in the same cultural moment as Benjamin Spock’s child-rearing guide for mothers, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care (1946) and Jackson’s “The Lottery” (1948). The Lottery and Other Stories, first published in 1949, is the only short story collection Jackson published while she was alive. It is filled with women dealing with persecution, isolation, and powerlessness, trapped in the claustrophobic family home and burdened by societal expectations. Domestic duties take precedence for Mrs. Hutchinson in Jackson’s “The Lottery,” just as they did for the Kelly Girl, the wife in America’s postwar nuclear family. Mrs. Hutchinson is a wife and a mother who arrives late to the lottery because she is busy doing housework; she is chided for this: “Thought we were going to go on without you, Tessie”/ “Wouldn’t have m’leave my dishes in the sink, now, would you, Joe?”

Later she emerges the winner of the lottery and is stoned to death.

In addition to suffering societal entrapment as a woman in Cold War America, Jackson also experienced entrapment in her own home. In 1948, Jackson was thirty-two years old and had been married to Stanley Edgar Hyman for eight years. Hyman was hired as an instructor in Bennington
College and would later become known as a literary critic. The couple settled in North Bennington, Vermont—the “village” that would become a stand-in for the unnamed small towns in Jackson’s stories—and had four children. Jackson’s marriage was itself a horror story. Hyman repeatedly slept with other women, including his students, and exerted tight control over Jackson’s and the family’s finances, even though Jackson earned considerably more money than Hyman through the success of *The Lottery and Other Stories* and her later books.\(^{23}\)

Jackson felt ostracised in the insular village of North Bennington, which, according to Franklin, “closed ranks when challenged by a relative newcomer.”\(^{24}\) Jackson and her husband endured “gossip about her housekeeping, the boozy parties they threw, [and] their African-American friends.”\(^{25}\) After Jackson challenged the school board for not firing her daughter’s schoolteacher after he used corporal punishment in her class, the neighbourhood harassment became even more venomous. The family discovered “garbage dumped in their yard” and “swastikas soaped on the windows.”\(^{26}\) On top of all this, Jackson suffered physical entrapments: she was afflicted with chronic headaches, anxiety, and debilitating agoraphobia, which led her to become a recluse later in her life.

**Shirley Jackson: Essayist, Fictionist**

Aside from fiction, Jackson communicated her domestic, physical and societal entrapment through nonfiction works. Jackson wrote extensively of her home life in essays published in women’s magazines and later collected in two volumes, *Life Among the Savages* (1953) and *Raising Demons* (1957). In “Memory and Delusion,” published posthumously, Jackson wrote:

---


24. Ibid., 379.

25. Ibid., 380.

26. Ibid.
I am a writer who, due to a series of innocent and ignorant faults of judgment, finds herself with a family of four children and a husband, an eighteen-room house and no help... Anyway, what this means is that I have at most a few hours a day to spend at the typewriter, and about sixteen—assuming that I indulge myself with a few hours of sleep—to spend wondering what to have for dinner tonight that we didn’t have last night... It’s a wonder I get even four hours’ sleep, it really is.²⁷

Unlike the sombre, atmospheric style of her fiction, Jackson’s essays are written with a subtly humorous tone that remains inspired by the gothic. As Eric Savoy observes, Jackson’s domestic writing is “more than obliquely continuous with [her] final Gothic masterpieces that delineate the toxicity of family life.”²⁸ For Savoy, Jackson invites her audience “to read, with bifurcated vision, or with an attention divided between the amusing details of what children do or say and the looming possibility that the ‘savage’ and the ‘demonic’ are something other than clever metaphors.”²⁹ In other words, Jackson’s characterisation of family life as an amusing world that is also charged with sinister elements is not simply a literary conceit, and experiment in gothic stylisation; it is a way of identifying the dysfunction intrinsic in the apparently charming model of the nuclear family.

Humour allows Jackson to convey unsettling thoughts to the reader while making her household despair palatable to 1940s and 1950s America. However, humour does not provide sufficient distance from reality, nor enough estrangement to invite us “to look again and understand differently.”³⁰ One can imagine a housewife barely holding it all together, unassisted by her husband in child and house care, but still required to smile and be flippant about her troubles—despite the daily struggles she faced. As Joyce Carol Oates observes, Jackson often presents as “the captive cheerily assuring strangers that all is well.”³¹ If Jackson had to complain, or issue a call for help,
it had to be obscured—in this case, by humour—lest she be accused of being a bad mother and inadequate faculty wife.

Jackson herself preferred the refuge and freedom that fiction gave her. In her posthumously published “On Fans and Fan Mail,” Jackson wrote of her own preference for solitude:

I think that the popular notion of the writer as a person hiding away in a garret, unable to face reality, is probably perfectly true... contacts with the big world outside the typewriter are puzzling and terrifying: I don’t think I like reality very much.\(^{32}\)

Similarly, in one version of a speech she delivered often, Jackson claimed she liked writing fiction “better than anything, because just being a writer of fiction gives you an absolutely unassailable protection against reality,” since “nothing is ever seen clearly or starkly.”\(^{33}\) In the published version of this speech, titled “Experience and Fiction,” published posthumously, Jackson writes, “it is much easier, I find, to write a story than to cope competently with the millions of daily trials and irritations that turn up in an ordinary house.”\(^{34}\) In many ways, fiction was a distraction from life—a “flattering veil” through which to reenvision the world around her.\(^{35}\)

**The Lottery and Other Stories**

In Jackson’s fiction, the house often figures as a site of horror. Jackson explores isolation, ostracism, conformity, and powerlessness, injecting menace and the macabre into otherwise ordinary events. Though “The Lottery” ends with a grand surprise—and with slaughter—Jackson’s other stories in *The Lottery and Other Stories* concern tiny cruelties and trivial violences that inflict harm without drawing blood; however, like “The Lottery,” they too juxtapose dark scenarios with the bright interiors of the domestic sphere, thereby estranging familiar spaces and shocking the reader into paying closer attention.

---


35. Ibid.
In Jackson’s stories, the kitchen is one such space, a familiar room that often becomes a site of entrapment. In “The Intoxicated,” which opens the collection, a man stumbles out of the dining room and into the kitchen during a party; there he finds the host’s daughter, a seventeen-year-old girl named Eileen. “I’m writing a paper about the future of the world,” Eileen explains to the man. Eileen is the only character named in a story filled with adults, alerting the reader to her uniqueness and importance, even as the man begins to mock her. “In my day,” he propounds, “girls thought of nothing but cocktails and necking.” In the conversation that follows, Eileen invokes horror in the man by illustrating to him a different world with “new rules and new ways of living.” She tells him of a doomed future, and describes how she believes the world will end:

Churches going first... then all the big apartment houses, slipping slowly into the water with the people inside... And the schools, in the middle of Latin class maybe, while we’re reading Caesar... Each time we begin a chapter in Caesar, I wonder if this won’t be the one we never finish.

The man realises that Eileen is imagining a world in which he is dead—buried in the ruins. When it ends, the man finds himself “want[ing] to say something adult and scathing, and yet... afraid of showing her that he had listened to her.” But by this point, it has become clear to the reader and the man alike that the future of Eileen’s imagination is simply that—an imagined future—and so the man leaves the kitchen and leaves Eileen behind, her story ignored and inconsequential.

In “Flower Garden,” entrapment is apparent in both the domestic and societal spheres. In this story, the recently widowed Mrs. MacLane and her young son, Davey, have moved from New York into the small town and are soon befriended by Mrs. Winning. Jackson estranges small-town conformity in the
way she names her characters. Stepping into the story is akin to stepping into a claustrophobic house of mirrors, as the characters reflect one another in disconcerting ways. In addition to Mrs. Winning’s mother-in-law also being called Mrs. Winning, the two Mrs. Winnings both have husbands named Howard, and in turn both have sons named Howard. The young Mrs. Winning emulates the older Mrs. Winning in moments of maternal service: she tries to “anticipate her mother-in-law’s gestures of serving,” and thinks, with relief, that “she had at least given them another Howard, with the Winning eyes and mouth, in exchange for her food and her bed.” 41 The young Mrs. Winning’s comments are a clear affirmation of the societal expectations placed on married women.

The young Mrs. Winning also thinks, at first, that Mrs. MacLane, a young mother, is her reflection, at least until the latter befriends an African-American neighbour and hires him to work on her flower garden. Thus crossing over the town’s unspoken racial lines, Mrs. MacLane shatters the illusion of likeness that Mrs. Winning is primed to project or perceive in the newly arrived mother. As Mrs. MacLane is snubbed by the town, Mrs. Winning withdraws from her one-time friend, cocooning herself in the safety of conformity and the esteem of her respectable name.

In “The Daemon Lover,” Jackson estranges feminine anxiety and fear, a form of psychological entrapment, by intensifying it. Jackson illustrates a woman’s fear of ageing, of growing undesirable and alone, through her unnamed female protagonist, who experiences increasingly bizarre events and reactions. The protagonist is thirty-four and engaged to a younger man: “I can hardly believe it myself,” she writes to her sister. 42 She is so anxious on her wedding day that she rips a seam under the arm of her dress. But something else is wrong: she cannot recall the face or voice of her husband-to-be, a man named James Harris, nicknamed “Jamie,” and she discovers that he is not at his

41. Ibid., 7.
42. Ibid., 9.
apartment either. She travels all over the city looking for him, encountering people amused by her appearance. At one point of her search, the protagonist notes “three or four” policemen, “standing around listening, looking at her, at the print dress, at her too-bright make-up, smiling at one another.”43 Later, when she speaks to a man in the doorway of an apartment building she believes is Jamie’s address, the man tells her, “you got the wrong house, lady,” and adds, laughing, “or the wrong guy.”44 Finally, she is led to an apartment where no one comes to the door, but she is convinced that there is “someone inside” because she can hear laughter.45 The story closes on a disturbing note: “She came back many times... but no matter how often or how firmly she knocked, no one ever came to the door.”46 Here, the desperate protagonist’s entrapment is associated with her belief in a man who appears no longer to exist—a man she was engaged to marry—and the narrative gives frenzied expression to her deep fear of abandonment.

*The Haunting of Hill House*

Jackson revisits the theme of feminine anxiety in *The Haunting of Hill House*, first published in 1959.47 In his 1981 survey of the horror genre, *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King called *The Haunting of Hill House* “one of the finest books ever to come out of the genre.”48 In 2010, Sophie Missing reviewed the novel in *The Guardian*, lauding it as the “definitive haunted house story.”49 Indeed, the novel’s opening paragraph is an exemplar of horror literature:

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against the hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors
The novel begins and ends with a description of Hill House (“not sane”), but what the story focuses on, and what truly captivates the reader, is the protagonist Eleanor Vance. Eleanor has spent eleven years caring for her cruel, “invalid mother,” and has become so desperate for human connection that she approaches a strange invitation to live with a Dr. Montague and some others for a time at an old house, Hill House, with curious optimism.

Eleanor approaches the Hill House stay as a new beginning and escape from her entrapment. Of course, this “escape” also constitutes a period of seclusion inside a house with a dark history. However, at least initially, Jackson’s novel estranges the protagonist’s feelings of entrapment, with Eleanor envisioning her new predicament in an unexpected way—with glee and excitement:

She smiled out at the sunlight slanting along the street and thought, I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step.  

Eleanor finds joy in Hill House, marvelling at her easy banter with the others who had been invited to live there: “I am one of them; I belong.” She soon discovers that the invitation was part of an investigation into supernatural phenomena at the Hill House—an apparently haunted house—that is being led by Dr. Montague, a “doctor of philosophy” in anthropology who is “scrupulous about the use of his title,” lest he be regarded as unscientific.

But Eleanor’s joy is often mixed with terror, and at times she feels both emotions simultaneously, or is aware and then unaware of them:

Idly, Eleanor picked a wild daisy, which died in her fingers, and, lying on the grass, looked up into its dead face.
was nothing in her mind beyond an overwhelming wild happiness. She pulled at the daisy, and wondered, smiling at herself, What am I going to do? What am I going to do?\textsuperscript{54}

What is terrifying in this passage (as well as in the novel as a whole) is not the morbid nature of the house, nor the rapid death of the flower, but Eleanor’s descent into madness, which can be understood either as an incident of the house taking control of her mind, or as an aftereffect of Eleanor’s social isolation and the trauma of caring for her spiteful mother. But Eleanor’s madness is coupled with her slow realisation that the moment the experiment ends and the participants are required to leave Hill House, she will have nowhere else to go. She cannot return to her sister’s house—where she sleeps on a cot in her baby niece’s room—because she has stolen her sister’s car in order to drive to Hill House. Planning ahead, she tells another participant, Theodora, that she will follow her home: “I want to be someplace where I belong.”\textsuperscript{55} But Theodora rejects her, responding dismissively: “I am not in the habit of taking home stray cats.”\textsuperscript{56}

Eleanor is a thirty-two-year-old woman in a society that demands beauty and conformity—and she is acutely aware of it. On her way to Hill House, she watches a child refuse to drink her milk at a country restaurant, instead crying out for her “cup of stars” as her mother, who soothes her, attempts to persuade the girl to take her milk from the regular glass. “Don’t do it,” Eleanor thinks, for “once they have trapped you into being everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again.”\textsuperscript{57} Eleanor knows she herself is trapped, though not in Hill House, but in the house of her body and mind, a prison much harder, if not impossible, to escape. “Why don’t you run away?” Eleanor asks a waitress she meets in the restaurant, with whom she hears of the “lucky ones” who escape the town. The waitress’s curt reply is telling. “Would

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 180.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 22.
I be any better off?” she asks, her entrapment in the town made clear in her implication that leaving would be futile.  

Near the end of the novel, Dr. Montague and the other participants, fearing that the house is affecting Eleanor’s sanity, decide that Eleanor should leave Hill House immediately. Hill House is starting to look kinder than the outside world and, in the end, Eleanor makes her choice. She sits behind the wheel of her sister’s car, considering her predicament:

... they don’t make the rules around here. They can’t turn me out or shut me out or laugh at me or hide from me; I won’t go, and Hill House belongs to me.

She then crashes the car “at the great tree at the curve of the driveway,” finding an escape from entrapment in her own death.

Conclusion: “A Thing in Front of Us”

Fiction, ultimately, could not protect Jackson from reality. Nor could it estrange her world enough to change it. Like Eleanor Vance, Jackson tried to escape the world but could not escape her body and mind, which continued to plague her with myriad illnesses. Jackson died of heart failure on August 8, 1965, at the age of forty-eight, leaving a legacy of thirteen published books, including a short story collection, six novels, and two memoirs.

In 2007, the Shirley Jackson Awards were established to honour her legacy, celebrating “outstanding achievement in the literature of psychological suspense, horror, and the dark fantastic.”

After being largely out of print until 2009, Jackson’s fiction returned to mainstream consciousness with the 2018 Netflix mini-series adaptation of The Haunting of Hill House. Unfortunately, this modern reimagining proves to be fundamentally unfaithful to Jackson’s novel. It effectively erases Jackson from the story’s universe by attributing the novel’s opening paragraph to a male character who is a writer,
ENTRAPMENT AND ESTRANGEMENT IN SHIRLEY JACKSON’S GOTHIC FICTION

frustrating the novel’s potential for a psychobiographical analysis. It is a perspective change that, as Abigail Nussbaum observes, “infects” the whole series. In this Hill House, the crumbling edifice is a metaphor for a crumbling family life that can be fixed only by the husband and, later, by his heir and the house’s new owner, his oldest son. At many points in the series—upon uncovering black mould in the mansion he is remodelling, or while cradling his wife who has jumped to her death—the patriarch Hugh Crain announces, “I can fix this.”

The series thus eschews the specific feminine anxiety of Eleanor Vance and puts male perspectives at the front and centre, turning a story of “women who have been failed by men” into a story of “men who have failed women... in the service of elevating the pain and redemption of men,” as Nussbaum articulates. It is arguable, then, that now, more than half a century after Jackson’s death, her descriptions of the rich internal lives of her haunted women and her estrangement of domestic life are even more vital. Female entrapment can still be, to return to Shklovsky, seen but not seen, even when “a thing is in front of us.”

One of the most compelling moments in *The Haunting of Hill House* is when Eleanor quietly admires her individual personhood: “What a complete and separate thing I am,” she thinks to herself. Notice how Eleanor needed to state what should be self-evident, to alert us to what is already directly in front of us: that she is a woman, with her own voice and agency. But at times it is neccessary. The devices of estrangement in gothic fiction allow the previously unseen not only to be seen but to be gazed at in a different light.

65. Ibid.
66. Shklovsky, “Art, as Device,” 162.
“MUSIC BOX” AND “MEAT GRINDER”: CORPOREALITY AND METAPOETICS IN TERRANCE HAYES’S AMERICAN SONNETS FOR MY PAST AND FUTURE ASSASSIN

CLARE PRYOR

HOW IS A POEM like a meat grinder—or, for that matter, a music box? Such is the astonishing problem that opens Terrance Hayes’s seventh poem in American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin, whose first four lines run as follows:

I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison,  
Part panic closet, a little room in a house set aflame.  
I lock you in a form that is part music box, part meat  
Grinder to separate the song of the bird from the bone.¹

In four short lines, Hayes situates us firmly in the realm of self-conscious metapoetics, prompting us to question how we define a sonnet and, more specifically, how we define an

American sonnet of the kind that Hayes is writing. The answers to these questions are metaphors, or perhaps riddles—“prison,” “panic closet,” room in a burning house, “music box,” “meat/Grinder”—answers so offbeat they pose a significant interpretative challenge. This essay partially meets that challenge. I will centre my discussion around the second couplet. I posit that this couplet is significant because the three images contained within it, “music box,” “meat/Grinder,” and singing bird, are among the most strongly programmatic in American Sonnets. These images carry substantial weight in Hayes’s rhetoric, serving as motifs that reappear in poetically and politically significant ways throughout the collection. Because of such numerous repetitions in different contexts, the three images accumulate a vast and complex collection of symbolic values that fit into two broad categories. First, they are an admittedly idiosyncratic variant on three crucial and interlinked metapoetic ideas in the Western tradition of lyric poetry (and literature more broadly). Second, they evoke various aspects of the systemic racial injustice that Hayes, as a Black American poet writing self-avowedly American sonnets, continually highlights in his series. These two categories will form the basis of my analysis in this article.

First, I return to the idea of Hayes posing an interpretative challenge. The metaphor of the sonnet “form” as “part music box, part meat/Grinder” is difficult, because the image it conveys, though easy to visualise, is logically incoherent. It is bizarre to think that a poetic form can be compared to a musical toy or a kitchen appliance, or how such pieces of metaphorical machinery can “separate the song of the bird from the bone,” as though excising a tumour. So wide are the leaps of logic that they bewilder initial attempts at interpretation. This is no failure, but an element of Hayes’s subversive strategy. With “music box” and “meat grinder,” Hayes baffles our customary
approach to language, and forces us into a new and fertile way of thinking. Where logic stutters, the mind’s eye does its best work. The images of “music box,” “meat grinder,” and birdsong, sheered from bone, offer vivid juxtapositions of beauty and brutality, artistic delicacy and cold utility. For the sonnet to be both is for it to be essentially a contradiction: a synthesis of the fanciful and practical, art and violence. It is with these difficulties in mind that we must approach our analysis.

We begin with the “music box.” This image taps into centuries of metapoetic discourse—poets writing about poetry—on the nature of the sonnet, and of lyric poetry more broadly. In Hayes’s hands, it also carries a political message. In conceptualising the sonnet form as a “box,” Hayes follows an authorial precedent stemming from at least the Romantic era, which comments on the sonnet’s restrictive and formal properties.


system, and racial stereotyping. The association is strengthened by the description of the sonnet as “part prison” in the first line. However, here it is the lyric “you” who is locked in a “box.”

Though the question of American Sonnets’s intended addressee is beyond the scope of this article, commentators agree that it is intriguingly multi-formed: at various times “a stinkbug, the gang that lynched Emmett Till, a bunch of white girls posing for selfies, Donald Trump” (the sonnets were, after all, written during the first 200 days of Trump’s presidency), time itself, America, “and, unsettlingly, Hayes’s own reflection.” Regardless of the precise identity of the lyric “you” at any one time, this list suggests a broad dichotomy between the assumed white listener versus the Black narrator. Therefore, if Hayes’s “box,” which imprisons the listener, does allude to the ways in which white America has historically imprisoned its Black citizens (both literally and metaphorically), it is an attempt to flip the script—to force white America to identify with the experiences of Black America.

However, this is a music box, a fanciful carnival object—a nod from Hayes to the peculiarity of his project, perhaps, and an acknowledgement of his continued intention to juxtapose the beautiful and imaginative alongside the gritty and corporeal. At the same time, the image associates the sonnet, and the lyric tradition to which it belongs, with music—a generic slippage which has existed since ancient times. The use of the Latin carmen both to refer to a song and to poetry in general finds a parallel in the modern word lyric. Here we may recall Keats’s statement that in writing poetry we must “inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress/ Of every chord.” The remainder of the sonnet, and indeed the collection, shows how Hayes revels in the expressiveness of the lyric “music box.” As Bruce Whiteman observes, “pleasure taken in the sound of words recurs again and again in American Sonnets.” The internal assonances of “crow” and “undergo” (7–8),
“floors,” “falling” and “walls” (10–11), the alliteration of “prison” and “panic closet” (1–2), the wealth of imagery and metaphor, are “verse at full verve.” The poet engages in a similar playfulness, an unabashed revelling in language, while simultaneously treating heavy political topics, in one of the sonnets most explicitly directed at Donald Trump. Here, relentless, jarring assonance and rhyme are used to lampoon and ridicule the president without mentioning his name: “The umpteenth thump on the rump of a badunkadunk/ Stumps us. The lunk, the chump, the hunk of plunder./ The umpteenth horny, honky stump” (1–3). If Hayes’s aim in American Sonnets is political commentary, his delight is in the sound and rhythm of words.

As we have seen, the image of the “music box” situates Hayes’s poetry within the broader lyric tradition, while also encapsulating an aspect of his political message. The metaphor of the “meat/Grinder” functions similarly. We have already examined how the idea that it “separate[s] the song of the bird from the bone” (4) suggests that Hayes seeks to separate language from its accustomed framework in order to generate new, subversive meanings. Moreover, according to the logic of the metaphor, the brutality of the meat grinder is necessary for the bird to sing. Here, I suggest that Hayes is justifying the more brutal and unsettling elements of his poetry as essential for his message to be heard. As I argue later in this article, the “bird” of line 4 refers to Hayes’s Black narrator who in turn acts as a mouthpiece for African Americans more broadly. The image of the “meat/Grinder” as a metaphor for the sonnet thus expresses Hayes’s conviction that in writing American Sonnets he is giving a voice to the Black American experience. At the same time, the image of the “meat/Grinder” also betrays Hayes’s interest in associating his poetry with corporeality—an interest which recurs time and again in the collection. As Sehgal suggests,

There’s a direct line between the sonnet and the body in Hayes’s work. Just as the sonnet, derived from the Italian “sonetto” for “little song,” can contain, in its courtly way, immensities of experience and feeling—so does the body, until the point of breaking.\(^1\)

If Hayes’s is a poetic of the body, it is one of metamorphosis, fusing, or transforming familiar things in discomfitting and alien ways. The second sonnet of Haye’s collection begins with the line “Inside me is a black-eyed animal/ Bracing in a small stall” (1–2) and goes on to meld images of physical transformation (“a bird... /... breaking its shell,” 2–3) with the metaphysical “grasp of time” and “space” (10–11).\(^1\) The idea of containment reappears, but is visualised in paradoxical physical terms: “a huge black/ Bull balled small enough to fit inside/ The bead of a nipple ring” (6–8). Often it tips over into the grotesquery of mutilation or dissection: “You are the scent of rot at the heart/ Of love-making. The meat inside your exoskeleton/ Is as tender as Jesus” (10–12).

Elsewhere, Hayes uses language itself to pack an almost physical punch: the sonnet that begins, “Why are you bugging me you stank miniscule husk/ Of musk... ?” (1–2)\(^3\) combines the abrupt evocation of smell and taste with driving internal rhymes (“husk,” “musk”), assonance (“bugging,” “husk,” “musk”), and the forceful repetition of the plosive k. Sehgal refers to the body’s ability to contain emotion and experience “until the point of breaking”;\(^4\) the bodies in American Sonnets are generally at that point of fracture, or beyond it. Grotesquery and metamorphosis have a long literary history: since Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, if not before. However, Hayes uses these concepts to drive home a specifically politicised message: it is through a poetic of brutality and transformation that the “bird” sings most clearly.

The “meat/Grinder,” like the metaphor of the box, evokes specific oppressive elements of the Black American experience—namely, sexualisation and violence. In addition

\(^{11}\) Sehgal, “Sonnets that Reckon.”

\(^{12}\) Hayes, American Sonnets, 6.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Sehgal, “Sonnets that Reckon.”
to the resonances discussed above, I posit that the poetic logic of this fourth line, where the “bird” becomes “meat,” is a live metaphor for this sexualisation and violence—for Black bodies being treated like “meat.” Sexual and violent imagery permeate the collection, prompting Dan Chiasson’s comment that American Sonnets “is one of the deepest accounts I have read in poetry of what it feels like to have one’s body fetishised as an object but criminalised as a force.”

One example of Hayes’s interest in the intersection between sexualisation and violence is the sonnet that begins,

The earth of my nigga eyes are assassinated.
The deep well of my nigga throat is assassinated.
The tender bells of my nigga testicles are gone.¹⁶

The sonnet goes on to directly address the “Assassin” of the title: “You assassinate the sound of our bullshit & blissfulness” (4). The tone when the speaker refers to the sexual organs is almost clinically detached. The n-word, interposed between the possessive “my” and the body parts in all three lines (“eyes,” “throat,” “testicles”) mimics the dispossession and loss of autonomy that is a consequence of racism and its most extreme outcome: death. Appropriately, racism itself (the n-word is a convenient cipher) comes between the Black narrator and his own body and autonomy, as literally within the poetic line as it does in real life. Later, the use of sensual adjectives displaces the clinical tone: “You assassinate my lovely legs & the muscular hook of my cock” (13). This is acutely uncomfortable. Hayes has already spent twelve lines establishing the racism-inflicted separation of the narrator from his body. The voice that compliments the narrator’s legs as “lovely” is therefore naturally read as that of the assassin, not the narrator. Ultimately, this line depicts the horror of a society happy to sexualise Black bodies while doing violence to and causing the unjust deaths of Black people through its deep

¹⁵. Chiasson, “Politics and Play.”
¹⁶. Hayes, American Sonnets, 17.
racial biases, including in the criminal justice system.

Perhaps too, given Hayes’s ongoing interest in remoulding poetic traditions of all kinds, the line is a nod to the old poetic wordplay of “death” as a reference to orgasm, deployed here with a sinister twist. Similarly, the third sonnet of the collection begins “but there never was a Black male hysteria” and goes on to describe America’s oppressive “economic formula” whereby “black men are paid with money stolen from their ancestors, only to have it again taken away from them.”17

Once again, the mechanism of oppression involves degradation via sexualisation. Black men “must withstand humiliating sexual ‘reviews’ to participate in the economy at all.”18

There was a black male review for ladies night
At the nightclub. There was a black male review
By suits in the offices, the courts & waiting rooms.
There was a black male review in the weight rooms
Where coaches licked their whistles.19

Other sonnets in the collection explore the themes of violence and sexualisation with reference to specific historical instances of violence against Black Americans. One such instance, the murder of Emmett Till, is alluded to a number of times throughout American Sonnets. Indeed, the metaphor of “meat/Grinder” may itself contain a veiled allusion to this historical episode. In 1944, the 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered by two white men, Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J. W. Milam, for allegedly whistling at and flirting with Roy’s wife, Carolyn.

The pair... beat Till, shot him, and strung barbed wire and a 75-pound metal fan around his neck and dumped the lifeless body in the Tallahatchie River. A white jury quickly acquitted the men, with one juror saying it had taken so long only because they had to break to drink some pop. When Till’s mother Mamie came to identify her son, she told the funeral director, “Let the people see what I’ve seen.”20

A photo of Emmett’s parents standing in front of the funeral casket and gazing at his mutilated body was subsequently published in

17. Ibid., 7; Chiasson, “Politics and Play.”
the magazine *Jet*, and became an ongoing symbol in the national consciousness for the horrors of racism.  

Hayes’s third sonnet, which shows the sexual degradation of the Black body as part of an oppressive mechanism, plays repeatedly on the name of “Money,” the town where Till lived and was murdered, to illustrate this confluence of commodified sexualisation and violence.

```
But there never was a black male hysteria
Because ... / ... a clutch of goons drove you through Money,
Stole your money, paid you money, stole it again. (1–4)
```

Similarly, the sonnet beginning “Drive like fifteen miles along a national parkway” references “a till of bodies bobbed at the piers” (8) before asking, “How much have black people been paid for naming/ Emmett Till in poems?” (9–10). Given the ongoing significance of the death of Emmett Till for American and Black American history and politics, together with Hayes’s repeated references to these events in the sonnet collection, it is likely this episode may also lie in the background of the image of “meat/Grinder.” Till’s fatal encounter with Carolyn Bryant occurred in “Bryant’s Grocery and Meat Market.” The phrase “meat/Grinder” is reminiscent both of the location of this encounter and the violence of its outcome. On a metapoetic level, it is also a proclamation that the sonnet, as a literary form, has the capacity to tackle themes not just of love and desire but the horrors of racial injustice.

The final image of my analysis—that of the bird—is likewise significant, both politically and metapoetically. As previously discussed, “song” can be a cipher for literature, and particularly poetry. The mechanism of the sonnet “separate[s] the song of the bird from the bone” (4). Here we encounter the subversive possibilities of this separation: language, when separated from its accustomed framework, is free to generate

---

21. Ibid.


24. Ibid.

25. Time, “100 Photos: Emmett Till.”
new meanings. This presumably grisly process allows the “song” to be freely heard, apart from the “bird” that voices it. Finally, the phrasing of this idea is significant because it implies that the “song” is in some way physically attached to the bird. This is of course impossible. However, wings and words have been associated on some level in the Western literary consciousness since Homer’s writings, if not before. ἐπεὰ πτεροῦντα (“winged words”) appear throughout the Iliad and Odyssey as part of a standard formula for introducing speech. Paolo Vivante, in his analysis of “winged words” in Homer, writes that “[t]he epithet is self-explaining, words have wings in that they fly from the speaker’s mouth to the listener’s ears.” Similarly, the swan appears in Ovid and the works of his contemporaries as a symbol of literary inspiration. The Muses, goddesses of literary and artistic inspiration in Greco-Roman myth, are bird-like in Ovid; the “muse” of later English poetry is often winged too. The association between wings and words seems to persist within the modern subconscious: “Dark wings, dark words” is an episode of the popular HBO series Game of Thrones and a recurring proverb within the original books. Vivante highlights how, for Homer, the solidity and vividness of the image of “winged words” is “hardly a metaphor [but] a concrete reality: breath gathering into voice, sound formed into meaning and travelling through the air.” In conceptualising his lyric as a “song” that must be almost physically torn away from the “bird,” Hayes assumes a similar solidity of language.

I stated earlier that the image of the singing “bird” in “Sonnet 7” represents the poetic narrator. In part, this is the logical conclusion of the idea that the “song,” along with the “music-box” and related concepts of music, lyricism, and singing generally, is a metaphor for poetry and the sonnet, and particularly Hayes’s American sonnet. The bird as narratorial figure, however, becomes clearer when it reemerges as “a crow...
trapped… in the shadows of the gym” (7–9)—a clear reference to the “Jim Crow” laws of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and to “Jim Crow” as a derogatory term for a Black American.\(^3\) In the light of the “bird” of line 4’s reemergence as a (Jim) “crow,” it is natural to read Hayes’s description of sonnet form (freeing the “song of the bird from the bone”) as referring to the public and political voice that his poetry affords both him and, through him, other Black Americans.

Crows reappear as a motif throughout the sonnet sequence. For instance, they are illustrated in a sonnet that criticises an “autocrat” (3) who “cannot distinguish a blackbird/ From a crow or raven” (1–2), which may easily be read as a metaphor for racial insensitivity, and a not-so-veiled reference to Trump.\(^3\) Another metapoetic sonnet begins,

> The song must be cultural, confessional, clear
> But not obvious. It must be full of compassion
> And crows bowing in a vulture’s shadow.\(^3\)

Here, we encounter images of the horrors of racism—“a tangle of wire” (6) evokes the wire around Emmett Till’s neck, while “feathered & tarred” (10) refers to a practice with a long history, but notably inflicted both on “abolitionists” and “Negro criminals” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\(^3\) These images fuse with an interrogation of the demands that bear on a political poem or, rather, a “song.” The political “song” must combine beauty (“must turn on the compass/ Of language” (5–6) and “shed a noise so lovely it is sung at sunset” (13)) and political acumen (“The song must be cultural” (1)) with subtlety (“But not obvious” (2)). Again, in this sonnet, it is easy to find the “obvious” reading: the “crows bowing in a vulture’s shadow” (3) represent the oppression of Black Americans in the Trump era. Yet the satire in Hayes’s tone here warns that there is more to uncover than one-sided polemic. It prompts us to doubt whether

---


33. Hayes, American Sonnets, 42.

34. Ibid., 46.

this sonnet is a true statement of Hayes’s poetic intent, or a wry
comment on what is expected of a Black American political poet
in today’s America.

Ultimately, the second couplet of Hayes’s Sonnet 7 is an involved metaphorical statement on the nature of the
sonnet, an extravagantly playful demonstration of the wonder
of language, and a complex interweaving of poetic and political
ideas. The three images it contains, and which have been examined
above, are all images that reappear, in various guises, through
the other sixty-nine sonnets in the collection. These images
are at once ideas that haunt the canon of Western metapoetics,
and images that, in Hayes’s poetry, come to represent the Black
American experience throughout history. The idea of literary
containment in the image of a “box” acquires the added resonance
of unjust imprisonment and segregation perpetuated by a racist
America. The image of the “meat/ Grinder” evokes the idea of
a revolutionary approach to language, but also the horror of the
simultaneous sexualisation and criminalisation of the Black body
in today’s America, a country that, it may be said, treats its Black
citizens like “meat.” “[S]ong” and “music” continue the literary
conceit of lyric poetry as analogous to song, while the “bird” that
sings the song becomes identified as a (Jim) “crow”—a reclamation
of a derogatory title for African Americans. Yet Hayes never
loses sight of the idea of poetry as an exercise of language—an
exercise in beauty, as much as an exercise in politics or polemic.
With every line, Hayes draws us into the “music-box” beauty
of his poetry. We are permitted to enjoy, as well as to reflect.

Acknowledgments: With thanks to Brooklyn Arnot, Susan Chen, Samuel Lewis, and
Hannah Roux for detailed proofreading, feedback, and encouragement. I am also
indebted to editors Isabelle Wentworth and Chris Rudge and Philament’s anonymous
reviewers for their invaluable comments during the editing process.
CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMODITIES: CONSUMABLE BODIES IN MELINDA BUFTON’S “CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRISTOPHER LANGTON’S I LUV YOU SCULPTURE, 1993”

JULIA COOPER CLARK

Introduction

A KEY PREMISE in classic aesthetic theory is the distinction between events, artworks, and phenomena, as determined by the presence or absence of an aesthetic response in a viewing subject. Classic aesthetic categories like the beautiful or the sublime are bound up with the distinction between high and low art, which has plagued critical theory across disciplines for decades. However, the high/low dichotomy was irreparably destabilised by postwar Western visual art movements, such as Dada and Pop Art, which coincided with a rapidly growing consumer culture that turned art into commodity, and vice versa. With the Western world moving into late-stage capitalism, there appears to be a new evolution in the destabilisation of the

1. Gérard Genette draws on Kant and Panofsky to divide aesthetic objects into categories of everyday objects, artworks, and natural objects as predicated by their creators’ intentions. However, the terms of the aesthetic relation are inconsistent for each category, with considerations of genre applied to natural objects but historical context applied to artworks. Genette argues for a distinction between “simple, everyday aesthetic commentary” and “professional critical discourse,” disavowing aesthetic criticism of everyday or natural objects. See Genette, The Aesthetic Relation, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 73, 126, 132.
aesthetic distinctions between subject and object, the consumer and the consumed. Melinda Bufton’s poem “Conversations with Christopher Langton’s I luv you sculpture, 1993,” presents the possibility of a new aesthetic relation, the end of the line for capitalist objectification: a consumable subject.

Melinda Bufton’s second poetry collection, *Superette* (2018), uses the language and aesthetics of internet and contemporary culture to integrate popular culture into academic analysis of consumption and capitalistic (self-) branding. The references unite the realms of typically visual mediums like fashion and film with literary techniques and allusions to create multidimensional and multisensorial commentary on the experience of the modern world and modern media. In her high-energy and self-referential poetic worlds, commodification and capitalisation are the norm as her speakers navigate the body as the brand, and the brand as the commodity.

In Bufton’s poem, “Conversations with Christopher Langton’s I luv you sculpture, 1993,” a culture of consumption has skewed the distinction between art and reality, turning both the body subject and art object into commodities. This blurring of boundaries alters the aesthetic relation in artistic and bodily terms. In the encounter, alternate bodily aesthetics confront and converse with each other: animate and inanimate, natural and constructed, consumer and art object. Bufton layers the influence of commodity culture with the mixed art/commodity setting of an art gallery, an affective experience that collapses the distance between subject and art object. In Bufton’s poetry, commodification and consumption not only infiltrate the university and art gallery space, but further seep into the bodies that populate these spaces.

This article will examine the layers of consumer culture represented in “Conversations with Christopher Langton’s I luv you sculpture, 1993” in order to demonstrate the movement
from space to body produced by an intensification of consumer culture. It will also explore this movement’s destabilising influence on aesthetic relations. Beginning with an introduction to Bufton’s position within the tradition of poetic kitsch and the intention of her work’s aesthetic, the article will break down the university and art gallery as consumer spaces in line with the collapse of art/commodity distinctions. Then, focusing on the bodily encounter between the speaker and Langton’s I luv you sculpture, the article will unpick the complex aesthetic and affective relations at work to uncover the possibilities of a merged subject/object. These layers will show how Bufton’s poem represents and negotiates the unstable subject/object distinction at work in a contemporary aesthetics under consumer culture.

The Scene

While the poem is structured around a conversation with a specific sculpture, the scenes incorporate many intertextual references that invite dialogue between Melbourne landmarks (“University of Melbourne” and the “Art Fair”), Australian writers (“Elizabeth Jolley”), consumer brands (“Levis,” “Bonds,” and “Marlboroughs”), as well as popular culture television shows (“Wyatt Earp” and “Miami Vice”). The conversation between the speaker and the sculpture is intertwined with the myriad of conversations and symbols signalling simultaneously within the two scenes. Bufton explains in an interview with Trisha Pender that the saturation of her work with pop cultural specificity is an attempt to construct a literary montage: “When I use public figures, or characters from film, TV, books, it’s because they are in the public domain and they already come layered with imagery, grotesquery, myth; they are already beyond any kind of stable site.” With these intertextual allusions and real-world references, Bufton injects the University of Melbourne with a

popular culture that destabilises the connotations of elitism and intellectual independence that underpin the institution.

This sense of the poem as operating within a popular culture cacophony evokes the aesthetic of kitsch, an aesthetic that is a product of and response to contemporary mass media’s proliferation of visual overabundance. The kitsch aesthetic, as Jean Baudrillard explains, comes from a culture of mass media and consumerism:

[Kitsch] can best be defined as a pseudo-object or, in other words, as a simulation, a copy, an imitation, a stereotype, as a dearth of real signification and a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations, as a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details.3

For Baudrillard, the rise of kitsch and the aesthetics of simulation grew out of a logic of reproducibility, coming from the mass production of objects as well as the popularity of the department store at the end of the nineteenth century.4 Specific to poetry, Daniel Tiffany understands kitsch as an aesthetic of deliberate disruption, tracing its beginning to the use of vernacular language in poetic writing. Tiffany summarises the kitsch in poetry as representing “tensions (and transactions) between elite and popular cultures,” manifest in the use of everyday English in an exclusive literary form.5 Poetry was said to be “kitsch” if it appealed too much to the average reader and appeared to lose reverence for the grand literary tradition of poetry. In this sense, poetic kitsch encapsulates the collapse between high and low culture.

For Bufton, the kitsch aesthetic is both a product and reproduction of consumer culture. This logic allows for a reflexive critique of consumerism from within itself. At the same time, the destabilising relation of both kitsch and consumer culture to the classical distinction between high and low art is shown to reach past the surrounding art object and event space and into the body.

4. Ibid.
The Space

Conversations with Christopher Langton’s *I luv you* Sculpture, 1993

‘At the University of Melbourne’
You go to the Art Fair after a quick Office Hour of
Elizabeth Jolley, who is In Residence at U of M in that preppy
summer of your anxious hopes. You slip out a little short story for her to
look at. That’s enough for you to feel cocksure and right.
Super unfolded,
You were wearing a tweed jacket and levis.
   Idol of the Real! A Clementine of men yet o so modern
   Wyatt Earp. Just in. With your
black Bonds t-shirts with soft-pack Marlboroughs tucked in the sleeve
“don’t think this went unnoticed”
(undergraduate chicas, haha!)
In the corridors Miami Vice modernists swore ecru linen
   but that’s another story.  

The kitsch aesthetic does not merely illuminate the poem’s
complicated relationship to and within consumer culture. Bufton
further uses these cluttered references to centre consumer culture
on the body. The space of “Conversations with Christopher
Langton’s *I luv you* sculpture, 1993” is clearly delineated within
the University of Melbourne and the gallery of the Art Fair,
setting the scene of kitsch reproduction in these identifiable
real-world locations of high culture. Using the commodifying
gaze of the speaker and their repeated employment of brands
and visual references from the fashion industry, Bufton remaps
these sites of artistic and intellectual elitism as consumer spaces.
Within these spaces, the body becomes a product signalling to
surrounding bodies.

At the university, the speaker addresses a “you”
who wears “a tweed jacket and levis” with a “black Bonds
t-shirt” and “soft-pack Marlboroughs tucked in the sleeve.” He is
described as an “o so modern / Wyatt Earp” with an Americanised
bad-boy edge that catches the eye of the speaker and other
“undergraduate chicas.” The scene of the academy is set up as a
kind of cinematic backdrop, a backstory to the identity of the bad boy, which is most accurately described in fashion styles: a body literally branded by capitalist signifiers. The speaker consumes the poetic “him” with the gaze of a savvy consumer but does not let the bad boy’s consumptive choices pass without remark. The speaker teases: “*don’t think this went unnoticed*.” In this configuration, the speaker observes the “Wyatt Earp” lookalike and interprets his body and bodily adornment. There is an understanding that the “look” is intentional and that the speaker recognises this constructed façade as one of ease and nonchalance.

The poem uses fashion terms to further mark bodies, both in poetic space and within a lexicon of consumer culture. The speaker writes of the “Miami Vice modernists [who] swore ecru linen,” identifying a kind of sartorial regret or cultural cringe, remembering how “the tweed jackets were too boxy for / our legs.” As Anne Hollander writes about meaning-making in fashion,

> All methods and degrees of expressing formality and casualness, and all varieties of sexual emphasis, make oblique references to the groups, subgroups, current ideologies, movies, movements, historical periods, or individuals with which they are associated.  

The people in this poem, while attempting to construct and exhibit an idealised image, are literally “fashioning” themselves through the vocabulary of the fashion industry.

The speaker is equally embroiled in the complex social system of fashion, acknowledging their role as the intended receiver of “Wyatt Earp’s” signals. This behaviour of performance and reading mirrors the behaviour of shoppers found in sociological studies. In his ethnographic study of consumer culture in Singaporean shopping centres, sociologist Chua Beng Huat shows how the consumptive space may become an arena for observation, a space where shoppers look at commodity objects and other shoppers, expecting their gaze to be returned. Huat explains that

---


one function of the shopping experience is to be seen shopping by other shoppers. What is peculiar about the scene in Bufton’s poem, however, is that the university has become a shopping centre, an environment known for the same behaviour of performance and observation. Consumerism, and the symbolism of fashion commodities, have been carried beyond the shopping centre and into the university, where that symbolism is visible on the bodies of the consumers who move and inhabit all spaces. In characterising the figures in her poem by their brand identities, Bufton acknowledges this process of performance and consumption, identifying a collapse in the ideological distance between the high-culture space of the sandstone university and the low-culture, consumer space of commercial fashion.

This collapse, brought on by a permeation of commodity culture into the poetic and intellectual space, follows the speaker into the Art Fair gallery. In the study on shopping centres cited above, Huat discusses how space is a defining characteristic that hierarchises consumer capital. The greater volume of space that is afforded to a product, the greater the imputation of luxury and social capital. The consumer cannot touch objects endowed with such luxury freely; contact is mediated by a shop assistant while the shopper is encouraged merely to look and imagine. In Bufton’s mixed-art product space as gallery, the Art Fair may be viewed as the ultimate space of social commodity capital in that it produces the greatest distance between object and product, subject and consumer. Conceptualising the gallery as a luxury shopping centre redefines the terms of the encounter between bodies, introducing concerns of consumption, objecthood, and the social signals of objects.

Completely prohibited from physical contact with the I luv you sculpture, the speaker is limited to consumption through sight: specifically, the signals of the sculpture. However,
the sculpture’s status as an inanimate body complicates its place in the social system of fashion commodities, changing the relationship between viewer body and art-object body. Hollander observes the importance of artistic representations of bodies, which hinge on their distinction as “natural”: the “‘natural’ beauty of cloth and the ‘natural’ beauty of bodies have been taught to the eye by art.”\(^{10}\) In this sense, the depiction of clothed bodies in Western art demonstrates what artists and viewers believed bodies looked like based on normative styles and fashions. Hollander concludes: “Thus Western clothing is not a sequence of direct social and aesthetic messages cast in a language of fabric but, rather, a form of self-perpetuating visual fiction, like figurative art itself.”\(^{11}\) Understood in these terms, the encounter between the speaker and the sculpture becomes less a meeting of animate and inanimate bodies than an encounter in which the speaker meets a representational self, a figure viewing the figurative.

### The Sculpture

‘At the Art Fair’

This love device so canny
when unwound but fleeting in its
desperate lengths to stay inflated. I only live when I pump, it says,
, so softly only I hear. It was a vending machine for my future patterns.
It makes grace like an external liver
cleanser. It will return you to silkier
plots,
disengaging character refs and all of your pert demands
Mainly the tweed jackets were too boxy for
our legs. The proportions now make me
quiver, when I think how wrong. We had not dealt with the waists.\(^{12}\)

Within the Art Fair gallery, the key encounter takes place between a mechanical sculpture assemblage and a “natural” human body, altering the terms of the poem’s bodily aesthetics by imagining a

---

\(^{10}\) Hollander, Seeing Through Clothes, xii–xiii.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., xv.

categorical merging of the object/subject and art/commodity/body. In physical synchronicity, the two beings attempt a merging of bodies, unsettling their subject/object positions.

Figure 1. Christopher Langton, / luv you (1993). Image courtesy of artist.
Christopher Langton’s sculpture (figure 1), with which the speaker is conversing, appears as a large rectangular case with metal framing and glass plate sides that allow a clear view into the case. Illuminated inside are seven inflatable cartoon hearts, their white hands and arms extending outwards, beckoning for the viewer’s desire and affection. The stack of toy-like objects encased in this way is reminiscent of a carnival or arcade game whose prizes, on full display but out of reach, entice players to compete for their possession.

While this appears to be an encounter between a viewing subject and an art object, the terms of the sculpture and viewer’s relationship are complicated by the invocation of cuteness and the language of a complicated power dynamic between the two beings in the scene. While the sculpture communicates with the viewer, there is a tone of pleading desperation, indicating bodily weakness. The speaker identifies I luv you as “fleeting in its / desperate lengths to stay inflated,” an identification that establishes the viewer as subjective witness to the object’s helplessness. This relationship is categorised within a cute aesthetic, which Sianne Ngai has explained as follows: “Cute things evoke a desire in us not just to lovingly molest but also to aggressively protect them.” The speaker wants both to encompass the sculpture with love and to save it from some unidentified harm that may prevents it from breathing.

The inflating balloon hearts of I luv you fit the cute aesthetic with their plump cartoon bodies and semi-personified arms. They comprise just enough limbs to embrace in a cuddle, but not enough to move or demonstrate autonomy. They do not have mouths but still speak, with the words “I LUV YOU SOOO MUCH!” emblazoned across their fronts in bubble lettering. This is the only message they need to convey, and the only response they will ever make, regardless of how one treats

them. There is a power imbalance between the object and the viewer, not only because the object is unable to autonomously fulfil its own needs but because its predicament evokes a desirous and protective response in the viewing subject.

In *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012), Ngai argues for new aesthetic terms to identify the changing landscape of the modern world where aesthetic relations can no longer be compartmentalised between the beautiful or sublime. Ngai names “cuteness” as the aesthetic that captures the current consumerist climate, one in which mass production and capitalism have redefined the art object as commodity. As she writes, cuteness is an aesthetic disclosing the surprisingly wide spectrum of feelings, ranging from tenderness to aggression, that we harbour toward ostensibly subordinate and unthreatening commodities.\(^{14}\)

Bound up in cuteness, and particularly in Bufton’s use of cuteness in this poetic encounter, are the processes of production and consumption proliferating in postwar capitalism. Further, commodity fetishism, the desire to possess an object at the centre of the cute aesthetic, is perversely circular. The powerlessness of the cute object operates alongside a powerful demand to be chosen; or, as Ngai suggests, the cute object “flatteringly seems to want us” at the same as it sees the consumer subject as an “adoptive ‘guardian.’”\(^{15}\) The mirroring of desire between the consuming subject and the cute object is a unique power dynamic, more complex than a commodity aesthetic might initially seem. It is as though the cute object is able to manipulate the subject and infiltrate their autonomous desiring position.

Now we return to the construction of the sculpture. Atop the case are a series of pumps, which operate to inflate the internal hearts—up and down, in and out—much like the natural systems of the body (the breath and heartbeat).

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 949.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 64.
This external mechanisation turns the carnival display into an iron lung, an organ displaced from the body but still operating. Standing with the sculpture, the rhythms of the pumps match the rhythms of the onlooker’s body, creating an affinity between the subject’s autonomous life force and the object’s mechanisation. Thus, the inanimate status of the sculpture shrinks from the foreground, and the scene becomes an encounter between two bodies, breathing in harmony. The physical mimicry of the sculpture complicates the boundary between inanimate object and animate body by objectifying a bodily process.

Considering the details of the encounter, the speaker directly articulates their conversation with the I luv you sculpture, a machine described as a “love device.” Not only is this object a mechanised body with animate bodily systems, it evokes an affective response. A “love device” describes either an object which gives the user love (whether through physical affection and comfort or a verbal message like “I LUV YOU SOOO MUCH!”), or an object that receives love. In both cases, “love” is a reciprocated affect, an emotion given and then received. In her examination of contemporary conceptions of love and desire, Lauren Berlant argues that, while desire generates a “reencounter” with the self, “love is the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated: rather than being isolating, love provides an image of an expanded self, the normative version of which is the two-as-one intimacy of the couple form.” In this relationship, the sculpture becomes a part of the viewer, displaced but completing the subject’s self-image. The sculpture communicates directly with the speaker: “I only live when I pump, it says /, so softly only I hear.” It is as though this encounter, taking place in a public space, is so intimate as to be internalised within a single expanded body.

The speaker further describes the sculpture as “so canny” in a gloss unusually distinct from the more

common description of an object as uncanny, in the sense of strangeness or unknowability. In contrast, this object is “so canny,” so unexpectedly familiar and knowable to the viewing subject, who feels they are themselves reflected in the inflatable hearts and their outstretched arms.\textsuperscript{17} Further, the descriptor plays on the contemporary meaning of canny as “having or showing shrewdness and good judgement.”\textsuperscript{18} The speaker is bestowing on the object the capability of not only making judgements, the domain of the subject, but of making good, valuable judgements. Now, the boundary between the sculpture and the speaker has dissolved into the normative couple form Berlant alludes to, with the speaker’s body and subjectivity expanding into one shared body and subject position through the affective connection of love.

Yet, this merged subject position is not free from the commodifying influence of consumer culture. The affective love relationship of the conjoined subject/object is informed by capitalism. As Berlant summarises,

\begin{quote}
People learn to identify with love the way they identify with commodities: the notions of personal autonomy, consent, choice, and fulfillment so powerful in love discourse seem to be the same as those promised by national capitalism.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

The attitude of object possession and object accumulation has impacted the social realisation of love as a process of self-actualisation. Not only has the subject externalised their self-image to the sculpture body through love; the subject is also in a relationship shaped by their ability to purchase back their self-actualisation. Thus, as the object encroaches on the subject position through cuteness and physical mimicry, the subject turns to the object to fulfil their self-image. The subject is reflexively commodified as a consumable product, understood as part of a purchasable whole.

\textsuperscript{17} The etymological origin of “canny” is the Scottish and northern English word “can” in its sense of “know how to”: \textit{Online Etymological Dictionary}, s.v. “canny (adj.),” accessed October 13, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/word/canny.


Conclusion

The bodies of Bufton’s poetry are the grounds on which the destabilisation of subject/object boundaries play out under consumer culture. In “Conversations with Christopher Langton’s I luv you sculpture, 1993,” bodies carry fashion brands and pop culture into academic and art spaces to confirm the collapse of high and low art, turning the university and the art gallery into consumer spaces. However, in the evolution of postwar capitalism, the distinction between the animate and inanimate body also dissolves. Bound up in the affective relationship of love as both a reciprocation and extension of the self, achievable through the accumulation of commodities, Bufton’s sculpture and speaker are able to merge their subject and object positions. In this dialectic, the consumable subject becomes the ultimate possibility of consumer culture for contemporary aesthetic relations.
FREE TRADE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING BETWEEN BRITAIN AND CHINA: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF AMITAV GHOSH’S SEA OF POPPIES

JEBUN GEETI

Introduction

As an Indian author writing in English, Amitav Ghosh holds an extraordinary sense of history and place. His work investigates the multidimensionality of the postcolonial past, present, and future. Ghosh’s 1988 novel *Sea of Poppies* illuminates the politics of the nineteenth-century opium trade, an industry in which British colonisers compelled Indian farmers to produce opium in fertile croplands and thereby destroy their harvests permanently. As part of a predesigned policy in India, British traders turned the banks of the river Ganga into opium factories, exporting drugs to China openly and unlawfully. In the name of Christianity and moral duty, these traders engaged in drug trafficking and amassed huge amounts of wealth by exploiting poor workers in opium factories, spreading mass addiction to both India and China.
As postcolonial history tells us, there was high demand for tea, silk, and porcelain in Britain in the nineteenth century. There was, however, little demand for European commodities in the East. As a result, Britain had a large trade deficit with China and had to pay for its imported goods with silver—the Chinese currency at the time. Opium production in India was a premeditated venture that the British thought would compensate them for their lopsided trade deficit.

In examining *Sea of Poppies* in light of this history, this article charts ways in which these British merchants justified their devastating drug business—a business whose sole purpose was to gain access to China’s huge market for enormous profit, and whose result was the inhuman oppression and the exploitation of both men and nature, all under the mantra of free trade.

It should be noted that the issues Ghosh brings to light in his novels are framed through the perspectives of displaced peoples; indeed, the histories of these peoples often take place at the margins of Eurocentric narratives of history.

Besides *Sea of Poppies*, several of Ghosh’s significant novels can be understood to trace the history of displaced or marginalised peoples in the wake of colonisation. For instance, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) can be read as one of the most important narratives of the diaspora and dislocation of India and East Pakistan after partition in 1947. The novel questions both the legacies of partition in the Indian subcontinent and the role of persistent riots in the nationalist histories of India and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. A preeminent example of Ghosh’s production of historical narratives in the guise of travelogue is *In an Antique Land* (1992). This narrative explores the role of European and non-European colonisers in building relations between Asian and African countries. Similarly, *The Glass Palace* (2000) outlines the detrimental impact of British rule and portrays the predicament

---

of displaced people in Burma and India. The novel also depicts the history of the displaced Royal family in Burma, which was forced to move to India in the wake of World War II. Ghosh’s much-acclaimed novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) also focuses on the history of displaced people of the islands of Sundarbans through its portrayal of the dreadful plight of refugees and indigenous people. *The Hungry Tide* interrogates the notion of progress through its depiction of the traumatic experience of dislocated people.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh reexamines his principal themes and concerns, presenting a historical novel of great depth. The novel spans different continents, each with their own entangled, complex, and self-contradictory interests. The narrative brings into view the violence of colonial oppression as it was enacted through the illegal opium business and the transportation of indentured labourers. In addition to identifying the impact of the opium trade as it is brought into relief in *Sea of Poppies*, this article will also uncover some elapsed stories of diaspora and plantation workers arising from the British drug business. To do so, this article contends that *Sea of Poppies* describes two basic forms of colonial suppression and deprivation. The first concerns the forced plantation of poppy seeds instead of edible crops in the fertile lands of India, a practice that caused widespread hunger and poverty. The second is Britain’s illegal export of drugs to China, with the aim of maximising profit from those exports.

Through *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh emphasises the collective identity of the early nineteenth-century transnational diaspora who boarded the *Ibis*, a former slave ship, and sailed toward new roots and new aspirations, leaving behind their agonising past for an unknown future. Ghosh stated his reason for writing about this subject in an interview with the BBC:

What basically interested me when I started this book were the lives of the Indian indentured workers, especially those who left India from...
Bihar region... Also all the indentured workers at that time came from all the opium growing regions in the Benares and Ghazipur areas.  

The setting of the novel is North India and Bengal in the 1930s. The oldest of the two opium plants in India was located in Ghazipur, and established by the British East India Company in around 1820; the newer plant was in Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh, and had been established in 1935. Ghosh refers to the silent role of Britain’s drug trade in many of his interviews and opines that opium was the most lucrative business among other projects under Queen Victoria’s reign. Ghosh’s view is also similar to the contention of the economist Carl Trocki who states that “without the drug, there probably would have been no British Empire.” Indeed, as Trocki asserts, “the economic foundation of the imperial economy lay on opium.” Trocki also observes that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, opium was a major source of government revenue in British India and a major export. This is reflected in the narrative of Sea of Poppies in that the British merchants are depicted as exploiting the immense value of opium production in India and its huge demand in China.

The novel primarily covers the histories of the slave trade, diaspora, the opium trade, the British Empire, and the beginning of forced migration of indentured labourers to the Caribbean. It also illustrates the intimate relationship between history and politics and studies the oceanic networks of the Indian Ocean—networks through which ideas, commodities, and people would flow from India to a variety of places, including China, Mauritius, England, and the United States. Clare Chambers has observed Ghosh’s preoccupation with oceanic networks and his representations of the Indian Ocean in many of his novels. As she writes,
Ghosh suggests that people need a model of belonging that moves away from national lines. The Ocean provides a forum for erasing the divisive ‘shadow lines’ he problematises in many of his novels.\(^\text{12}\)

However, *Sea of Poppies* uses the Indian Ocean to exceed the material geography—something that highlights Ghosh’s preoccupation with seas and oceanic networks. Travel and migration are also noteworthy themes in Ghosh’s work; however, Ghosh depicts these themes not only as recent phenomena but places them in the context of their enduring historical continuity. As Chambers points out, Ghosh “frequently makes plain that travel, migration, and cultural interaction are not recent byproducts of globalization” but “endeavours that societies have always undertaken for economic, religious, ideological, strategic, or personal reasons.”\(^\text{13}\) For Ghosh, these activities speak less to the age in which they take place than to the character of the peoples who engage in them.

The body of the *Ibis*, the ship with which the novel is concerned, carries messages from different histories of non-Western sailors, the slave trade, and bonded labourers. In depicting these messages, the novel deals with cross-culturalism, multilingualism, and class and caste systems. In his review of *Sea of Poppies*, Michel Binyon has captured the extent to which the novel depicts the remarkable diversity of peoples who travelled on board the *Ibis*:

> Coarseness and violence, cruelties and fatalism are relieved with flashes of emotion and kindness. This is no anti-colonial rant or didactic tableau but the story of men and women of all races and castes, cooped up on a voyage across the ‘Black water’ that strips them of dignity and ends in storm, neither in despair nor resolution. It is profoundly moving.\(^\text{14}\)

What makes *Sea of Poppies* a landmark work of literature is that its author has successfully blended history with fiction. One of the reasons Ghosh has had to undertake such a blended project is

---


13. Ibid.

that the regions Ghosh explores are not easily accessed or located in colonial or postcolonial histories. As is well known, history is often shaped by the sociopolitical perspectives of the colonisers. Therefore, the narratives generated by postcolonial historical fictions must utilize both the author’s imagination and empirical or factual research into various historical topics and works to create a broader view of historical reality.

The central character of *Sea of Poppies*, Deeti, is situated on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipur in North Calcutta, India. She belongs to a family of farmers who supply poppies to a British-run opium factory at Ghazipur in colonised India. The factory was also overseen by the Central Bureau of Narcotics, housed in the Department of Revenue of the Government of India.\(^\text{15}\) Indeed, a government website for these factories remains active today.\(^\text{16}\) As Bibhash Choudhury comments, “most of the people of this novel embody cultural legacies, which, in spite of being accretions of varying densities, inform and bracket their identities throughout the novel.”\(^\text{17}\) For the villagers in the novel, poppy cultivation is considered legitimate agricultural work, even as the British force these farmers into poppy cultivation in their own corn fields. The villagers mainly speak in a colloquial form of the Bhojpuri language, which bestows a strong sense of locality on the novel’s descriptions of their lives and work. However, it must be acknowledged that the novel leaves a deeper impact on readers through its presentation of multiple languages. Shirley Chew has commented on this “clash and mingling of language”:

\[\text{Bhojpuri, Bengali, Laskari, Hindustani, Anglo-Indian words and phrases and a fantastic spectrum of English including the malapropisms of Baboo Nob Kissin, Burnham’s accountant, create a vivid sense of living voices as well as the linguistic resourcefulness of people in diaspora.}\]
The story of the former slave ship *Ibis* extends to various parts of Bengal, including off the coast of Ganga Sagar Island, where the ship drops its anchor at one point. The narrator mentions the ironic history of the *Ibis*: although it was once used by British and American naval officers to patrol West African coasts, the vessel was sold because it was not swift enough to serve the previous owner’s purpose and was finally handed to its present owner, Benjamin Burnham. The ironic twist is that Burnham now uses the ship for exporting opium and transporting bonded workers.  

Burnham’s first successful project was the transportation of convicts: that is, the shipping of Indian prisoners to the British Empire’s network of island prisons. These islands included Penang, Bencoolen, Port Blair, and Mauritius. At the time these transportation occurred, in the mid-nineteenth century, Calcutta was the principal site to which thousands of thugs, dacoits, rebels, head-hunters, and hooligans were moved. There they were kept in island jails: these were the places in which the British kept their enemies, imprisoned. In this lucrative venture, Burnham’s shipmate was Captain Chillingworth, the ship’s master. As we learn, not a single slave, convict, or coolie has ever escaped Chillingworth’s tyranny. As the narrator observes,

> With Chillingworth’s help, Benjamin Burnham sieved a fortune from the tide of transportees that was flowing out of Calcutta, and this inflow of capital allowed him to enter the China trade on an even bigger scale than he had envisaged: soon he was running a sizable fleet of his own ships. By his early thirties, he had formed a partnership with two of his brothers, and the firm had become a leading trading house, with agents and dufters in such cities as Bombay, Singapore, Aden, Canton, Macao, London and Boston.  

One point should be noted here concerning slavery. In 1807, the British Parliament had abolished the slave trade, which caused enormous financial losses. At that time, a group of British officers were desperate to make up the loss caused by the abolition of the
slave market. They devised a plan to introduce a trade of carrying opium and bonded workers across the seas, hoping to make a significant return from it. The novel deals with this plan and its implementation.

At one point, the novel introduces these bonded workers, which the narrator calls “girms” or “girmitiya”:

They are so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on ‘girms’—agreements written on paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld. (72)

When Kalua, a “giant of a man” (4) who drives an ox-cart asks a guard about where the grimitiya are going, the guard explains as follows:

A boat will take them to Patna and then to Calcutta... and from there they will go to a place called Mareech. (71–72)

The novel’s preoccupation with history is exhibited throughout its pages. These forgotten histories incorporate the movement of people and bonded workers from one place to another, but they also record the crossing of geographical boundaries, the transportation of poor Indians as plantation workers to British occupied islands, and the impacts of economic pressure on the common people. The novel incisively employs history to bring silenced and marginalised voices out of the colonial archive and into our postcolonial present.

**Closed Economy, Free trade, and the Politics of Opium in *Sea of Poppies***

The opium trade has its roots in the preexisting sixteenth-century trade relations between Britain and China. Commodities like tea, silk, and porcelain were in high demand in Europe, but European commodities failed to attract the East in return. This created a large trade imbalance and
Britain was required to pay for its imported goods with silver. Ghosh explores in his novel how British colonial rule in India was sustained and extended, chiefly by the profit made from illegally exporting opium to China. They created widespread poverty and hunger, leaving poor farmers poorer, by making drugs available to the vulnerable, poverty-stricken, dislocated, destitute, or culturally marginalised.

In the novel, Ghosh depicts the history of the Opium War through the portrayal of invented characters from the East India Company, who represent the stance of the British merchants. In order to grasp the motivation behind the Opium War and the repercussions of the drug business in China, we need to look into China’s past to get a clear picture of their closed economy. A closed economy is one that has no trading activity with outside economies. It is therefore an entirely self-sufficient economy where there is no option for import or export with the rest of the world. A closed economy was adopted in China with the goal of providing domestic consumers with everything they would need, within the country’s border. Although China had not adopted an open economy at the time of the Opium War, its vast economy was open to the West up until 1978 — a year that marked the beginning of a series of radical economic reforms for the country.

Under a closed economy, China did not interact much with the economy of other nations. However, the incident that initiated the opening of the Chinese economy dates back as far as the Opium Wars, which were fought between China and the Western powers in the nineteenth century. The period that started with these wars, and which provided the basis for China’s economic transformation, is called the Century of Humiliation in Chinese history.25

22. Ibid.
The Opium War that took place between China and Britain brought the Qing dynasty to an end.\textsuperscript{26} With one of the world’s largest economies, China was the most developed and influential empire of the world until the fifteenth century, when Westerners arrived in China by sea. Initially it was the Portuguese and the Dutch who carried their homes to Canton for trade opportunities. Then followed the British, the French, and the Americans in the pursuit of commercial gain. The opening of China to modern markets was partially founded on the tea trade: in the nineteenth century, Britain, as the world’s largest colonial empire, wanted to enter China, a major market. The Chinese empire was paid a large amount every year for tea.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, the British also bought large amounts of silk and porcelain from China.\textsuperscript{28} As previously stated, Britain wanted free trade with China so that it could find a source of mercantile turnover to close the import–export gap. The British considered opium to be a profitable resource, and it would later become the most lucrative business between Britain and China, which would easily balance the trade deficit.

In the novel, the character of Bengali zemidar, Raja Neel Ratan Halder, stands for the contemporary Indian kings or landlords. These figures had little idea that drug-trafficking had no official approval in China. The British merchants could export drugs to China quite openly and illegally due to some Indian Raja or kings’ reluctance to prosecute, obsession with lavishness, and immersion in their amorous relationships. Due to the recklessness and neglect of many of the Indian rulers, it became relatively easy for the British to compel the peasants of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal in India to grow poppies in their fertile agricultural lands, causing economic breakdowns and widespread hunger.\textsuperscript{29} It is arguable that the novel portrays a realistic representation of Indian kings through its creation of

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 895.


\textsuperscript{29} Choudhury, “Fraught with a Background,” 166.
Raja Neel Ratan Haldar and his father, the old Raja of Raskhali, the latter of whom had initially built his fortune by allowing Mr Burnham into his estate to make unrestricted profit through his investment into the opium business. Old Raja did not know Burnham, nor did he intend to investigate his practices. When it became known to others that the Halder of Raskhali had entered into a partnership with an English trader, many of his friends and relatives started begging for shares in that fortune, knowing little about the business. Old Raja was influenced by his mistresses whose demands became insatiable. At one point of the novel, the narrator describes the situation:

Learning of the zeminder’s new source of wealth, his mistresses—of whom he had exactly as many as there were days in the week, so as to be able to spend each night in a different bed—grew more exigent, vying with each other in asking for gifts, baubles, houses, and jobs for their relatives. Always a doting lover, the old zemindar gave in to most of their demands, with the result that his debts increased until all the silver Mr Burnham earned for him was being channelled directly to his creditors. (89)

Subsequently, Raja Neel Ratan, the reckless son of the old Raja, becomes obsessed with one these mistresses, a “once-famous” dancer, known to the world by her stage-name, “Elokeshi” (39). Known throughout the novel as “Neel,” the old Raja’s son is indifferent to and ignorant of the British mercantile strategy. Perhaps inevitably, then, Neel gradually becomes a victim of this strategy. At a late point in the novel, Neel is transported to an island and imprisoned there, having been accused of forgery by the British—specifically by Mr Burnham. Although his incarceration is made more comfortable by virtue of his formerly amicable association with his accuser, the prosecution ultimately transforms Neel into a penniless beggar (199).
In the novel, the lands that once provided sustenance to India are reduced to cash crops to satiate the naked greed of the British. When the Chinese stand up against the illegal export of drugs to China and ban its importation, despite what Mr Burnham describes as their intention only to claim “a bigger share of the profits” (113), the East India Company declares war with China under the assertion of their right to free trade.

In what follows, Burnham tries to justify the Opium War:

The war, when it comes, will not be for opium. It will be for principle: for freedom—for the freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people. Free trade is a right conferred on Man by God, and its principles apply as much to opium as to any other article of trade. More so perhaps, in its absence many millions of natives would be denied the lasting advantages of British influence. (115)

Both the hypocrisy and economic interests of the British merchants become clearer in the novel as it progresses. For instance, in a conversation between Burnham and another merchant, Mr Doughty, Mr Burnham says that no one dislikes war more than him; however, he admits that “there are times when war is not merely just and necessary, but also humane.” (260) He continues, “In China, that time has come: nothing else will do” (260). Mr Doughty supports Mr Burnham in his justification for the war, claiming he is “quite right” (260). As he then postulates, “Indeed, humanity demands it. We need only think of the poor Indian peasant—what will become of him if his opium can’t be sold in China? Bloody hurremzads can hardly eat now: they’ll perish by the crore.” (260)

Earlier in the novel, when Neel Ratan is assured that exporting drugs to China is illegal, he records, piously, his concern that God has been invoked wrongly in the “service of opium” (116) and its unlawful sale. Responding to this concern, Mr Burnham provides a summary of his own theological reasoning:
Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ. Truer words, I believe, were never spoken. If it is God's will that opium be used as an instrument to open China to his teaching, then so it be it. For myself, I confess I can see no reason why any Englishman should abet the Manchu tyrant in depriving the people of China of this miraculous substance. (116)

But Mr Burnham's arguments are directed not only to God and theology. Mr Burnham also emphasises the use of opium for medical treatment, lecturing Neel on the time before this substance “when men had to have their teeth pulled out and their limbs sawn off without benefit of any palliative” (116). As he says to Neel, in a chastising mode,

So you would do well to bear in mind that it would be well nigh impossible to practise modern medicine or surgery without such chemicals as morphine, codeine and narcotine—and these are but a few of the blessings derived from opium. (121)

In his further conversation with Mr Burnham, Neel insists that addiction and intoxication have become an alarming problem in China. Not only does he imply these “afflictions” might be ruinous for that country; he notes they are “surely” not “pleasing to our Creator” (116). However, Burnham, though “nettled” by these suggestions (116), resists Neel’s moralising with an ethical argument of his own:

The antidote for addiction lies not in bans enacted by Parliaments or emperors, but in the individual conscience—in every man's awareness of his personal responsibility and his fear of God. As a Christian nation this is the single most important lesson we can offer to China—and I have no doubt that the message would be welcomed by the people of that unfortunate country, were they not prevented from hearing it by the cruel despot who holds sway over them. (117)

According to the British merchants, China’s strict ban on importing opium is a form of tyranny, while the British merchants are “but the servants of free trade” (122). Thus, the
conversations depicted in *Sea of Poppies* clearly portray the colonial demand for wealth. Mr Burnham’s arguments demonstrate the way in which colonial rule was justified, as well as how colonial rules were used to make money from the subjugated nations under the mantra of free trade and beneficence.

**Impacts of Opium Cultivation in India**

The foremost focuses of the novel are indisputably the illegal plantation of the poppy crop, the opium trade between British and China, and the devastating impact of the opium trade on working- and lower middle-class sections of India. The history of the Opium War in the late nineteenth century reveals that initially Afghanistan was the main producer and supplier of opium in Europe. However, the British East India Company found that its fortune lay in the drug business and converted the fertile banks of the river Ganga into a poppy growing region in which to run their factories.

Despite China’s official restrictions on importing drugs, the British continued their drug trade, denouncing Chinese prohibition completely, and finally waging a war against China. In *Sea of Poppies*, this historical background helps to reveal the devastating impacts of the drug trade on India, particularly on the socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and ecological setting of the colonised country.

The most demeaning result of opium production in colonial India is that it ceases the cultivation of edible food crops. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the situation as it was in Deeti’s youth, when edible crops were grown alongside poppies:

*When Deeti was her daughter’s age, things were different: poppies had been a luxury then, grown in small
clusters between the fields that bore the main winter crops—wheat, masoor dal and vegetables. (29)

Of course, even then, poppies were used for medical and other purposes, including to be sold to merchants. As the narrator continues,

In the old days, farmers would keep a little of their homemade opium for their families, to be used during illness, or at harvest and weddings; the rest they would sell to the local nobility, or to the small merchants from Patna. (29)

Deeti is the wife of Hukum Singh, a man who works in an opium packing factory and whose life is destroyed by opium addiction. Upon marrying Hukum Singh, Deeti discovers that he has already lost his virility due to his addiction to opium—he is unable to engage in matrimonial sex with her as she (and others) expects he will. Reflecting after discovering her new husband’s addiction, Deeti realises that she can still remember her childhood days when “the fields would be heavy with wheat in the winter” and, after the spring harvest, the straw would be used to “repair the damage of the year before” (30). However, after the establishment of British rule, and as farmers were forced to grow poppy, Deeti realises that things changed. As the narrator observes, the English “sahibs” had changed the entire economic system of the region:

But now, with the sahibs forcing everyone to grow poppy, no one had thatch to spare—it has to be bought at the market, from people who lived in faraway villages, and the expense was such that people put off their repairs as long as they possibly could. (30)

Opium generates a disastrous influence on Deeti’s life. She realises that she has been raped by her husband’s own brother on her wedding night, an act that was predesigned by her mother-in-law, whose ravings while under the influence of datura—a deliriant hallucinogen—reveals the deception and the assault. Her mother-in-law had given Deeti drugs to consume on her wedding
night so that she was too drowsy to identify the difference between her new husband—a man who had himself become addicted to opium—and his brother. Subsequently, Deeti gives birth to her husband’s brother’s child, a fact that renders her marriage to Hukum Singh a personal humiliation.

For his part, Hujum Singh is severely victimised by opium. In order to help his family to survive, Singh is forced to spend his life working in the opium factory, where he inevitably becomes addicted to the substance and finally collapses while at work (27). In narrating these scenes of distress and trauma, the novel emphasises another oppressive aspect of the opium trade: the pitiable situation of the workers who must work in the opium factories—and the effects this has on their lives, families, and communities. When Deeti is informed that her husband has collapsed, she is not surprised. However, she realises it will be necessary to attend to him. But for Deeti to collect her unwell husband from the factory, she must provide some payment to Kalua, the driver of the ox-cart with whom she will travel to Ghazipur. As the narrator notes, “Having run through the alternatives,” Deeti soon realises she has “no option but to delve into the carved wooden chest in which her husband kept his supply of opium” (28) to provide the sum of payment to Kalua. Thus, the novel shows how opium has become not just a substance from which various ailments flow but the currency through which acts to repair the damage must be transacted.

In the novel and in history, we witness the factories open up a hazardous, insecure, traumatic, and polluted journey of underprivileged workers. These people lose their ability to think of a life outside the opium industry, becoming mere instruments of the British drug business and network. In her essay “Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking
Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century,” Clare Anderson explains the situation of confined migrants:

The practices and experiences of indenture are best understood primarily in relation to the institutions and imaginative discourses that framed the well-established contemporary colonial practice of penal transportation as a process of social dislocation and rupture.33

In fact, through the practices of empire-building, native peoples and native producers are treated as commodities and free labour; these indentured peoples remain constantly under the scrutiny of the colonisers and the local kings or landlords. In her book chapter on trade and the origins of modern Europe, Lisa Lowe notes that, out of the “global intimacies” of Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, there “emerged a modern racialised division of labor.”34 Lowe points out that the exploitation of the Chinese labourers in particular, at a time when British political discourse announced a decision to move from “primitive slavery” to “free labor,” was achieved by deceptive means. By representing the Chinese as “freely contracted,” the British political system “buttressed liberal promises of freedom for former slaves while enabling planters to derive benefits.”35 As Lowe continues,

Neel and the old Raja’s transactions with Mr Burnham engender no challenges to their standing. Nevertheless, their position makes it evident that, due to private profit-seeking and opportunism, the indentured peoples in India are abused freely as instruments in the hands of the white mercantile community. This becomes most apparent when Mr Burnham is invited to dine at Neel’s palace and the moral questions relating to opium arise

35. Ibid., 194.
36. Ibid.
in conversation. When Mr Burnham suggests it is not apt for “a Raja of Raskhali to moralize on the subject of opium” (123), Neel, evidently defensive and yet ready for “the affront that was sure to follow” (123), asks Mr Burnham why that is so. In response, Mr Burnham is condescending:

Well, for the very good reason that everything you possess is paid for by opium—this budgerow, your houses, this food. Do you think you could afford any of this on the revenues of your estate and your half-starved coolie farmers? No, sir: it’s opium that’s given you all of this (123).

The novel depicts the moral arguments made by each side of the debate, and through Mr Burnham crystallises the rationalisations expressed by the British discourse of the time about the opium trade and the sale of labourers during the period.

Another feature of *Sea of Poppies* worth examining is the character of Paulette Lambert. Paulette is the daughter of a French botanist who joins the lowest track of the professional and social group on the *Ibis*. Her position conceals her status as a non-native woman and one of those who is cut off from their roots on board the ship. Paulette was brought up by her adoptive Bengali mother but was left an orphan under the care of Mr Burnham, the British merchant, and his wife. Despite being a European, Paulette’s father genuinely abhors the ecological devastation brought to India by the British traders. The novel’s reference to Paulette’s father’s concern for nature is somewhat ironic considering the mass destruction of plants, animals, and environment under the British regime. Nevertheless, Paulette’s father sincerely thinks that the effects of colonial rule on his daughter will be degrading, since the colonies hide their greed:

She has not known anything but Love, Equality and Freedom: I have raised her to revel in that state of liberty that is Nature
itself. If she remains here, in the colonies, most particularly in a city like this, where Europe hides its shame and its greed, all that awaits her is degradation: the whites of this town will tear her apart, like vultures and foxes, fighting over a corpse. She will be an innocent thrown before the money-changers who pass themselves off as men of God... (136)

The novel explores the sufferings of not only the farmers and commoners who were dying of hunger and migrating to Mauritius but all living beings on earth who have been made the victims of opium production. A key ecological impact of the excessive production of opium in the nineteenth century was that it caused insects to behave unusually. As the novel recounts, the sweet odour of the poppy pod attracted insects like bees, grasshoppers, butterflies, and wasps. Some insects became easily stuck in the liquid of the poppy pod, their bodies merging “into the black gum, becoming a welcome addition to the weight of the harvest” (28). Of course, when this opium was sold into the market, it was contaminated by these insects. Additionally, butterflies, lethargic under the influence of the sap, were pacified by the substance, so that they “flapped their wings in erratic patterns, as though they could not remember how to fly” (28).

Another impact of opium production at this time was to be found in the deplorable state of the monkey populations that lived near opium factories. As a result of opium consumption from the sewers that drained from the factories, these animals became sluggish, gloomy, and unresponsive, never stealing from passers-by (91). However, possibly the most detrimental environmental effect was the dust that was emitted from the factories, which caused people to sneeze and sniff, sometimes causing permanent respiratory problems. As the narrator observes,
Rare was the passerby who could brave this mist without exploding into a paroxysm of sneezes and sniffles – and yet it was a miracle, plain to behold, that the coolies pounding the trash were no more affected by the dust than were their young English overseers. (91)

Ghosh’s novel also emphasises the way in which the Ganga—the sacred river that was the object of worship by the Hindus and whose water was used for bathing and drinking—became polluted and grimy from the dirt of the opium factory. The novel makes particular note of the landscape around the river, which had changed a great deal since Deeti’s childhood, after opium production had begun to blacken the countryside (192). *Sea of Poppies* is clearly interested in highlighting how the cultivation of opium destroyed the ecological balance of this region of India in such a way that the city of Calcutta became congested and the atmosphere toxic, especially with no foliage to support oxygen production.

**Conclusion**

Besides outlining the saga of the Opium War and its damaging impacts on man and nature, the novel uncovers many related stories of colonial India. In doing so, *Sea of Poppies* reveals various features of the political, historical, and social realities of pre- and postcolonial India and China. While the Opium War is central to the novel, it is but one of the themes suffusing the text. Indeed, in the words of reviewer David Robson,

> If opium were the dominant theme of *Sea of Poppies*, it would probably be a less interesting book. Instead, Ghosh has used the voyage of the *Ibis* as the centerpiece of a much broader canvas, a seething human diaspora in which every character has a story to tell and every passenger is on the run from someone or something.37

The novel’s multifaceted characters, each with their own diverse background and dialect, provide readers with a strong sense of the diaspora of the indentured peoples. It should be noted that the characters on board the *Ibis* choose their fates to explore new...
homes but remain ceaselessly haunted by their harrowing pasts. But if the homesickness typically associated with human diaspora is absent in the case of the *Ibis* crew, it is because these crew members have suffered such traumatic experience in their places of origin. In parallel with the story of opium trade between India and China, the story of the *Ibis* takes as its subject a trans- or intercontinental form of Indian diaspora, and thus provides an unsettling picture of the oppressed crews and labourers under the British regime.
The response of alt-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones to fellow cultural provocateur Eric Andre’s invasion of his stage at the American Republic Nationals Convention saw Jones announce to his crowd, “He’s talking about sex and pee, he’s filming this and going to edit the footage.” This statement revealed Jones’s unfamiliarity with Andre’s work. Those better acquainted with Andre’s performances, particularly his television program *The Eric Andre Show*, will know that the comedic actor does not rely on the manipulations of editing to falsify his provocations or to modify the reactions of his targets. Instead, Andre’s provocation is his focus on the corporeal. This is because Andre presents himself, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, as a carnivalesque or grotesque body—a body that, in emphasising its orifices and related animalistic practices, performs a symbolic degradation that aims to bring elevated phenomena down to earth.

Bakhtin’s text on the carnivalesque, *Rabelais and his World*, was originally published in 1965. It is concerned with the folk humour that characterised the European medieval carnival, and is anchored by the portrayal of these carnivals in...
the writings of the sixteenth-century author François Rabelais and his pentalogy of novels, *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel*.\(^2\) Traversing the limits between art and life, medieval carnival was not a spectacle for the people. It was in effect a “second life” that was extra-political and extra-ecclesiastical. Carnival allowed for the suspension of the established order and in doing so opened up a space to bring the elites down to earth. Carnival served as a reminder that all hierarchical ranks, norms, and privileges were changeable, could fall prey to dissolution and perish before a new coming. In the carnival, the degradation of the elite is achieved through the privileging of a collective body—a figure held up as a site of revival and renewal, symbolic of the imperishability of the greater populace. Collectivity sees the carnivalesque body as an ancestral corpus that, in its communal immortality, becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable and, above all, indestructible.

The cooptation of the term carnival in our current times to refer to a mere holiday for an individual who remains subject to the state’s dominant hierarchies and social conventions belies Bakhtin’s belief in the immortality of the carnivalesque—or the grotesque body, as Bakhtin also describes it.\(^3\) For Bakhtin, the carnival represents a constant potential for the death of the old and the birth of the new. As this article will contend, Bakhtin’s vision of the carnival may be seen in the comedic provocations of Eric Andre. In examining Andre’s performances through the lens of the carnivalesque body, the article will show that this form of grotesque bodily humour still provides a potent mode of transgression.

Eric Andre is best known for his late-night TV program *The Eric Andre Show*, which alternates between candid-camera-type, man-on-the-street stunts and the ubiquitous reality television staple: the talk show. In the opening credits, Andre declares his subversive intent, an intent that quite literally sees the deconstruction of the entertainment talk show format
with its accompanying cult of celebrity. Each opening sequence of The Eric Andre Show begins with its eponymous host and creator, Andre, hurtling himself onto the set, smashing his desk, jumping onto his shelf, launching himself onto the backdrop curtains—destroying them in the process—and generally demolishing everything in sight as the house band plays a form of chaotic free jazz in accompaniment. The desk and band offer the viewer semiotic signposts of the entertainment talk show; yet, the aggressive anarchy of Andre and the erratic music produced by the show’s band all serve to subvert these conventions. The subversion is generally completed by Andre stage-diving into the drummer, before staggering back to a desk that has been reassembled—along with the rest of the set—by several nonplussed stagehands. Each opening sequence differs and, as the series progresses, these opening outbursts become increasingly violent. During one episode, Andre pulls out his teeth, then smears the resultant blood over an unsuspecting woman. In another, he appears naked with his hands embedded in raw chickens and with a raw turkey concealing his head. In later episodes, Andre simulates fornication with a snowman before punching its head off, or douses himself with petrol, having been pepper-sprayed before he can light a match. However, these gross, obscene, and violent openings offer much more than shock value. They present a truly rebellious provocation to the viewer. As this article will contend, this provocation is even more forceful because Andre’s destructive power has ideological roots in the vision of a “second life” offered by the carnival.

In his book on Rabelais, Bakhtin quotes a passage from Rabelais’s fourth book of Gargantua and Pantagruel in which Pantagruel and his companions are depicted visiting the “Island of Procuration” and meeting the Chicanous, a race of peoples who earn their living by allowing themselves to be beaten.4 Bakhtin observes that the image of Chicanous society illustrated by

Rabelais was immediately drawn from the “living popular-festive tradition of his [Rabelais’s] time.” Medieval carnival commonly saw effigies of winter “beaten, torn to pieces burned or drowned” in celebration of its death and the renewal that constituted the rebirth of spring. Likewise, the traditions of carnival saw the enactment of a coronation for the “King of Carnival.” Elected by the people, the Carnival King’s reign is brought to a close almost immediately, as he is mocked by the people and physically abused before having his robes metamorphise into the costume of a clown. Read through the lens of carnival, Andre’s opening segments constitute (in Bakhtin’s words) “a dimension in which thrashing and abuse are not a personal chastisement but are symbolic actions directed at something on a higher level, at the king.”

For medieval carnival, the king was a personification of all of society’s officialdom and power. In the context of the late-night talk show, Andre’s openings, with their self-directed abuse and destruction, also take aim at officialdom and power, thus conforming to carnivalesque tradition. Where various late-night talk show hosts have been given the title of “the king of late-night TV” (including Johnny Carson and, more recently, Steven Colbert), Andre’s abuse can be seen as an instance of the “king’s uncrowning.” However, with Andre, as in the carnivalesque, the symbolic uncrowning is followed by a rebirth in the form of the unscathed Andre. In this light, we see Andre follow the traditional medieval carnival system of images in his introduction, beginning with travesty and then thrashing to uncrown the old authority so as to birth something new—all performed by Andre with comic precision. The use of the comedic to symbolically dethrone the established authorities is also an essential tradition of the carnivalesque, which was, after all, an expression of the “festive life.” Carnival comedy is a comedy based on inversion, a mode of resistance that operates through a recognition of social
inequality. Therefore, in the carnivalesque, it is appropriate that social antipodes—clowns and kings—are linked by the rules of inversion: clowns are disguised as kings until their reign ends, at which point they again revert to clowns.

If we return to Bakhtin’s commentary on Rabelais’s tale of the Chicanous, we note that, at one point, Pantagruel witnesses a beating that he fears may have resulted in the chosen Chicanous having been “battered to death,” only to then watch the “rascal” jump “back on his feet, as happy as a king or two.” Bakhtin points out that Rabelais’s use of the metaphor “happy as a king” is no accident, as he would later write that “kings and clowns have the same horoscope.” Tellingly, the beaten Chicanous is referred to as “Red-snout,” a name that accords to him the traditional red-nosed appearance of a clown. Andre, as a comedian, is essentially a clown, and it is the clown, rather than the king, who has emerged victorious from Andre’s self-abuse. Ultimately, Andre’s violence is a kind that has developed into a symbol of death and regeneration in the comic aspect. It is this representation of change performed by Andre in the opening segment of the show that sets the tone for our enjoyment.

In The Comedy Studies Reader, Evan Elkins describes The Eric Andre Show as “remarkably, intentionally, and gleefully off-putting.” As Elkins continues, “It’s also one of the funniest shows on television—that is, if the viewer is able to get onboard with Andre’s warped mindset.” However, laughing at The Eric Andre Show is not so much a case of getting “onboard with Andre’s warped mindset” as of adopting Andre’s perspective, which is not as unique as one might immediately think. Andre’s performances revolve around the carnivalesque theme of death and resurrection, and it is here that the rationale for his destructiveness lies. The carnivalesque is the second life of the people, a life that stands outside the “official” life of social

9. Ibid., 197.
10. Ibid., 198.
11. Ibid., 200.
hierarchies, economic classes, and the law and order that preserves inequality in the order of things. The second life of the carnival is a life that is unknowable and indeed outside the consciousness and understanding of those who wield power. The violence, excess, and obscenity of The Eric Andre Show is a platform where viewers—through Andre—may critique the socioeconomic norms and structures inherent in the official life. The show symbolically wrests power from the powerful through Andre’s use of the carnivalesque, which in turn grants viewers a sense of rebellion. Andre, like the carnivalesque, celebrates the integral violence that is perpetrated on the powerless and, in doing so, undermines that power. Mike Presdee, in Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime, writes of this celebration of violence: “When punishment becomes a desired outcome, to be worn as a medal to demonstrate our ability to ‘riot for pleasure,’ then legislators become impotent in their struggle for law and order.”

Presdee goes on to observe that this same sense of pleasurable castigation mobilises the carnivalesque, undergirding its “challenge to both the law and lawmaker.” In short, the carnivalesque becomes transgressive, and marks an opportunity to indulge in one’s subversive desire to be free of one’s own impotence vis-à-vis the inequalities one faces and observes in life. Further, the carnival—which allows us to dispense with the rational in favour of the bizarre, to disrespect hierarchies (and in doing so escape their reach), and to rebel against the individualism of Enlightenment thinking and its role in the politics of modernity—returns us to the reality and immortality of our collective, earthly bodies. This process allows us to inhabit a different world “beyond the reach of the rational”: that is, “a world where the ‘fart’ rather than the ‘thought’ is of more importance.”

The highlighting of the lower stratum of bodily functions is, as Presdee notes, a primary feature of the carnival aesthetic. It is also an aesthetic to which The Eric Andre Show
is acutely attuned. Within the carnivalesque, “higher” and “lower” have strict topographical meanings: “high is heaven” and “low is earth.”¹⁶ In this topography, the earth is the cosmic repository of the grave and the womb. The carnivalesque body is aligned with this cosmic aspect of high and low, with the head being high and the lower body—the belly, genitals, and buttocks—constituting the low. These absolute topographical definitions are used in reference to the carnivalesque body or the grotesque body to degrade the target. It is important not to confuse degradation in the carnivalesque sense with satire, which sets itself above the object of its degradation. To debase or degrade in a carnival sense is simply to disenthral—“to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something new and better.”¹⁷ The carnivalesque is a Janus-faced outlook on life, where destruction is intrinsically linked with creation. As Terry Eagleton writes on this mode of comedy, “Carnivalesque comedy is a form of vulgar materialism.” He continues:

If its ferocious demolition of abstract idealism has a smack of the death drive about it (a ‘wish for death,’ as Bakhtin himself puts it), it is also intertwined with a ‘wish for life.’ One can lay waste to the world as savagely as one likes, convinced that matter, along with the great body of the populace, is imperishable, and that each act of annihilation is simply the prelude to a new birth. If the earth is a grave, it is also a womb. The immortality of the collective body is reflected in the inviolability of the individual one, as men and women are ritually beaten and buffeted but in cartoon-like fashion remain magically unscathed. Carnival is violence fictionalised, virtualised, alchemised into theatre and spectacle, and as such a jovial kind of belligerence.¹⁸

After the violent, anarchical tactics of The Eric Andre Show openings, Andre does indeed emerge unscathed and, in “cartoon-like fashion,” is reborn. Retreating to his desk, Andre’s adoption of the carnivalesque body transgresses its limits by foregrounding his bodily orifices, now liminal sites where the individual collides with the greater world. As Andre proceeds

---

¹⁷. Ibid.
with his talk-show format conceits throughout *The Eric Andre Show* (in guest interviews, in banter with his sidekick, the deadpan Hannibal Buress, and in skits), defecation, sweating, blowing the nose, spitting, and vomiting are all standard occurrences. This expulsion of bodily fluids, excreta, and gasses extends to the formal aesthetic of the program, while the sound design amplifies sighs, slurps, grunts, farts, and other bodily noises in the mix. In the first season of *The Eric Andre Show*, the visually low-fi set was matched by a degraded, analogue-style filming effect, complete with simulated malfunctions and technical breakdowns. Of course, the show’s use of crude visual signifiers seems an obvious choice for a production that seeks to deconstruct the complacency of the slick late-night talk show. However, when the show adopted high-definition production values in its second season, it highlighted rather than diminished the show’s most grotesque elements, with the blood, gore, and vomit now all appearing in the glory of high-definition video. In line with the carnivalesque or grotesque body, Andre’s body is one of excess: it cannot hold its contents but must instead spill into the environment.

The imagery of bodily excess that populates Bakhtin’s carnival serves as more than a rendering of humorous, gross physical remains. Instead, it is a focus on the body’s orifices as liminal places that transgress the inner and outer self. Metaphorically, the body opens to the outer world and to others, serving to break down the closed individual, transforming them into a collective being. As Bakhtin writes,

> All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome; there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all
these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body.19

For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque or grotesque body is one that emphasises the open or the penetrative: genitals, mouths, noses, anus, and so on. But The Eric Andre Show highlights the decline of grotesque bodily imagery in current times, most notably through the reactions of Andre’s celebrity guests. One of Andre’s most infamous stunts involved him vomiting onto his desk, before reingesting the bile, as he interviewed MTV reality star Lauren Conrad, who proceeded to walk off the program, visibly upset. However, among images of the grotesque body, the performance of vomiting serves a primary symbolic purpose. It is not only the most extreme act of liminality—an act in which the inner self and the world literally collide—but, in line with the carnival aesthetic, it is also a physical act of inversion. Vomiting marks the endpoint of a sequence in which the body, beginning as hungry or empty, becomes sated or full, and lastly suffers discomfort before the relief of the purge.20

Conrad’s disturbed reaction to Andre’s vomiting is indicative of our “new bodily canon.”21 As Bakhtin writes,

The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface and the body’s “valleys” acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world.22

Andre’s reaction to this modern perspective of the body is to hyperbolise the “leading role” that orifices play within life.23 Andre freely allows himself to sweat, sneeze, cough, and have


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 317.
his nose run out of control. He also allows his stomach and bowels to expurgate through burping, farting, and, as in the Conrad episode, vomiting. Indeed, if our current age is one of increasing self-individualisation—a time in which life is a concatenation of discrete actions by individuals devoid of overriding connection—then those who populate our television screens, who essentially promote their individuality through what Bakhtin calls “a certain accentuation of expressive and characterised features,”24 may be said to perpetuate a state of affairs that is in direct opposition to the grotesque body. That is, to promote an image of the individual that accords with the contemporary cult of celebrity is to undermine the grotesque body, since the latter lays emphasis on the body’s orifices, taking them as symbols for the material dimension of life that connects humanity to each other and to the earth.

The dominance of the new bodily canon, with its function reduced to the expressive characterisation of the individual, is most apparent in Andre’s guests’ reactions to his use of nudity. In addition to removing his clothes while his guests attempt to talk to him, Andre simulates masturbation with an oversized prosthetic penis under his desk. In one notable moment, Andre admonishes his guest, the rapper T. I., for looking away from the accessory, commanding “Make eye contact with me, or I can’t come.”25 In this scene, Andre’s act is devoid of pornographic qualities. Instead, the simulated masturbation scene, in its exaggeration and excess, displays the fundamental attributes of the grotesque body. The image of Andre masturbating defies modern conceptions of bodily exhibition, where one’s sexual life is made up of individual acts confined to the narrow and specific locus of private rooms. However, when viewed in the context of the medieval grotesque, the material element of this masturbation scene also attains a purely positive character, as the phallus performs the philosophical function of denoting

24. Ibid., 322.
the fecundity of the people and therefore symbolises their immortality.26 For the carnivalesque or grotesque body, which is part of the collective ancestral body, immortality is inherent, as each death will be renewed in the next generation.27

Of course, the most politically powerful of all the acts of the body’s orifices is speech, an act that appears to have survived the new bodily canon intact. However, a closer examination of speech in the context of the late-night talk show, and in modern society more broadly, indicates that speech is not the same “open” act of collectiveness and equality it is portrayed as in the carnivalesque aesthetic. As Krystyna Pomorska notes in her foreword to Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin repeatedly praises the Socratic dialogue as a “prototype of the discursive mechanism for revealing the truth.”28 Dialogue here stands in opposition to the “authoritarian word,” exactly as “carnival is opposed to official culture.”29 As Pomorksa elaborates,

> The “authoritarian word” does not allow any other type of speech to approach and interfere with it. Devoid of any zones of cooperation with other types of words, the “authoritarian word” thus excludes dialogue. Similarly, any official culture that considers itself the only respectable model dismisses all other cultural strata as invalid or harmful.30

“That’s all I had planned,” states a slumped Andre after one of his anarchistic openings. “What should I do now?” he asks. “I don’t know” replies a bored-looking Buress. “Do a monologue or something.”31 The monologue is, of course, a talk-show staple; and *The Eric Andre Show* is a talk show, albeit a depraved one. At Buress’s suggestion, Andre takes to the floor with a standing microphone and intones “words, words, words,”32 much to Buress’s delight. This empty monologue is more than an attempt at humour based on Andre’s incompetence. As this article argues, Andre is carnivalesque, and the carnivalesque is based on principles that value equality over hierarchy, the social self over...
the individualistic self, the body in communion with the natural world over the body abstracted and privatised. The essence of the monologue is hierarchical, individualistic, and exclusionary; it is what Bakhtin calls—and denounces as—*autoritarnoe slovo*, or the “authoritarian word.” The performer of the monologue simulates dialogue—that is, they act as though engaged in a cooperative, two-way conversation; however, the performer is in fact the creator of a closed world where the power of speech is theirs alone, and where the other is cast into the subordinate role of the listener. If Andre transgresses the modern standard of the “closed body” with his use of the “open” or “grotesque” body, then his use of a bodily orifice (here the mouth) to perform a closed act—a monologue—directly opposes the carnival aesthetic. Instead, Andre’s intoning of “words, words, words” not only shows contempt for the monologue but, in his anaphoric use of “words,” produces a conventional sign that fails to signify. This performance highlights the lack of exchange in, and the impossibility of creating new meanings and truths through, the monologue, revealing it as no more than a static device devoid of social value, and potentially totalitarian in nature.

Andre’s critique of the monologue suggests that it essentially serves the same function as ideology. However, Andre’s exchanges with celebrities in guest interviews also demonstrate how “dialogue” (or what passes for dialogue in late-night talk shows) is often no more than an unequal partnership in which a passive listener is reduced to a mere prompt for a more dominant speaker. In Bakhtin’s view, the self is inherently social, with discourse reflecting the accumulation of the greater social world in which the self is embedded. Therefore, dialogue, unlike monologue, is an opportunity to unearth the truths of the social world. Ultimately, dialogue is an unclosed world that is, in the words of Wilson Yates, “regenerative, corrective and

Andre has celebrity guest interviews—opportunities for dialogue—at the centre of his program. The first season of The Eric Andre Show consists primarily of B-list celebrities; however, as the show has attained longevity, the guests have increasingly moved towards the A-list tier. Regardless of who he is interviewing, Andre refuses to allow his questions to become vehicles of self-promotion for his guests or, to put it another way, prompts for monologues. In an interview with the London actor and television personality, Julie Brown, Andre begins by saying, “I want to go on vacation. Where do you think I should go?” This attempt at authentic dialogue, albeit trivial, leaves the good-natured Brown confused, as she had expected to answer a question about her own celebrity. Less trivial is Andre’s opening question to former member of the pop group the Spice Girls Melanie Brown (Mel B), which references her “Girl Power” trademark. “Do you think Margaret Thatcher effectively utilised girl power by funnelling money to illegal paramilitary death squads in Northern Ireland?” asks a monotone Andre. Brown’s giggly response, “Oh, I don’t know,” illuminates Andre’s anti-talk show format, with Brown, an entertainment veteran, resorting to laughter in order to maintain the late-night talk show rule of maintaining a light tone and hewing to uncontroversial subject matters. While Andre’s interview style may appear deliberately contrarian, or (as is the case for Brown) antagonistic, Andre’s tactic is to gesture towards the familiar—to advert to the generic attributes of the talk-show interview—in order to confound those same attributes.

Andre further dismantles the capitalist media machine that undergirds the late-night talk show interview by deflecting the “high” celebrity status of his privileged guests, specifically by directing their awareness to the egalitarian nature of the body. In a comment about


his guest interview strategy, Andre states, “When tarantulas and scorpions are popping out of my desk, it doesn’t matter who [the guests] are, they’re going to have a strong [physical] reaction.” These reactions are achieved by tricks not visible on screen. For example, as Andre said in a different interview,

> We have this Chinese water torture thing going on, where we’ll have water drip right on the guest’s head from the top of the ceiling. We’ll also stuff a heat duct with old clams and put it under the seat, so it reeks like a landfill. It gets really smelly and hot, like Guantanamo Bay. We did that to Krysten Ritter, pumping hot clam air all up into the back of her chair. She was so pissed.

These interview tactics could be viewed as mere cheap stunts to prompt embarrassment or confusion in his guests. However, their real effect stems from Andre’s complete disregard for his guest’s self-promotion; instead, Andre subjects guests to the demands of their bodies, demonstrating to viewers the primacy of the body in their lives. The tendency of comic characters to reveal the body’s primacy over the mind is far from new. The same tendency is typified by the conduct of Panurge, a “comic character” in Gargantua and Pantagruel:

> Item: he had another pocket full of plume-alum itching-powder, some of which he would toss down the backs of the women he deemed most haughty, making them strip off before everybody, while others jumped about like a cock on hot coals or drum-sticks on a tabor.

The body, as Andre continually remind his guests, is the people’s immortality. It is collective and ancestral, dying and rebirthing with each successive generation. As Bakhtin writes, “The material bodily lower stratum is productive. It gives birth, thus assuring mankind’s immortality. All obsolete and vain illusions die in it, and the real future comes to life.” Andre’s use of tricks to distract his guests from their “vain illusions” by forcing them to focus on the needs of the body undermines the elevation of celebrity culture,
directly reminding his guests that their body is as corporeal as ours. Importantly, however, it also shows the collective nature of humanity through the common needs of the body, issuing a reminder that is particularly poignant in the late-night talk show format, which privileges the individual.

Andre’s “man on the street” stunts reinforce the collective nature of the carnivalesque or grotesque body quite literally. One sketch has Andre walking the streets of New York City attached to a row of dolls made in his own image, trying to enter a pornography shop, among other places.\(^{41}\) Other sketches explicitly nod to the carnivalesque when Andre wears a medieval jester’s costume; others still evoke the mutability of the carnivalesque body when Andre dresses as a centaur and catches public trains. Again, these stunts result in physical accidents, whether caused by the cumbersome nature of Andre’s costumes or by altercations with the public. Yet, Andre’s ever-unscathed presence on screen represents the indestructible nature of the collective body. As Bakhtin writes of this collective body,

> Even the pressing throng, the physical contact of bodies, acquires a certain meaning. The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people’s mass body. In this whole the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself; it is possible, so to say, to exchange bodies, to be renewed (through change of costume and mask). At the same time the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community.\(^{42}\)

What is most important about Andre’s on-the-street performances, as well as his live performances, is that they remove the structure that frames his television show, thus allowing the audience to become aware of their “material bodily unity and community.”\(^{43}\) In writing of Goethe’s journey to Italy, Bakhtin describes Goethe’s observations about the amphitheatre of Verona and the effect Goethe proposed it had on the people

---


42. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 255.

43. Ibid., 279.
who gathered there. As Bakhtin writes, the amphitheatre allowed the people to “perceive the concrete, sensual, visible form of their mass and unity.” Bakhtin then quotes the observations made by Goethe directly:

Crowded together, its members are astonished at themselves. They are accustomed at other times to seeing each other running hither and thither in confusion, bustling about without order or discipline. Now this many-headed, many-minded, fickle, blundering monster suddenly sees itself united as one noble assembly, welded into one mass, a single body animated by a single spirit.

This unity renders the carnival devoid of footlights, dissolving the distinction between performer and audience. Instead, carnival encompasses all, its very essence embracing the multitude and engaging them in a play that shows their collective power.

Nevertheless, as this article has indicated, the majority of Andre’s work comes to the people through the medium of television. It has been reiterated throughout this article that carnival is a communal state, a real and organic—albeit a “second”—life of the people. Television, in contrast to this communal state, is a technological and therefore artificial construct. Yet, one needs only reflect on one’s own personal TV viewing experiences to see the intrinsically social nature of television. As Robert V. Hamilton and Richard H. Lawless note, “television [is] a part of the social matrix in which the individual personality exists.” As the authors suggest, the content viewed on television may spark discussions in private, casual conversation but lead to more complicated political and cultural discourse. Although the TV-viewing experience has changed dramatically in recent years with the advent of streaming services, the viewing experience does not end when the television is turned off. Instead, further technology-based communication continues after the programming ends, including through TV-specific content published online on

44. Ibid.
fan sites and through other interactions on social media.\footnote{James Lull, “Foreword,” in Social Interactive Television: Immersive Shared Experiences and Perspectives, eds. Pablo Cesar, David Geerts, Konstantinos Chorianopoulos (New York: Information Science Reference, 2009), xvii.}

In joining Bakhtin’s analysis of the carnivalesque body with the genre of the late-night talk show—a spectacle that celebrates capitalist individualism and the cult of celebrity—this article has shown how *The Eric Andre Show* achieves a provocative rendering of the power of the carnival. What is unique about the medieval carnival—and, by extension, *The Eric Andre Show*—is that they both offer an alternative vision of the world through lived experience. Respectively, they create this vision by arranging a collective gathering of the medieval body or by exhibiting, through Andre, the use and abuse of the human body, which triggers physical reactions in the show’s guests and viewers. These productions use carnival as an instrument not merely to inspire but to enact a revolution—a revolution not only of the mind and spirit but of the body too.
THE ASSASSINATION OF AN ANDALUSIAN POET

MARTÍN GARCÍA CALLE

He was seen, surrounded by rifles, moving down a long street and out to the country in the chill before dawn, with the stars still out. They killed Federico at the first glint of daylight.

The band of assassins shrank from his glance. They all closed their eyes, muttering: “See if God helps you now!” Federico fell, lead in his stomach, blood on his face. And Granada was the scene of the crime. Think of it—poor Granada—, his Granada . . .

—Antonio Machado, “The Crime was in Granada”

NEVER IS THE IMPORTANCE of a literary body of work more vital than in the absence of the living body that produced it. Eighty years have passed since the assassination of Federico García Lorca, though his literary legacy, thankfully, lives on in public memory.² His works have been translated into many languages, and Lorca is considered the most universal poet of twentieth-century Spanish literature.³ His work has enjoyed widespread acclaim in his birth country of Spain, as well as in Latin America. He has been honoured in Mexico, Uruguay, and Argentina.


Lorca would not have been assassinated at thirty-eight years of age if not for the Spanish Civil War. The poet was slain on August 18, 1936, in the first month of the conflict. Granada, the birth city of Lorca and the place in which he found refuge during the upheaval, was taken by the insurgent troops under the instruction of General Francisco Franco. According to some manuals of Spanish history, the poet was shot for having been leftwing, homosexual, anticlerical, and a defender of the abolition of the Spanish monarchy. However, the truth remains unknown. In the following, I will outline various distinct theories that surround Lorca’s assassination.

The Official Version

Essential to the clarification of the assassination has been the French-Hispanic journalist Marcelle Auclair. Auclair decided to write a biography in honour of the life and death of Lorca, who was her friend. Titled Enfances et mort de Garcia Lorca [Childhood and the Death of García Lorca], the biography was published in 1968 by French publisher Éditions du Seuil and, soon after, in 1972, was translated into Spanish by Aitana Alberti and published by the Mexican publisher Ediciones Era as Vida y Muerte de García Lorca [The Life and Death of García Lorca]. In the course of her research, Auclair solicited a report from the Francoist dictatorship on the crime committed against the man she called “one of the great poets of this planet.” She did not receive a response. Instead, the dictatorship concealed the report. However, years later, in April, 2015, a document came to light. Dated July 9, 1965, the document was written by the Regional Brigade of Social Investigation with the Granada police and addressed to the governor of Granada. The report describes the poet as a “socialist” and a “[free]mason belonging to the Alhambra order,” noting that he had become known for “homosexual
practices” but that no “specific case” had been recorded. In any event, according to the French writer Jean-Louis Schonberg, the principal cause of Lorca’s assassination was his homosexuality.

In his book *Federico García Lorca: L’homme-L’œuvre* (1956), Schonberg suggests that Ruiz Alonso, the rightwing politician who led the arrest and subsequent murder of Lorca, was also a homosexual, and that Lorca’s assassination—a crime of passion, and a personal score to settle—was ultimately caused by Alonso. Critics such as Paul Preston have concluded that the French regime favoured this hypothesis since it excused them from any blame. In 1967, some years after the assassination, another scholar of Lorca and his death, Ian Gibson, managed to arrange an interview with the infamously guarded Alonso. The biographer asked him whether it was true that he had denounced Lorca out of spite, or vengeance over a supposed homosexual love, as Schonberg had insinuated. The response of Alonso, who has been called “the executioner of Lorca,” was cutting: “Tell that Schonberg to bring me his wife and daughters, so that he can see what type of man I am.”

**Political Motives**

For a descendent of the poet, the crime was a political one. Laura García Lorca, the niece of Lorca, asserts that, “From the historical point of view it is important that a document exists within the French regime recognizing that it was a political crime.” Preston, an historian, advances a similar opinion:

One of the most celebrated victims of the terror of the right, not merely in Granada but in all of Spain, was the poet Federico García Lorca. In previous years the Francoists would claim that Lorca had been killed in a private dispute of apolitical denotation, relating to his homosexuality. Lorca had nothing apolitical about him.
Preston’s remarks clearly suggest that the Francoists had sought to
downdraw the political orientation of the poet, and to obscure the
political nature of his assassination. Likewise, in an interview with
El País magazine, Ian Gibson opines that the report requested by the
Francoist ministries about Lorca was damning:

> The report that they requested is conclusive. It demonstrates
> that this was no street murder but that the order to assassinate
> came from the civil government. They say it themselves.¹³

In contrast to these views, others have argued that the national
insurgents bear no responsibility. Journalist Eduardo Molina
Fajardo, in a book published after his 1979 death titled Los Últimos
Días de García Lorca [The Last Days of Federico García Lorca] (1983),
attempts to downplay the role of the Spanish Falangists, a group
of two far-rightwing political parties with an authoritarian
political ideology. Fajardo notes that disagreement continues to
exist regarding who is responsible for Lorca’s death because all of
the actors who participated in the operation were in one way or
another culpable for the ultimate crime.

In 1938, only two years after the assassination, poet
and friend of Lorca, Luis Cernuda, described the event as “a
monstruous political crime,” his outrage and powerlessness redolent
in his words.¹⁴ It is true that Federico García Lorca had a strong
affinity with the Spanish left. He was a close friend of the poet
Rafael Alberti, a communist, and he was likewise close to a minister
of the Republic, Fernando de los Ríos. A professor of political law
and later socialist politician, Ríos had lectured Lorca in human
rights at the University of Granada and travelled with Lorca to
the United States in 1928. In 1937, in the middle of the Civil War,
General Francisco Franco was asked about the assassination of
Lorca in an interview with a Mexican magazine. In his response,
Franco characterised the death as politically motivated: “In those
first moments of the revolution of Granada, that writer was

---


killed for being mistaken as part of the insurgency: these are the natural accidents of war.” Whether correct or not, Franco’s remarks unambiguously link Lorca’s death to a political plan.

**Family Quarrels**

Miguel Caballero and Pilar Góngora are the principal proponents of the thesis that Lorca was killed over familial disputes. For these researchers, the assassination was carried out as a result of grudges and envies that certain Granadian families held towards Federico García Rodríguez, Lorca’s father. The primary dispute was between the Roldán and Alba families. Together with the García Rodríguez family, these families formed the economic triangle of the richest landowners of Granada. In their 2007 book *Historia de una Familia: la Verdad Sobre el Asesinato de García Lorca* [History of a Family: The Truth about the Assassination of García Lorca], Caballero and Góngora develop the theory. The persuasiveness of the family theory is affirmed by the book’s preface, written by Gibson. For Gibson, the book no less than confirms that Federico García Lorca died not only due to his status as ‘red,’ famous ‘red’ and, to be more exact, ‘fag’—a supporter of the Popular Front and enemy of the Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, but because he was the son of Federico García Rodríguez. Somehow the father was punished through the son.

Caballero and Góngora are convinced of two fundamental motivations for Lorca’s assassination. The first is the resentment the Roldán family held towards the father of Lorca for various reasons, including economic rivalry, political matters, and envy. While the children of García Rodríguez had only attended university, Lorca had, at the time of his arrest, already achieved great success as a prestigious poet and playwright. The second (related) motivation was Lorca’s theatrical work, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* [The House of Bernarda Alba]. Though

---


Lorca completed the play in 1936, only two months before his assassination, it was not performed until 1945. The play is about an authoritarian Andalusian matriarch, the eponymous Bernarda Alba, who wields complete control over her five daughters. As Caballero and Góngora suggest, it is likely that the Roldán family viewed the play as a personal slight, since it features characters modelled on—and with the same names as—members of the Roldán family.

Despite the pleas of Lorca’s mother, Vicenta Lorca Romero, and of other family members who wished to avoid conflict with the Roldán family, Lorca refused to change the names. As Caballero and Góngora write, when the Roldán family gained “knowledge of the existence of the [play],” it became “a new motive for the quarrels between the families.” As they continue, “One might say that this was the drop that made the glass of grievances overflow.”

More than eighty years have passed since Lorca’s death and the poet’s body has still not been found, despite search attempts of archaeologists, historians, and researchers. In any event, Lorca’s family has refused on many occasions to exhume his remains should they be found. According to some, the location of the assassination has still not been identified; for others, Lorca’s body was hidden by the Franco regime, which sought to avoid the location of his death becoming a shrine or site of pilgrimage for socialists. There have even been those who speculate that his own family moved his body to a different location.

Conclusions

I believe that Lorca’s assassination was not simply carried out because he was a homosexual, nor because Lorca had close ties with the political left; rather, it was a culmination of several events. In relation to the theories advanced to explain his...
death, the most plausible seems to be the hypothesis of Caballero and Góngora—that the principal motive for his murder was the resentment for and envy of Lorca and his family held by the Roldán family. In reference to the search for the body, it appears possible, as Marta Osorio has argued, that Lorca’s family (or the Franco regime) removed his body to a separate place. This would explain why various excavations have not found any vestiges of Lorca’s remains. Besides this fact, it is telling that the family resoundingly refuses to facilitate the search: this might indicate that the family has an interest in obscuring their involvement.

On the other hand, it is inevitable that the figure of the Andalusian poet remains linked to certain political interests and ideologies. The Spanish Communist Party considers Lorca a martyr of the Republic, and even the former Soviet Union considered the poet as allied with the communist cause. In the same way, several poets who sympathised with the Francoist regime have also honoured Lorca. Despite having close friendships with socialist authors, it is certain that Lorca was not part of any political party. However, it is possible that, for his assassins, the strategy for hiding the true reasons for his death—vengeance and resentment—was to search for a political, religious, or moral justification to perpetrate their crime: hence, highlighting Lorca’s status as a socialist, atheist, and homosexual.

Lorca’s literary afterlife has taken on the dimensions of his death, with his works being both censored and much debated. But his literary corpus has been subjected to its own exhumation and transportation, having been translated and sold around the world. The connection between Lorca’s body and his body of work has been intermittently by his own translator, Roy Campbell, who wrote the following poem, titled “On the Martyrdom of F. García Lorca,” which consists only of a single quatrain:


21. The Falangist regime imposed a ban on Lorca’s work until 1953, and several publications of his work were censored even after the ban was rescinded: see Mary Vincent, “Breaking the Silence? Memory and Oblivion since the Spanish Civil War,” in Efrat Ben Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter, eds., Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55.
Not only did he lose his life
By shots assassinated:
But with a hammer and a knife
Was after that—translated.²²

Campbell’s poem, together with Antonio Machado’s poem at the head of this essay, demonstrate how the tragic event of Lorca’s death inspired a swathe of artists to commemorate Lorca’s life. The circumstances of Lorca’s death have interwoven with the reception of his work—a reception expressed in both artistic and critical responses. Reciprocally, the theories behind Lorca’s assassination have taken on their own literary status, each telling a unique story about Lorca as a political citizen, a son, and poet.

INTERSECTION IN MUSIC AND LITERARY STUDIES

ROGER HANSFORD

Introduction

A N I N T E R S E C T I O N M A Y describe a direct relationship between music and another artform. It may designate the discernible connection of common themes, characters, or creative ideas. An intersection may also allow us to trace the influence of musical practices, or speak about musicianship, musical activities, or musical meanings. Links between music and film, visual art, or sculpture, or links between music and literary or dramatic works, are illuminating subjects for intersectional study. For example, an investigation of the connections between music and literature within a particular time period, accompanied by material and cultural evidence of their historical association or their shared consumption, might reveal important correspondences and overlapping characteristics. An example might include a musical structure that influences the crafting of a literary work or vice versa, or a character who appears in both a musical and a fictional work.

Although intersection often takes place on a representational level, more basic instances may occur, such as when lyrics from a poem or novel are set to music, or when a published song is cited in a literary fictional scene. In the latter

1. Intersection denotes an informative critical relationship between music and another artform. The precisely performative nature of music distinguishes this phenomenon from intertextual relationships among literary works; neither is intersection synonymous with ekphrasis, where the influence between artforms—a literary description of a visual artwork—is limited to one-way travel. This article does not argue for music as paragone or assign it any superiority over other artworks, any of which may be considered as texts and/or may be aesthetically appreciated.
example, the cited song may be used to drive the plot or enhance the setting or character description. Ian Bostridge’s *Schubert’s Winter Journey* is an intersectional monograph on both levels. Bostridge contextualises *Winterreise* using songs and poems that simply share themes or titles with those in Schubert’s song cycle; but he also investigates the broader connotations of the romantic figures and motifs—including the lonely winter wanderer, the charcoal-burner, the will-o’-the-wisp, the linden tree, the horn-call—appearing across these *lieder* and related paintings and fictional works. As this article will contend, such instances of musico-literary and musico-visual intersection afford scholars valuable opportunities to analyse complex webs of artistic reception, whether geographically or historically defined.

The principal meaning of the verb “intersect” is to “divide [a thing] by passing or lying across it.” The noun form, “intersection,” brings to mind the familiar North American term for a road junction, where two roads meet and cross each other. The noun “intersection” also describes “the act of intersecting” and “a point or line common to lines or planes that intersect.” These definitions are cogent for musicological study. In this article, the word is not simply a synonym for such similar verbs as “interlink” or “interrelate” but denotes an active interaction between artworks. Moreover, this active interaction is one that is meaningful and useful to music historians. Scholars have already recognised relationships of proximity or contextual affinity between literary works of different genres through the use of such terms as “intertheatricality” or “intermediality.” However, this article sets out a theoretical reference point for understanding music within its wider artistic context, denoted by the term “intersection.”
Musico–Literary Intersection in the Postmodern Critical Landscape

By nature, the intersectional approach is interdisciplinary. It thus aligns with several key ideals of the new musicology—signaled by Joseph Kerman’s call in 1985 for more meaningful and less positivistic music criticism—in that it seeks to understand musical works within their cultural contexts, rather than as hermetically-sealed units. As this article argues, intersectional criticism is endemic to important philosophical shifts in the investigation of pieces of music that took place preceding and during the turn of the twenty-first century.

Formalist readings of musical structures, previously accepted as adequate in their own right, have in recent decades been considered only as limitedly useful beyond the subdiscipline that American universities term “Music Theory” or “Music Analysis.” New interpretative devices, derived from poststructuralism and literary theory, among other rubrics, have opened up a wider spectrum of interpretative models to musicologists, those who study musical styles and practices.

This professed “postmodern turn” in music studies has seen a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship investigate the interactions between music and literature in Anglophone culture during the long nineteenth century. Indeed, the interplay of music-text relationships is crucial in intersectional music studies. In 2017, Michael Allis wrote an introductory essay for a special issue of the Journal of Musicological Research titled “Reading Music through Literature.” Allis noted that such interdisciplinary approaches show “significant potential” to
revise or enhance “our understanding of specific musical works.”

However, analyses of music in the context of literary criticism and interpretations of musical vocality—important though they are for understanding subjective identities in such works—are only part of the historical impact of these intersectional studies.

Reading Victorian novels as sources of evidence for British music of the period, Phyllis Weliver has adopted an intersectional approach to identify musico-literary connections in fiction. Weliver’s method promises to inform scholars’ views of contemporary music itself by providing a “social, cultural and political context” for the musicianship under examination.

Scenes from novels often depict the manner of a song’s performance, illustrate an imaginary audience’s reaction to actual repertoire, or show how repertoire was significant in the lives of its fictional singers and players. Literary works may also reveal the place of particular musical instruments and performers within society. Recognising that English literature offers music researchers a useful investigative tool is an important part of the intersectional methodology. Intersectional theorists seek to identify mutually influential interactions between at least two artforms—interactions that may be traced in extant historical materials—to understand aspects of British social life in the past.

Though Weliver has interpreted nineteenth-century English literary works as records of musical reception, another strand of intersectional musicology uses sources from Italian courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Inspired by the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Gary Tomlinson, in 1984, offered a “prescription” for music historians studying the madrigal, a secular vocal genre of music popular during the Renaissance and early Baroque eras. Tomlinson describes a methodology that qualifies as intersectional, in that it begins by comparing a song with its original poem. Tomlinson underscores

---

the importance of the relationship between these artefacts, identifying it as “the particular nexus in the cultural web that we chose as the object of our study.” For Tomlinson, this intersection defines critics’ interpretations of both artworks—song and poem—and, in the context of other related poems and madrigals, helps to convey aspects of the court society their performers inhabited. Eschewing formalist and positivist approaches to music from past cultures, Tomlinson opens the way for intersectional studies; he defines this interpretative process as “a reciprocal one, in which the art work illuminates the context even as the context illuminates the art work.”

In a more recent example of intersectional criticism, Theodore Ziolkowski has identified a number of “stages” in the development of European Romanticism. Ziolkowski devotes six chapters of his book to analysing intersectional interactions between different types of artworks in the years 1798, 1808, 1818, 1828, 1838, and 1848. In this way, Ziolkowski avoids reenacting the approach, established among many cultural historians, in which genre or nation is the main organisational principle. Ziolkowski’s monograph, along with the other examples, demonstrates that intersectional readings of music and music history need not be confined to studies of any specific milieu. This important point is also evident from the recently published *Edinburgh Companion to Literature and Music*. It begins “before 1500,” extends to the present, and concludes with “A Future for Literature and Music.”

However, notwithstanding its broad applicability, it is arguable that intersectional study should always be supported by the key theoretical frameworks that have arisen with the poststructuralist turn in literary and cultural studies—frameworks such as postcolonial theory and interdisciplinarity. According to Raymond Williams, works of literature can become

17. Ibid., 356.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 356, 357.
PHILAMENT 26: BODIES OF WORK


23. Ibid. See also Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, Practising New Historicism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 62, 68.


anecdotes or examples of “residual” culture, so that they are seen as works “effectively formed in the past” but are still “effective element[s] of the present.” In this way, literature can establish counterhistories and undermine teleological narratives of historical “progress,” especially those influenced by nineteenth-century ideals of establishing national or individual “greatness” in musical development. Moreover, critical interpretations can emphasise these effects. New historicist and cultural materialist approaches to artworks, for instance, may subvert traditional interpretations of authorial hegemony in favour of theories of readership. In such readership-focused studies, we may identify hitherto unexamined symbolism, representation, and moments of reception in canonical and non-canonical texts or artefacts especially when they are read in combination. In music, such approaches champion the individual listener and their aesthetic experiences.

Intersection is close in meaning to reception, since both theories trace an artwork’s influence across its own and other media over time. The overriding concern of the intersectional approach is to establish the extent and meaning of cross-media connections. This aim is not necessarily contrary to the aim of reception studies, a field that discerns the value, impact, or canonicity of works through their afterlives. Rather, intersectional research draws on reception-type study methods but applies its findings to an insightful reading of the music at the centre of the given semiotic web. The specific pieces for examination need not have been considered “canonical works” at any point.

While studies of intersection form geohistorically grounded examples of intertextuality and discourse, they are not usually instances of hybridity. The exception is where intersection studies involve contact between popularly “opposed” or contrasting cultures or groups. Kevin Korsyn, in charting the broad influence of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Julia
Kristeva, suggests that groups of texts with deconstructed and therefore permeable boundaries may become a form of mutually-referential discourse.\(^{27}\) The meanings of these texts are defined not just by their authors, but by their readership, as well as by intersectional conceptions of race, gender, class, sexuality, or disability.\(^{28}\) In recent years, several academic conferences have focused on exploring one or more of these categories in musico-literary studies, allowing artefacts and associated artistic practices to be read and understood as intersectional. Intersectional studies of gender and sexuality\(^{29}\) or intercultural and transnational exchanges through diasporic intersection have emerged.\(^{30}\) Furthermore, new research into the voice or the body as an intersectional category is an expanding horizon.\(^{31}\)

Relatedly, the term “intersectionality” was originally coined by the feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 to denote the way in which one’s social and political identities may combine to engender unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.\(^{32}\) In her original essay, Crenshaw was intent on drawing attention to the way in which black women plaintiffs are subject to multiple burdens that, when viewed through the “single-axis framework” of discrimination, obscure the complexity and “multidimensionality” of their subordination.\(^{33}\) It was not until the early 2000s, however, that the term “intersectionality” was more broadly adopted by feminists and advocates of social justice.\(^{34}\) On citing Crenshaw, Reni Eddo-Lodge writes:

America, with its grid-like road system, neatly packed full of perfect rectangles and squares, was the right place for the birth of this metaphor. Every person knows of a place where all the roads meet... Black women, in these theories [of Crenshaw’s “intersectionality”], were proof that the roads didn’t run parallel, but instead crossed over each other frequently.\(^{35}\)
This type of intersection, concerned with striving for the liberation of subjugated individuals, is pertinent to pressing social concerns of 2020, and it is therefore a fruitful avenue of research for twenty-first-century intersectional arts studies.

For the purposes of this article, intersectional approaches more broadly are those that seek to erode the text/context divide that has traditionally distinguished analytical from historical methodologies in music research. These approaches aim to show that structural and representational judgements about musical works can be complementary. For Delia de Sousa Correa and her co-authors, resolving the tension between apparently contradictory analytical approaches represents one of the greatest challenges and opportunities for graduate students researching the so-called “sister arts” of music and poetry. Through adopting intersectional methods in the study of artworks and their contexts, musicologists might more deeply understand the unique identities of different performers, composers, and music consumers. In the following section, the article will present a case study to explain the term “received intersection” as I have theorised it in my intersectional monograph *Figures of the Imagination*, before going on to consider the ways that intersection and received intersection may expand the depth and impact of future musicological research.

**Received Intersection**

Moments of intersection are themselves subject to the processes of reception identified by musicologists and cultural theorists. An understanding that such intersectional moments are texts, with their own interpretative meanings and afterlives, underpins the term “received intersection,” which I introduced in my 2017 book *Figures of the Imagination*. There, I used the term to identify a specific way in which imaginative figures form points of intersection between British fiction and drawing-room songs.


in the period 1790–1850. The point of introducing this term was to reveal more clearly a culture of domestic romanticism that was understood and consumed intersectionally. The main intersectional figures under scrutiny in that work were minstrels, supernatural figures (such as fairies, ghosts and witches), Christian figures, and siren figures (represented by mermaids and nightingales). Comparing artistic intersections of the early- and mid-nineteenth century, the monograph demonstrated how changes and developments in the identities of these figures continued through the period so as to show that intersection “was a dynamic and meaningful process.”

As the book contends, while some figures retained their established core traits within new social and political contexts of the Victorian era, others spearheaded increasingly complex intersections, reflecting evolutions of style and genre in the various artforms in which they appeared. Ghosts and witches declined in popularity, the minstrel remained prominent, and the romantic siren’s manifestations as mermaid or nightingale emerged—all while the Victorian air became increasingly florid and more technically challenging for performers.

Structured around the differing identities of the figures, the monograph applies a theory of intersection to interrogate print culture’s evolving social commentary on contemporary issues, such as Christianity in the home, the accuracy and freedom of the press, and gender roles in the professionalisation of musicianship. To paraphrase significant thematic intersections identified in the print materials, the study investigates how Christianity was portrayed and practised through fiction and song, how far editors in both artforms manipulated motifs of romanticism—including a supposed “folk” heritage—to promote their publications, and how female musicianship was contested as women musicians increasingly aspired to perform

39. Ibid., 179–226.
40. Ibid., 179–226, 234.
41. Ibid., 191–226.
Beyond amateur concerts within familial domestic settings.

An example of received intersection I examined in *Figures of the Imagination*, but will do so in a new way here, appears in Edward Bulwer’s *Zanoni*, a romance novel published in 1842. The novel reanimates a figure that was “intersectional”—that is, a figure who moved between literature and music—in earlier Anglophone print culture. The character first appears as a supernatural figure in Matthew Lewis’s 1796 gothic novel *The Monk*, but then later reappears in a musical composition that responds to Lewis’s novel: David Bruguier’s 1827 song, *The Fire King* (figure 1). *The Fire King* is a compound time and strophic *Allegro* setting for three voices in A major, with contrasting dynamics and an expressive piano accompaniment.

In *Zanoni*, the eponymous character is described as a “fire-king” during a pivotal scene of Mount Vesuvius’s eruption, after which a gentleman declines a respectable marriage in favour of pursuing training from Zanoni in the dark arts, feeling an “asbestos-fire” in his heart. The “fire-king” term refers in part to personifications of the volcano’s fire and lava flows, but also to supernatural elements of Zanoni’s spellbinding character, such as the power of his forbidden knowledge and artistic insight, and, according to several of Bulwer’s characters, his associations with witchcraft and the diabolical. Bulwer’s reception of the intersectional fire-king moment enhances the author’s description and plot direction; traces of the dramatic song and earlier gothic novel also deepen meaning for informed readers. An anecdotal figure in Lewis’s text, Bulwer’s “fire-king” has satanic power to dominate and terrify, showing literary developments in character portrayal but also presenting intersection as an evolving process in material culture. The topic of Bruguier’s song, a fire-king’s separation of marriage partners using the element of fire as a lure, resonates specifically with Bulwer’s
plot moment, making *Zanoni* the reception document for a figure with prior intersectional resonance. This case study illustrates “received intersection,” a phenomenon active in several examples highlighted by my monograph where material culture demonstrates its reception of—and receptiveness towards—preceding musico-literary intersections.

**New Directions in Music Scholarship**

Intersectional studies offer relevant approaches for postmodernist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial scholars in music. Several published investigations of music and literature have enacted intersectional readings of those artforms outside Victorian Britain, showing that composers from periods beyond the case study just outlined are also inclined towards extra-musical influences, just as authors from many cultures and traditions are inspired by music. Emerging from word-and-music studies, intersection is a key tool for musicology, opening up new possibilities for its many subdisciplines. An intersectional approach to a composer’s biography might amplify the fact that he or she had also published literary works, allowing scholars to trace influences on their later compositions through discerning shared thematic content, musical ideas discussed in the writings, or common representational motifs. Bostridge demonstrates this technique, enhancing his study of Schubert’s song cycle by linking relevant biographical snippets, and even the composer’s autobiographical comments, to the overriding sense of loneliness he perceives in *Winterreise*. The potential to approach musical biographies in an “eclectic” and “pluralistic” manner is an aspect of the new musicology; in 1997, Kofi Agawu drew attention to the importance of the “individual subject” in his list of new musicology’s achievements, while also defending the continued scholarly value of traditional music analysis.
Figure 1. David Bruguier, *The Fire King* (London: D. Galloway, 1827), GB Lbl E.270.(5.), bars 1–17. Novels by Matthew Lewis (1796) and Edward Bulwer (1842) both feature a fire king. Reproduced courtesy of the British Library Board (copyright holders).
Figure 1 (continued). Bruguier, *The Fire King*, GB Lbl E.270.(5.), bars 18–36. Reproduced courtesy of the British Library Board (copyright holders).

Figure 2. John Wall Callcott, *The Water King* (London, 1799), GB Lbl E.600.n.(4.), bars 1–32. This song was published three years after Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* referred to a water king; it has textural similarities with Bruguier’s *The Fire King* and presents an equally demonic figure. Reproduced courtesy of the British Library Board (copyright holders).
Richard Leppert’s portrayal of visual art’s relevance to music history, and Andrew H. Weaver’s original application of narratology theory to the texted German Lied, are examples where intersectional methodologies illuminate historical and analytical approaches to music. More innovatively, intersection enables the mapping of complex interactions, like sampling in popular music, the reception of popular chart songs in film soundtracks (and vice versa), and the performative analysis of musical contexts, such as ritual or speech in ethnomusicological studies. Many possibilities are open to researchers intent on studying musico-literary intersections with respect to race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class or disability, as well as examining how music enacts or encodes facets of individual or collective identities. Future empirical research could trace the way in which the human mind functions in relation to intersectional attributes. Assessments could be designed to discover the impact of various intersectional factors on individuals and how they might develop understandings of music in extra-musical contexts. Overall, intersection is a concept through which Nicholas Cook’s call for a “broader musical scholarship” may be applied, notwithstanding individual scholars’ disciplinary or institutional loyalties.

As McClary writes, twenty-first-century musical scholarship is interested in “bringing issues familiar to anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies to the examination of ‘our own’ music.” If “our own” music is the Western classical music canon, intersection may help us to expand, explode, or at least reevaluate, these institutionally-revered examples of human creativity.

The rhetorical Quadrivium, which Richard A. Lanham called “a place where four roads meet,” recapitulates the crossroads metaphor, in linking arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Together with the Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, the Quadrivium comprised the medieval curriculum of


51. McClary, “Feminine Endings in Retrospect,” xi.

the seven liberal arts that have influenced modern university curricula. The foundations for intersectional study—an embodiment of musicology’s more recent diversification and changes in outlook—may not be as ancient as these syllabi, but they are in one sense traceable to the foundational components of the discipline itself. In his article of 1885 titled “The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology,” Guido Adler made the histories of mimetic arts, dance, literature and philology “auxiliary sciences” to historical musicology, writing that literature and language were “inextricably connected with music research, in the same way as in vocal works the musical tone is inseparable from the word.”

DESTROYING NEW YORK CITY:
THE EMOTIONAL WORK OF FICTION

ELLA COLLINS-WHITE

CITIES ARE PLACES of deep cultural meaning. Their architectural structures tell of human histories, forming affective networks of societal needs. Cities’ “bodies” are in constant fluctuation to best accommodate their occupants. Cities also shape the people who live in them, just as they are shaped by their inhabitants. In many ways, cities become symbolic edifices of humanity’s control over nature. It is not surprising, then, that in imagining the apocalypse in its various forms, the city has become a focal point for both readers and writers.

Transcending mere locations on a map, cities—understood through geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s theorisation that places can be understood “experientially”—may be seen as “centers of meaning.” However, since the 1970s, cities have acquired meanings that transcend even this experiential form. Cities may be understood to have become a physical manifestation of, or a metonym for, humanity and the human species itself. In imagining the destruction of the city, for instance, we might

also imagine humanity’s end. In Anthropocene fiction, this theme of collective destruction is particularly cogent, as it reflects the tangible threat of an eroding world. As Tuan wrote in her essay titled “Place: An Experiential Perspective,”

Literature and painting induce an awareness of place by holding up mirrors to our own experience; what had been felt can now be seen, what was formless and vacillating is now framed and still.²

In creating an awareness of place, literary texts can afford new understandings of how humanity functions within, and how humanity relates to, place. In the case of apocalyptic fiction, and particularly Anthropocene fiction, the place of the city becomes a metaphoric representation of humanity’s fear—of death, societal collapse, the unknown, and more generally the ominous end of life. The still image reflected back in the textual mirror is one of an intricately linked, terrifyingly codependent society, firmly immersed in its city structure.

In the novel *Odds Against Tomorrow*, Nathaniel Rich explores the idea of the city, specifically New York City, as a symbol of social and societal structures.³ The novel portrays New York City as a cultural paradigm or an icon endowed with mythical powers; but it also imagines the city’s brutal destruction. The novel illustrates the psychological impact that New York City’s identity has had on society and social structures at large. This article contends that these representations of the city perform important emotional work. They transform the reader’s understanding of place to pointedly illustrate the problematic nature of placehood within the anthropocentric age. Simultaneously, the novel’s representations reimagine relationships between place and time. As this article will also contend, the emotional work of fictions such as *Odds Against Tomorrow* allows readers to reconcile themselves to the changing structures of the

². Ibid., 161.
³. Nathaniel Rich, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (New York: Picador, 2014). All subsequent page citations to the novel will be given in the text of this article in parentheses.
world—its ecosystems, geological make-up, climate—as well as to reimagine humanity’s role and future trajectory within it.

Odds Against Tomorrow captures the contemporary emotions many feel in the Anthropocene, including its sense of overwhelming anxiety. Many of these emotions are felt physically or may be described as “embodied.” The novel imagines New York City through a highly probable disaster scenario—that of a deluge caused by massive rainpour. Structured around this key event, dubbed “Hurricane Tammy,” Odds Against Tomorrow is divided into three parts: the antediluvian, diluvian, and postdiluvian. The novel follows protagonist Mitchell Zukor, a mathematics prodigy, through several stages of his life, including his professional life as a paranoid futurist forecasting the cost of environmental disasters, through his life as a survivor of the flood, and finally to his “postdiluvian” life as he embraces agrarianism. Mitchell’s emotional journey, from isolated automaton through to prophetic savior and finally to survivalist–naturalist–realist, has appealed to several general readers of the novel. In a New York Times review of 2013, Ron Currie Jr. suggested that Mitchell's journey invites readers not just to adopt or imitate the protagonist’s recently acquired knowledge and skills but to participate in his emotional journey. As Currie puts it, Mitchell’s “emotional transformation” is “one that both convinces and sticks—and one that the reader may find value, perhaps even salvation of a sort, in trying to emulate.”

In imagining Hurricane Tammy, the novel brings the Anthropocene into sharp focus, transforming the impact of anthropocentricism from a passive threat in the background to an active threat in the foreground. It also urges readers to consider the impending apocalypse. In a review published in Rolling Stone magazine, Julia Holmes describes the burning question that is asked, at one point of the novel, by a “mob” of people who, seeing him as some kind of prophet, seek Mitchell’s wisdom. “What’s
The term “Anthropocene” refers to a new epoch in which humans have so significantly altered the earth that it may be thought to have entered a new geological age. It is a particularly important term for emphasizing humans’ responsibility to and for the current changes to the Earth. As Adam Trexler writes in his book *Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, the term “may help to move [us] beyond the narrow questions of truth and falsity with regard to climate science,” because it “names a world-historical phenomenon that has already arrived.”

Adopting this term represents a significant shift in thought, as it foregrounds the problem of anthropogenic climate change, reengages people with a sense of immediacy, and highlights the threatening and destructive force of our current epoch and its erosion of place. In fact, Trexler has called for more research “on the impact of climate change on specific places.” As he notes, “Places have specific histories that are simultaneously cultural and geographic. The meaning of places also changes as real disasters befall them.”

While the Anthropocene, as a term and concept, recognizes humans’ influence on the world, a similar term, anthropocentrism, is used to describe a way of looking at or thinking about the world that is completely centered on human needs and desires—to the exclusion of all other species, creatures, or things. Anthropocentrism can be seen as the cause and origin of the concept of the Anthropocene. As one of the early users of the term notes, the word Anthropocene was introduced to “capture this quantitative shift in the relationship between humans and the global environment.”

In the Anthropocene, the world becomes a commodity used and abused for human gain; in this period, humans adopt an attitude leading to the current climate change crisis. Evoking anthropocentrism, the Anthropocene is also a time in going to happen to us?” the mob calls out to Mitchell. But, as Holmes writes, it is the “slyly profound novel” that provides readers with the answer: “global warming, overpopulation, water shortages, supergerms. The future, it seems, is already upon us.”

But the novel also asks, and perhaps answers, a series of related questions about place. If places disappear, and with them our affective networks of meaning vanish, will social structures and notions of what it means to be human, disappear as well?

Representations of New York City in *Odds Against Tomorrow* suggest that the city and its human inhabitants are intricately linked, and that humanity perceives its own survival (or demise) as contingent on the city’s existence. The novel explores how anthropocentric attitudes shape these understandings of the metropolis, and considers how the anthropocentric lens creates and perpetuates the myth of New York City.

The novel evokes anxiety, fear, and nostalgia in its construction of New York City in the first part; it then generates awe, ignorance and absurdity in its destruction of the City in the second; and, finally, in the last part, it engenders hope in reconstructing New York City. In doing so, the novel performs a kind of emotional work that is comparable to what Tuan describes in her observations about the function of art and literature. As Tuan suggests, literary descriptions and landscape paintings are “not themselves places” but capture and reflect reality back to the reader or viewer, allowing us to see, understand, and process certain emotions associated with the depicted place. A work of art, Tuan writes, “creates place materially as well as in the imagination.”

*Odds Against Tomorrow* similarly creates a material and imaginative place—but with a transformative goal in mind: to stage a literary intervention to alter the current course of anthropocentric decline. However, before analysing the text in more detail, it is necessary to define the Anthropocene and anthropocentrism.


The term “Anthropocene” refers to a new epoch in which humans have so significantly altered the earth that it may be thought to have entered a new geological age.\textsuperscript{7} It is a particularly important term for emphasising humans’ responsibility to and for the current changes to the Earth. As Adam Trexler writes in his book \textit{Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change}, the term “may help to move [us] beyond the narrow questions of truth and falsity with regard to climate science,” because it “names a world-historical phenomenon that has [already] arrived.”\textsuperscript{8} Adopting this term represents a significant shift in thought, as it foregrounds the problem of anthropogenic climate change, reengages people with a sense of immediacy, and highlights the threatening and destructive force of our current epoch and its erosion of place. In fact, Trexler has called for more research “on the impact of climate change on specific places.” As he notes, “Places have specific histories that are simultaneously cultural and geographic. The meaning of places also changes as real disasters befall them.”\textsuperscript{9}

While the Anthropocene, as a term and concept, recognises humans’ influence on the world, a similar term, anthropocentrism, is used to describe a way of looking at or thinking about the world that is completely centered on human needs and desires—to the exclusion of all other species, creatures, or things.\textsuperscript{10} Anthropocentrism can be seen as the cause and origin of the concept of the Anthropocene. As one of the early users of the term notes, the word Anthropocene was introduced to “capture this quantitative shift in the relationship between humans and the global environment.”\textsuperscript{11} In the Anthropocene, the world becomes a commodity used and abused for human gain; in this period, humans adopt an attitude leading to the current climate change crisis. Evoking anthropocentrism, the Anthropocene is also a time in

\textsuperscript{7} Adam Trexler, \textit{Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 1.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 3–4.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 235.


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 842.
which humans are asked to acknowledge their role in creating the Anthropocene (and ending the Holocene—the current geological epoch) but also to mitigate anthropogenic climate degradation, and to decentre the anthropocentric perspective.

In order to interrogate the relationship between the human, social, and architectural structures of the Anthropocene, this article draws on formalist theories of place. Tuan’s seminal article of 1975, cited above, conceives of places as both spatial locations and centres of sensory experience and visceral feelings. Places, she notes, are “known both directly through the senses and indirectly through the mind.” Tuan’s ideas are particularly relevant to cities, as these urban places are experienced by their inhabitants on both the micro- and macro-levels. Any specific physical space that is inhabited by an individual may be understood as “a small place” and one that “can be known through all the modes of experience,” Tuan suggests. But this same space might also be experienced differently. An individual may experience a place as a large space that “depends far more on indirect and abstract knowledge for its experiential construction” than on direct knowledge and experience.

These different experiential dimensions of place are relevant both to the concept of the Anthropocene and the genre of fiction of the same name. They are relevant because one of the aims of Anthropocene fiction is to identify the interaction and overlap of physical spaces with mental or experiential understandings of places. In their study of the emergent field of environmental hermeneutics, Forrest Clingerman, Brian Treanor, and Martin Drenthen claim that “environmental understanding is contextual understanding.” As they continue, environmental understanding “does not find itself in abstract space but is situated in concrete places or locations, and always within the particular cultural setting belonging to that place.”

---

13. Ibid., 152.
In other words, the experiential dimensions of a place are not wholly abstract (or mental) but are referable to the concrete or physical features, as well as the cultural settings, of that place.

On one level, understanding one’s immediate or “micro” environment is crucial to one’s own conservation and protection—even survival. However, on a broader level, attaining abstract and indirect knowledge about one’s “macro” environment becomes problematic, especially in the Anthropocene. Considering Tuan’s theorisation of place, we may propose that it is the “macro” places that may in the Anthropocene cause the most social anxiety, as places intricately tied to notions of “humanity at large” and the imperative that, as the macroenvironment changes, so must we. For this progression to happen, humanity must dissociate itself from the societal structures that reinforce identifying only the immediately perceptible “micro” places. When living in an environment, species adjust incrementally over time, adapting to the environment’s specific demands. What I call “macro” places, however—such as “a city or nation”—do not easily permit of this incremental adaptation. They remain abstract and connected to the “long history” of humanity (such as ages or epochs).\(^1\)

However, it is the emotional work of fiction that can reenvision these macro places. By imagining the transformation of place, a reader can participate in living through the experience of change. The novel mirrors the reader’s emotional journey in providing an architectural construction and destruction of place. The novel, in its construction of the place, also reveals the emotional status quo; and, in its destruction of the place, paves a way for emotional metamorphosis. The text can thus address the anxiety induced by the Anthropocene, allowing the reader to imagine the kind of structural transformation necessary for humanity to survive the anthropogenic age.

\(^{15}\) Tuan, “Place: An Experiential Perspective,” 152.
Caroline Levine’s proposition that “aesthetic and political forms may be nested inside one another,” which she introduces in her 2017 book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, further allows us to consider the ways in which humans are connected to the structures of place, and particularly to the structure of the city.¹⁶ By bringing Levine’s concept to bear on *Odds Against Tomorrow*, we can examine both humanity’s “nested” location within places, as well as the extent to which places might be “nested” in our cultural and political consciousness, “nested” as representations of humanity and the human species. In *Forms*, Levine suggests that her formalist methods diverge from those of traditional formalism. Rather than considering forms of literature and, for instance, a novel’s forms as something that contributing to its status as an “enclosed” artistic whole—that is, “the work”—her method, she suggests, incorporates historicistic considerations of context.¹⁷ Levine’s scholarship thus attempts to connect a work to its surrounding context, and proposes that the work in turn influences its context.¹⁸ This allows for the possibility that literary techniques—their forms and structures—can impact on the structures of the “social world” at large.¹⁹

Writing of the “nested” political and aesthetic forms, Levine posits that “each is capable of disturbing the other’s organizing power” and that, “together, [these] multiple forms of the world come into conflict and disorganize experience in ways that call for unconventional political strategies.”²⁰ The suggestion here is that different aesthetic and political structures may interact, mirror and collide with one another, disrupting any unitary or unidirectional influence of one upon the other. Such a proposition opens up the possibility of thinking about the effect of the Anthropocene on aesthetic forms and vice versa. Levine’s theory also suggests the benefits of interrogating both how social or political forms may be “nested” in the physical structures of a city.
and how different narrative (or narratological) “forms” in *Odds Against Tomorrow* might interact with the social and architectural forms of the city. In essence, the task to be developed is to map how these physical and literary forms might “travel” – that is, how that move “back and forth across aesthetic and social materials.”²¹

The idea that aesthetic forms—such as that of fiction, or within fiction (such as the novel)—can disrupt “real-world forms,” such as cities and buildings and institutions, can inspire writers and other artists to incite political change. The idea is particularly motivating for those who write Anthropocene fiction, as it allows us (and them) to imagine that these fictions may influence real-world life in the Anthropocene. By diminishing structural confines, these forms of fiction can imagine new possibilities for society in which people and institutions are able to reorganise themselves in completely new and unique ways, outside the physical and symbolic shadow of the city.

In its narrative structure, *Odds Against Tomorrow* illustrates the nesting of social forms within the structure of the cityscape. In so illustrating this nesting phenomenon, the novel constructs and then deconstructs the idea of the Anthropocene. It suggests that for Earth to survive the Anthropocene, the human species must build, morph, and hybridise the structures of the contemporary world, and that we must transform the way we work and function within and on the landscapes of the world. Narratives that envision such a manner of survival and change, such as *Odds Against Tomorrow*, perform important imaginative work: they help to conceptualise how such structural and social changes can occur. In *Forms*, Levine observes how the work of her literary critic colleagues Susan Wolfson and Heather Dubrow has shown that “literary forms reflect or respond to contemporary political conditions.”²²

²¹. Ibid., 5.
²². Ibid.
As Levine further notes, the reason why these accounts valorise literary forms is because they recognise that they “shape what it is possible to think, say, and do in a given context.” In what follows, this article will examine the nested or imbricated structures that connect the city to humans in Anthropocene fiction—as well as the ways in which these structures are perpetuated, destroyed, or augmented. In examining these themes, the article will show how Anthropocene fiction invites readers to imagine how they can manipulate these same structures in the real world, whether for beneficial or detrimental consequences.

**Constructing New York**

*Odds Against Tomorrow* constructs New York City by drawing on several cultural perceptions and preconceptions of the place, thus creating a mythic outline. At the center of these images is the premise that New York City is indestructible, infallible, and indefatigable. As the “city that never sleeps,” New York City already possesses a range of mythic qualities that the novel reinforces, thus rendering it the very cornerstone or engine room of American nationhood and modernity. In fact, the cultural signification of the City is blinding.

In the novel, New York City and its inhabitants continue to move, work, and live through the drought and deluge, apparently believing the city’s structures are invulnerable, and ignoring any and all warning signs of the impending catastrophe. “An itty-bitty Category Four ain’t gonna hurt us! At least not for a day or two. This is New York City,” utters Jane Eppler (138). Jane is Mitchell’s colleague at FutureWorld, the consulting firm for which Mitchell works, and the only “firm to have predicted the flood” (20, 203). Through its creation and later destruction of the apparently indestructible New York City, *Odds Against Tomorrow* illustrates not just the hubris of those who

23. Ibid.
perceive, and rely on, ideas about place for their continued development—but the misguided nature of these perceptions at a time when adaptation, not stagnation, is required. The novel uses the real-world myth of New York to construct an apparently fictitious version, drawing on the connections and connotations readers already have. Trexler summarises the way in which cities—and specifically New York City—are not just objects or places about which social associations and ideas develop; rather, these places also harbour features and spaces specifically created to elicit certain emotions, ideas, and feelings:

Cities are, by definition, extraordinarily dense networks of affective bonds between people and place. These bonds are frequently disorganized and overlapping: people have millions of different associations with New York City’s Central Park... Other features of the city are designed to organize social affect: monuments, skyscrapers, public buildings, and authorized views of geographical features, like riverbank parks or scenic viewpoints... Place is inescapably historical and political, in addition to being material and personal.24

Just as cities themselves are designed to elicit specific affects, so is Anthropocene fiction designed to engender feelings about cities and places in readers. In Odds Against Tomorrow, emotionally charged signifiers—what Trexler calls “affective bonds”—are developed around the place of New York City to engender a broader feeling of connection to the city. The novel achieves this by painting a nostalgic portrait of New York City that continually refers to its real cultural landmarks. The novel frequently sets these nostalgic images of New York City against comparatively cold and affectless images of Mitchell’s “skycity”—a doppelgänger place that melds with Manhattan in Mitchell’s dreams. It is a place where “instead of cobalt-blue sky and sparkling skyscrapers extending indefinitely,” Mitchell sees “trees—giant soaring oaks perforating a green-black night” (139). The construct of the New York City is further complicated by another place that features

among Mitchell’s thoughts: Camp Ticonderoga, a “summer camp for boys on a horseshoe-shaped lake twenty miles northwest of Augusta” (33). As the novel proceeds, Camp Ticonderoga is productively set against New York City as an idealized place symbolising of bucolic longing, and an escape from the deep anxiety of the unknown associated with Manhattan (38, 221).

Throughout *Odds Against Tomorrow*, the narrator makes reference to several specific places within New York, including Central Park, Times Square, Grand Central, and Wall Street. They become the quotidian background for Mitchell’s everyday life; however, these nostalgic emblems take on important new significations as he encounters them in person. As Mitchell discovers, many of these landmarks are inconsistent with the way he imagined them. Grand Central, for instance, “was darker than he expected—larger too” (171). Similarly, the narrator links several well-known landscapes with equally well-known national history monuments in scenic description: “A long window overlooked the corner of Central Park and its brown softball fields. Directly below was the Columbus Fountain” (115). In connecting these landmarks, the narrator weaves together New York’s landscape and political history to charge the novel with the overarching myth of New York City—that is, the city as it is imagined in our culture consciousness: an idealised version that tends to gratify the reader’s desire to understand the symbolic or mythic “place” of New York City. But the novel also makes the reader aware of the double meaning of this place—its myth and reality—and invites the reader to engage in its dialectics.

At one point, the narrator describes Tibor, Mitchell’s father. When the twelve-year-old Mitchell expresses a desire to visit the aquarium, “his father, old Tibor,” cannot oblige his son, “command[ing] the cab to drive straight to Wall Street and Broad” (43). The scene that follows reveals,
both to readers and the young Mitchell, the mythical qualities attributed to New York City by its inhabitants:

“This is where America happens,” said Tibor. “Where we happen.” His passion for old American movies surfaced whenever he found himself overpowered by emotion. “Greed is good,” he said. “Wall Street, starring a certain Mr. Michael Douglas.” Mitchell had nodded solemnly in agreement. Tibor felt indebted to Wall Street because he owed his prosperity to a quintessentially American idea. (43)

In this scene, the novel engages with place on two levels: first, it refers to the actual Wall Street, and second, it enlivens the mythic notion of Wall Street created and reinforced by the city’s portrayal in *Wall Street*, the eponymous film. As Tibor implies, both versions of the place project the same ideal: “greed is good.” Fact and fiction intertwine as Wall Street and *Wall Street* become one. Tibor appears indebted to both versions of the place—a discovery that in turn suggests that the distinction between fact and fiction, Wall Street and *Wall Street*, is actually immaterial in *Odds Against Tomorrow*. The metaphorical place and the real place create a nostalgic longing for the lost American Dream as they become inseparable in the psyche of cultural memory. The episode also demonstrates the manner in which social constructs, such as cultural ethea and politics, are enmeshed in the imaginative and physical construct of a place.

As places with long, specifically human, histories—places made of what Trexler calls “dense networks of affective bonds between people and place”—cities are the predominant perpetrators of this simultaneously passive and active sense of place. They represent the replacement of “real” environments with imagined, mythic, cityscapes of cultural memory. By reflecting contemporary New York City, and so holding up a mirror to place, the reader is made aware of just how unaware the “experience” of place is in

---

25. Ibid., 76.
practical, lived reality. The novel illumines how people are more engaged with the concept of place than its actuality.

Skycity, the nightmare doppelgänger of New York City, is a place devoid of personal affect. It is a city without place, a no place (a heterotopia), a utopian or dystopian vision of efficiency and monotonous conformity with no beginning or end. The narrator illustrates skycity as it appears in Mitchell's mind's eye:

It was a nightmare city, a phobopolis. It came to him in a blur of flashing metal and glass... he'd find himself in a silent, glass-windowed apartment. He was high off the ground, so high that he couldn't see the bases of the other skyscrapers. The sky was a rich, bright blue and the enormous steel edifices soared both as high and as low as he could see. He suspected that the towers never stopped, but extended infinitely in either direction. They were slender, the towers, and they swayed lightly. (74)

Mitchell’s phobopolis—his city of fear—is constructed as a site devoid of personal place but endowed with the notion of the abstract city, the city without a name. This invention transforms New York City—one of the best-known cities in the world—into a nameless, placeless, void: a structure without emotional affect. The abstract, placeless city contrasts with and heightens the figural, mythic New York that is its other, a New York saturated with a sense of personal place. Skycity emphasises the organising affects and physical constructs that constitute cities at their most basic level. This place also envisions a humanity trapped within these constructs: “the skyscraper dwellers,” the narrator says of those in skycity, simply stare “forlornly from their glass windows” as they remain “imprisoned in their identical white rooms” (74).

Ironically, rather than disturbing the protagonist, Mitchell’s imaginings calm and soothe his nerves (74). He imagines humanity trapped in the cityscape—interned in the physical edifice of the city. But the novel also envisions the “nested” forms of the Anthropocene observed by Levine—forms
that exist in both physical and mental realities.\(^{26}\) By visualising humanity as a species imprisoned in the cityscape, the novel highlights both our immersion within and reliance upon the city. Holding out New York City as a representative figure, a case study, the novel also comments on the ways in which cities are theorised or conceptualised in general. The novel configures place as a construct of organising affects that not only configures society and its forms but contains them. By disturbing and destroying the organising power of the city, societal structures are opened up to adaptation and rearrangement to be transformed into more sustainable environments. This powerfully imaginative process in *Odds Against Tomorrow* enables the reader to envision new realities in the contemporary world, and even perhaps to identify the structures that prevent the creation of a sustainable landscape in the real world.

Wilderness, a concept that, like “nature,” has been used to advance essentialist ideas about environmental philosophy and ethics, has all the emotional associations of place without its physicality.\(^{27}\) Wilderness thus represents something of a reversal of the abstract city or skycity. Wilderness can only be known through its antithesis—the city, or other man-made structures. As W. S. K. Cameron writes, “On reflection, neither ‘nature’ nor ‘wilderness’ exists: both have been socially and historically constituted.”\(^{28}\) *Odds Against Tomorrow* uses the antithetic wilderness to affirm and enforce the character of the city, and specifically New York City. The notions of “wilderness” and “city” are contrasted in the notes of correspondence sent between Mitchell and his friend Elsa Bruner, a woman with a life-threatening illness who lives in a commune at Camp Ticonderoga. Elsa narrates her life to Mitchell through a series of postcards and letters that are primarily concerned with how she converts a summer camp for boys into a hippy commune. Her

\(^{26}\) Levine, *Forms*, 1.


descriptions of agrarian life amid the “encroaching wilderness” (33) provide a clear point of contrast to Mitchell’s city life.

When Mitchell asks Elsa to explain why she had “decided to risk her life for the privilege of living on an isolated farm,” Elsa sends “news of solar tubes, bidirectional net meters, and metal flashings; lists of crops and the seasons in which they would be planted” (63–64). Mitchell’s response is to defend the city’s many amenities:

In his own letters Mitchell made a point of listing the virtues of metropolitan life, primarily the attractions of total convenience: the way the city handles essential services such as food and waste with optimal efficiency, leaving you with more time (63–64).

The contrast solidifies the antithesis of the city and the wilderness. It juxtaposes the recognisable places of New York City (and the steely, man-made phobopolis of skycity), with the unknown, untamed, and wild of Camp Ticonderoga. This dialectical correspondence enacts a kind of bucolic longing—a longing for the days before the modern city—that has subsisted in literature since the Industrial Revolution, a reconfiguration of place and placehood that caused mass migration from the country to the city from the nineteenth century.29

Mitchell envies Elsa, as he associates her country life in the wilderness with a life of heedless, carefree abandon. His envy perpetuates and reinforces his abstract idea that there once existed a simpler time, one that is associated with country life and is at the centre of his bucolic longing. This longing is another construct to emphasise the rigidity of the city; and it impresses upon the reader the city’s unnatural stillness in time (its stasis). Mitchell’s longing also works to construct the difference between what might be called “active” and “passive” places—the active wilderness encroaches; it is engaged with, cultivated, and fought. But the passive city is a

backdrop—a place full of meaning but demanding no quotidian engagement from its inhabitant. It is seen but not heard.

New York City, skycity, and Camp Ticonderoga work in harmony to represent place as a uniquely human structure. Taken together, they illustrate the anthropocentric constitution of place. Humans create the meaning and identity of these locations—and they do so from an inescapably human perspective. The passivity and activity of place, described above, highlights the way in which humans envision their environment but remain disconnected from it. Having established anthropocentrism as problematic in Mitchell’s imaginings and correspondences, *Odds Against Tomorrow* dissects the relationship between humans and the city to reassess how society views and interacts with place and the environment.

**Deconstructing New York City**

In order to destroy New York City, to collapse the conflated image of the metropolis that lies, stagnant, in our cultural psyche, its forms must be taken apart. Its nested structures must be divided into discrete and separate things. As Levine suggests apropos these nested forms, one is always capable of “disturbing” the “organizing power” of the other.30 So must the structural forms of the New York City be altered in a way that disturbs the organising power of the city and its networks of affect. By such a method of deconstruction (and destruction), the mythologised image of the city—distant from the experiential environment—might be debunked and a sense of environmental agency restored. There are two ways in which *Odds Against Tomorrow* can be said to disrupt the human order, thus forcing the anthropocentric view of the city to shift. First, the novel depicts humanity’s mock regression into savagery when it is left without a city within which to house its social structures. Second, the

novel depicts the eradication of the cultural landmarks of the place. It is through this process that the novel destroys the apparent boundaries between human bodies, the wilderness, and cities.

*Odds Against Tomorrow* shows us that, to shift away from the idea that humanity is embedded within the city, it is useful to decentre our human perspective of the city. The novel imagines this reconfiguration of the human order by utilising anthropomorphism. In the introduction to their edited volume, *Animal Horror Cinema: Genre, History and Criticism*, Katarina Gregersdotter, Nicklas Hållén, and Johan Höglund explain the way in which humans are a central but not singular force in determining the climate trajectory of the planet. As they write,

> Thinking through the concept of the Anthropocene involves centring the human as the source of largescale eco- and geological change, but also displacing anthropocentric perspectives by seeing humans as just one piece among many in the planetary puzzle.⁹¹

The authors’ observation entails considering how the term “Anthropocene” might be reshaped, realigned, and given new connotations to displace this human-centred perspective. In a 2012 article, Tom Cohen imagined the Anthropocene as a concept with a double meaning—a thing that expresses and encapsulates the problem of anthropogenic climate change while it also offers an opportunity to reconsider it.³² In his article, Cohen points to the problem of the prioritisation of the human in Anthropocene studies. His contention is that the Anthropocene conveys anthropocentrism and expresses the dominance of humans in its very terms. But Cohen also connects the Anthropocene with the idea of anthropomorphism:

> The term “anthropocene” is curious, at once leaden and foppish. It carries a trace of the obscene... it seems the epitome of anthropomorphism itself—irradiating with a secret pride invoking comments on our god-like powers and ownership of “the planet.”³³
Once again the dualistic meaning of the term Anthropocene, which is here both “leaden and foppish,” begs critical consideration. The figure of the city is the physical representation of anthropocentrism—an environmental anthropomorphism. It enforces a sense of human dominance on “the planet,” speaking to the egotistical, imagined “god-like powers” of humanity. *Odds Against Tomorrow* ridicules this anthropocentric view of the world. At certain points, the novel anthropomorphises animals to illustrate the city’s organising network of affect, suggesting it is the city’s structure that endows humans with human qualities. That is, the novel “citizenises” the “local vermin” of New York City (97), recognising them as both belonging to and participating in the deconstruction of the metropolis. The narrator articulates Mitchell’s ideas about the rats, pigeons, and other creatures inhabiting the city:

As a New Yorker of nearly three months’ standing he was well acquainted with the local vermin. They were citizens too, after all: the pigeons queuing at the street corner, waiting for the light to change; the rats loitering on subway platforms; the bedbugs snuggling in the mattresses, preparing for dinner. (97)

Through Mitchell’s eyes, the narrator envisions the actions of local vermin as human actions. Commonplace but uniquely human activities are projected onto these creatures’ activities. Thus personifying the vermin, the novel equates human and non-human animals. Anthropomorphism here serves to reveal a crack in the human order, ridiculing societal constructs and illustrating how the imagined, “god-like powers” of humanity are nothing more than willful ignorance and a reliance on an “us-and-them” mentality. The deconstruction of the human order continues in the following scenes, when the novel describes the animals’ prescience and foreknowledge:
The animals were always the first to know. It was that way with the warming world—the polar bear experimenting with anorexia, the marmot cutting short its hibernation, the American grizzly emigrating to Canada. And now the native New Yorkers were behaving erratically as well. The rats were traumatized; the pigeons neurotic, their dirty beaks nodding incessantly, like meth addicts; the roaches were downright hysterical, running suicides across the sidewalk. (97)

As the narrative develops, the figures of the knowing animal and the ignorant human are juxtaposed. Though animals emigrate and reconfigure their rituals as the environment changes, “Most New Yorkers,” the narrator notes, “carried on with their usual activities, pantomiming quotidian normalcy, as if nothing were wrong” (102). This juxtaposition may be seen as a metaphor for the contemporary world: while animals take actions to ensure their continued existence into the future, humans, though they analyse the issues of the Anthropocene, do little to change course. Mitchell will think to himself apropos this very problem: “And that was the old, familiar problem. Analysis without action” (97).

By humanising the animals’ actions, these scenes impart choice and will to these creatures. But the novel also offers a derisive commentary on anthropocentric notions in the Anthropocene, revealing them to be absurd. With these animals taking on human roles, the novel disrupts the human order and debunks the notion that humans occupy a unique space or place in the world. Furthermore, these scenes make clear that the city structure is merely a physical construction that organises affect; although, since it is so successful at engendering human affect, even the animals have become human in this place. Thus, in the city of Odds Against Tomorrow, humanity—with its solipsistic conceptions of place and society—becomes less and less enmeshed in the cityscape. The scenario prompts the reader to ask questions of the city: To
whom does the metropolis belong? What behaviors, identities, and relationships does it normalise, permit, or proscribe?

In the first part of Odds Against Tomorrow, the narrative uses place and places—landmarks, monuments, and so on—as agents that shape the way people experience emotions. The story not only creates “place” but connects the reader to place through popular culture and history. However, in Part Two of the novel, this carefully constructed sense of place is destroyed. The novel eradicates those “centers of meaning” described by Tuan as it depicts the aggressively encroaching wilderness. Place is thus overrun by nature. The significance of this destruction is most evident in the narrator’s absurd description of a submerged Grand Central:

No voices, no footsteps, no life. Only the sound of the water, parted by the canoe, lapping gently against the limestone walls. The stairwell to the lower level, on the eastern end of the concourse, was completely submerged, as were the tunnels off the main floor that led to the Metro-North tracks. And somewhere ahead, at the western end of the concourse, was the twinned staircase that led to Vanderbilt Avenue and high ground. And there were Mitchell and Jane in the Psycho Canoe, floating slowly across the giant floor of the concourse. (172)

For a city of more than eight million people, a silent and humanless Grand Central is an eerie idea. With hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people passing through Grand Central Terminal on a daily basis, the station is a hub for human life; and its humanness is intrinsic to its sense of place. In the narrator’s account, the station’s physical elements—stairwells, tracks, concourse—are now juxtaposed with the fantastical idea of canoeing through the station: an image that is self-reflexive and absurd in its unreality. The transformation of Grand Central’s physical and mythical proportions suddenly suggests the possibility, however improbable, that New York City may be destroyed.

34. See “Grand Central Terminal” (July 9, 2018) https://www.grandcentratetalterminal.com/.
Later, another scene debunks the seeming indestructability of New York City and of “place” more generally. The scene depicts Mitchell and Jane having a picnic in a flooded Central Park. When the narrator describes the couple, we learn they do not sit on a picnic blanket, much less the ground, but have “wedged themselves between the wide crowns of two oak trees near the northeastern corner of Central Park” (187). As the narrator then explains, this “underwater forest had seemed a good place for a noontime snack, hidden away from the rest of the floating city” (188). Here the contrast of the absolute normalcy of a picnic in the park against the bizarre image of these two figures eating among the treetops, high above a flooded, floating city, creates another self-reflexive and absurd image. Like the Grand Central scene, here again the novel, through what may be called this “deplacing” of New York City, vitiates the power of human agency—a power that has so forcefully been imposed on the world. At the same time, the novel highlights the overpowering strength of other dynamics: namely, climatic, nonhuman forces. The reversal of the anthropocentric viewpoint beckons the reader to compare the power of human and nonhuman agency, and demonstrates how the environment may become not merely a passive backdrop but an active force in human thought.

Imagining the destruction of place—as an abstract possibility, or even as an incremental reality is difficult. As Alan Weisman writes,

> The notion that someday nature could swallow whole something so colossal and concrete as a modern city doesn’t slide easily into our imaginations. The sheer titanic presence of a New York City resists efforts to picture it wasting away.\(^\text{35}\)

The incremental erosion of place, however, is a reality of the Anthropocene: the reporting of encroaching shorelines, melting

icecaps, and sinking cities is utterly unremarkable. The monolithic proportions of a city are no longer a guarantor of its fortitude or indestructability. In *Odds Against Tomorrow*, this sense of accelerating erosion is given expression in the merging of New York City and skycity, a phenomenon that creates an “unknown” cityscape devoid of place. The merger of these places occurs as Hurricane Tammy heads for New York City:

> The gray clouds had sapped the coloration of the skyscrapers; every glass, stone, and steel surface had the same dull slate hue. It was as if Manhattan were assuming the qualities of his skycity—it lacked only the brilliant cobalt-blue sky of his dreams. When he reached the office building he was panting. A dismayed security guard stared pointedly at his shoes. They were leaking black dye onto the expensive carpet. He might as well have been walking on ink pads. (129)

Here there is an emphasis on the buildings’ construction materials—glass, stone, and steel, configured into skyscrapers; and these are also highlighted in earlier descriptions of skycity. This blazon of materials draws attention to the monolithic, man-made quality of New York City, stressing the seeming impregnability and eternality of the city. As Manhattan dissolves into skycity, Mitchell melts into the carpet. The passage thus aligns the erosion of structures with the erosion of the human, suggesting that people and places are interconnected, even in their destruction.

> The novel further explores the interconnectedness of people and place through the objectification and consumption of human bodies. In the aftermath of Hurricane Tammy, the narrator describes the devastated cityscape in grisly terms: “The tunnel between the twin marble staircases was like a large, greedy mouth drinking the water. But clogging that mouth, and against the bottom of the stairs, were bodies” (173). Continuing, the narrator coalesces the bodies with the ruinous
landscape: “It was as if they had been stacked there on purpose... a grotesque human dam” (175). These bodies, described as “stacked,” “clogging,” and constitutive of a “dam,” are objectified and dehumanised; at the same time, they are juxtaposed to another anthropomorphised structure: the greedy-mouthed staircase. The juxtaposition of these elements represents a transference of autonomy and agency from human to object. The city is consuming its inhabitants, symbolically encasing and devouring them through its structures. The novel’s recognition of the manner in which human structures (and humans themselves) are embedded in the city prompts the reader to recognise the need to take apart—to deconstruct or decouple—society and the city: two things perceived to be imbricated and inseparable.

With the destruction of the city in *Odds Against Tomorrow*, the collapse of the human order seems imminent. How can society survive without its organising construct? In the aftermath of Hurricane Tammy, society appears to crumble. This is seen through the degeneration of society, a process by which savagery is normalised as humans adopt animal qualities and shed the orderly and rule-bound norms of civilisation. As the narrator observes: “Already they had become animals. Snarling, brutish, hateful. Was it that easy, the transition into savagery?” (170) The novel expresses the disappearance of civilised constructs through the characters’ metaphorical regression into animals and their return to a precivilised time. This devolution is further expressed in the destruction of agrarianism:

The vegetables had been uprooted and messily devoured, as if by wild beasts; all that was left were scraps of torn vine and the occasional tomato lying on the ground, rotten and burst, oozing white bugs. (223)

The violent, bestial destruction of the meticulously cultivated land converts human into beast, reversing thousands of years of
social development. The symbolic ruination of agrarianism may be construed as a hallmark of societal collapse. But the reader is taken even further back in time as modern civilisation devolves into caveman rituals:

The full horror of the scene took a few seconds to reach him. His eyes, as upon entering a cave, had to adjust to the darkness. But now he could see them—the men. Most of them were shirtless. They roamed the bunk areas like foxes, uncertain, fidgety, huddling low to the ground, moving in packs. When the air cleared momentarily between puffs of smoke, Mitchell noticed other men, deeper in the woods, their faces covered with mud and leaves, branches tucked into their pants in a crude camouflage. They were hunting. (224)

This image—going from light to dark—effects a metonymic reversal of the Enlightenment. The sensation described by the narrator’s simile—“as upon entering a cave”—implies our entry into the Paleolithic world of the caveman. More similes follow, depicting the men as animals: they are “like foxes” who are prone to “moving in packs.” The rapid regression into savagery is the novel’s way of realising what is perhaps society’s greatest fear: the collapse of the city and the concomitant destruction of society, a fear grounded in the belief that city and society are codependent. And yet, to counteract (and even to ridicule) the codependence of these constructs, the novel contrasts images of “savagery” with fleeting gestures at social norms, rendering the men comical. Though “most were shirtless,” the men “roam the bunk area” with “branches tucked into their pants” (224) in a comical pastiche of civilian dress and caveman disguise.

When asked who ruined Camp Ticonderoga, a woman reading a magazine provides an answer: “People. Human beings. Well, to be specific, men. It’s the men that did it. They’re doing it still” (223). The woman’s quick revision of her initial statement—blame is suddenly reallocated from all of the human race to only men (who are “doing it still”)—is comical, as the
woman sits only some twenty feet from a number of such men who act out barbarous savagery even now. Moreover, that this woman reads a magazine seems to heighten the comedic effect; her nonchalance seems to mock society’s fear of the city’s destruction, suggesting it may be a foregone conclusion, or even irrational. In light of this reading, it may be conjectured that the novel imagines the worst-case scenario of New York City’s destruction not simply to scare the reader but, perversely, to assuage their social anxieties about the collapse of the city. If “place” is destroyed and yet humanity continues to exist, then the social fear of humanity’s end might be overstated, even misconceived.

This insight allows readers to see how social structures may be divorced from the city. Thus shown to be disparate entities, the city and society are no longer contingent on each other for their survival. In so doing, the novel enables the reader to imagine real-world societal structures outside the confines of the city. It decouples the two concepts and opens up a new space for change and growth. This sense of “deplacing” is a reality of the Anthropocene, and therefore an important concept to explore and imagine in literature. In imagining the destruction of place, the novel makes it more feasible for readers to understand both the eventual disintegration of the world, as well as its reconstruction.

Reconstructing the New New York City?

In the world’s current climate, imagining the future produces anxiety. This is well captured in Odds Against Tomorrow, which in Part Three asks several anxiety-laden questions: “What’s going to happen next? To New York, to America, to the world?” (210) Conceptions of humanity and the anthropocentric world are imbricated in humanity’s past and present. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has suggested, our human understanding is built on a historicistic foundation of
knowledge—a teleological knowledge that has developed through time—and it is this foundation that is used to also imagine the future.⁶⁶ But in the face of the Anthropocene, we humans stand before an unknown problem; we must learn to imagine ways to overcome the challenge of large-scale environmental destruction even though we have no prior experience with it.

Chakrabarty describes this problem, which is essentially tied to historical memory and learning, as the “historicist paradox.”³⁷ For him, “The discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience.”⁶⁷ As Chakrabarty notes, however, this assumption does not hold when we face a period that is discontinuous with the past. As he explains, imagining a future becomes problematic when the unprecedented, erratic, and unpredictable nature of the present radically disconnects our world from its historical foundations. In these circumstances, the future extends “beyond the grasp of historical sensibility.”³⁹

In these circumstances, it is perhaps literature, and more broadly art, that is capable of performing the important and necessary imaginative work that is required to teach us how to change. This is because literature and art rely not on the continuity of historical experience but on the continuity of emotion to create affective landscapes in the present. Furthermore, it is perhaps this work that may be used to shift perspectives on place and the Anthropocene, allowing us to see past the “contemporary moods of anxiety and concern about the finitude of humanity” and to adopt a more optimistic outlook. In many ways, the desire to try and use historical understanding to connect the past, future, and present is emblematic of humanity’s connection to the city. After all, the city is the physical embodiment of human history. In its very

---

³⁷. Ibid., 197.
³⁸. Ibid.
³⁹. Ibid.
⁴⁰. Ibid.
form, the city represents the “continuity of human experience” through which humanity understands its past, present and future. However, with the collapse of the city—as it is often what is imagined in apocalyptic fiction—how might literature and art envisage the future? Can it bypass the historicist paradox?

This article has suggested that *Odds Against Tomorrow* uses the specific place of New York City to arouse certain emotions in the reader. The reader’s emotional journey is heightened by the novel’s construction and destruction of the city. The novel presents a model for the way in which the formal features of literature may be used to emotionally construct and transform societal structures. Rich’s narrative creates an emotional and active landscape—a volatile force that elicits particular emotions from its characters. As this article has contended, it is this affective aspect of the landscape—drawing on a history of common experience—that allows us to imagine a future that transcends the confines of place. The novel’s exploration of place makes apparent its inextricable connection to human agency and shows us how it is ultimately a construct of humans’ social organising systems. The way in which humans conceive of our environment is itself a social construct; and thus it is part of the anthropocentric problem. The novel’s imagined ruination of New York City presents readers with a choice: go forward and create new structures, orders, and forms or return to the old ones. Indeed, the novel makes these choices clear: Acceptance or denial? Creation or imitation? To create, reorganise, and rethink, however, there must be some element of destruction. As Levine suggests, adaptation is contingent upon disturbance.\(^4\) By destroying place, and the social organising systems enmeshed in it, the novel reveals the tenuous nature of these constructs. Summarising the work of Brazilian legal scholar Roberto Mangabeira Unger, Levine asks whether we might be able to adopt a new way of seeing “social life” as a “makeshift,

pasted-together order rather than a coherent system.”

The novel allows us to see the world in precisely this way. It draws “attention to the artificiality and contingency of social arrangements” and thereby opens up “a new set of opportunities for real change by way of feasible rearrangements.”

Through the use of practical imagination, Odds Against Tomorrow offers the reader a template for restructuring society. Fiction confronts the reader with choices, offering them the chance to participate in the narrative of the Anthropocene, as well as to imagine its reality and see its catastrophic potential. Fiction itself may then be seen as the process of pushing readers beyond the anthropocentric view and opening up insights from outside of ordinary human structures. Fiction thus performs an act of decentring. Of course, this claim raises a host of new questions: To what extent does fiction manipulate its reader? How might these ideas be translated into practice in the real world? Do certain fictive structures manipulate readers more than others? And is fiction just another way in which the anthropocentric myth of a coherent society is constructed or reinforced? We are at a tipping point in environmental change today; we face a kind of sorites paradox wherein we must remove grains from the heap of sand to discover when those grains no longer constitute a heap. In order to make decisions—decisions that humanity has never had to make, and which have no historical precedent—we need imagination to consider what we can change about society. Fiction can assist us in forming this new understanding of reality; it can teach us what in our society we must remove or rearrange so that place no longer constitutes a threat to our futurity.

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
Why is the photograph, overleaf, titled “Alternative Possibilities”? Well, there is a variety of possible answers. And the world might be full of possibilities. Or it might not.

Musings on what is possible, particularly on what kind of choices are possible, nudge us towards the free will problem. Are we determined by genes and environments and left with just one possible future? Are our feelings of control over our choices illusory? Is anyone ever responsible for what they do?

One way of thinking about free will is that it eliminates possibilities. Prior to a free choice, two or more options are available. But once you have chosen and acted, then some possibilities are gone. Gone forever.

Sorry if that sounds a bit downbeat. Maybe a glass-half-full approach to free will might have it that it is the very thing that grants you possibilities. It gives you control so that life isn’t just something that happens to you. Instead, your free choices enable you to have your own role, a role that you write for yourself.

But what is the right way of thinking about free will? Thinkers of all stripes have tried their hand at answering this question. Rather bearishly, Jalalu’ddin Rumi, the twelfth-century Persian poet, pronounced that the debate would “continue till mankind is raised from the
dead.” A similarly pessimistic assessment of the current state of play was given by Emeritus Professor Thomas Nagel of New York University, who had this to say:

I change my mind about the problem of free will every time I think about it, and therefore cannot offer any view with even moderate confidence; but my present opinion is that nothing that might be a solution has yet been described.
This is not a case where there are several possible candidate solutions and we don’t know which is correct. It is a case where nothing believable has (to my knowledge) been proposed by anyone in the extensive public discussion of the subject.

The perennial, and apparently intractable, nature of the issue made me wonder if there was something wrong with the way people go about trying to solve it. With this in mind, I started to think of ways of illustrating aspects of the free will problem in one image. But there seemed to be something fundamentally temporal about choosing: a before-choice and an after-choice situation. This urged for a temporal, or at least sequential, medium rather than a static one. For this reason, it seemed to make sense to me that explorations of the free will problem in creative works were often surveyed by way of books and films.

So, the question of whether violent little Alex’s free will was undermined by a pacifying medical intervention was explored by Anthony Burgess in the novel *A Clockwork Orange*. Stanley Kubrick also addressed the question in a film based on the book. Books and films clearly work best for posing questions about free will. Or that was what I thought, prior to considering the potential of pinhole photography.

One day, I was walking through Darlinghurst in Sydney and I saw an advertisement for a pinhole camera competition, run by the Tap Gallery. I entered the competition and, to my great excitement, one of my pictures was commended by the judges. Of course, I would have been even more excited to win, but this commendation served to underscore one of the themes in the free will debate: luck.

It was lucky that I saw the notice. Perhaps I was lucky to be motivated to enter (by my interest in free will). I was a pinhole camera novice and it was undoubtedly somewhat lucky that the photos came out at all.
The judges’ commendation was a form of praise and, in truth, it wasn’t clear that it was deserved. But the free will debate raises questions about whether any form of praise (or blame) is ever deserved. Are the talented or morally good just lucky in the way they have been shaped by genes and environments? Does the same go for the inept or the wicked?

Humankind hasn’t been raised from the dead yet, so all of this is still up for discussion.

It’s easy, albeit perhaps futile, to get distracted by the twists and turns of the free will problem, so I must try to get back to my story if I can.

I wondered if the long and fruitless wait for an answer to the problem resulted from the overuse of a particular form of discourse: philosophical discussion in written and verbal form. While poets, novelists, and filmmakers have participated in the exploration of the problem, much of the work has come from philosophers using their traditional methods of thinking, writing, and talking. I wondered if these methods were somewhat limiting. In any case, there seemed to be something appealing about using a single image or at least focusing on one.

Pinhole photography seemed to enhance the power of an image with its static temporality. So, rather ambitiously, I used my rudimentary pinhole camera (it was made from an old VHS cassette box) to both prove Jalalu’ddin Rumi wrong and outdo one of the greatest thinkers in the history of philosophy by solving the free will problem.

Unsurprisingly, I failed to solve it. But at least I now have a self-portrait on my wall—or perhaps I should say two self-portraits.

In “Alternative Possibilities,” I am the figure in each of the phone booths, and I was also the pinhole photographer. Although this was not the photograph that
was commended by the judges, I like it a lot and it certainly
took more effort to create than other photos I have taken.

No doubt to the puzzlement of the people in
the cafe opposite the phone booths, I was able to exploit the
pinhole camera’s temporal feature, together with some nimble
footwork on my part, to create this double self-portrait. As
the camera has a long exposure time, I set it up, ran to the
first booth, stayed there for a few seconds, quickly moved to
second booth and stayed there for another few seconds, thereby
creating a faint photographic clone of myself. Then I ran back
and closed the camera’s shutter, thus capturing both moments,
and both of me in two different places, but in one image. Matt
Zonca, one of the organisers of the competition at Sydney’s
Tap Gallery (and now a friend) developed the photograph.

In keeping with the theme of time and
possibility, I later learned that Matt is a fortune teller, which
provides a nice segue back to the free will problem: Can
a person be free if their future is already in the cards?

But I can’t pursue that line of thought, or else I’ll
never finish. I need to get to the point and I need to stay on
track to get there. So why this double phone booth image?

The reason I wanted this particular image was
that I hoped to try to illustrate one of the issues in the free
will debate, the one that contemporary philosophers—and
I, as photographer, refer to as “alternative possibilities.”

The following passage from the late-nineteenth
century psychologist and philosopher, William James
contains a conception of alternative possibilities. It’s
what philosophers call a “thought experiment.”

Imagine that I first walk through Divinity Avenue, and then
imagine that the powers governing the universe annihilate ten
minutes of time with all that it contained, and set me back at
the door of this hall just as I was before the choice was made.
Imagine then that, everything else being the same, I now make
a different choice and traverse Oxford Street. You, as passive
spectators, look on and see the two alternative universes, —one
of them with me walking through Divinity Avenue in it, the
other with the same me walking through Oxford Street.

One way of thinking about my photograph is that it illustrates both
of these possibilities, except instead of Divinity Avenue and Oxford
Street, the possibilities relate to two rather similar Australian
phone booths. The faint images of me in the photograph represent
options that are truly open to me as a chooser, and I have free will
in a robust sense. The image blends two different ways the universe
might be after my choice with me in one phone box or the other.

Another interpretation of my photograph (is it
a bit presumptuous to call it my photograph in the context
of describing the free will problem?) is that the faintness of
the images of my figure are suggestive of illusion. On this
interpretation, the photograph illustrates my illusory belief
prior to my choice that two options are open to me.

Perhaps my choice is predetermined and, if
that is accepted, some—but certainly not all, nor even
most—philosophers have argued that I cannot have
alternative possibilities. Thus, the faintness of the two
images denotes unreality. The laws of nature or God
only leave me with one possibility, and I naively believe
I have two. And thus the title of the image, “Alternative
Possibilities,” just mocks my asinine metaphysics.

Yet another possible interpretation of the photo (yes,
possibilities still seem to be insinuating their way into my thinking)
focuses on fatalism. I am presented with a choice between two
phone boxes but, no matter which way I choose, left or right, I
will always just end up making a phone call. It’s fated and the title
mocks me yet again! Who is responsible for such a cruel title?
I am going to stop going on about possibilities in a minute. But, before I do, here’s another one. I am no longer just asinine. I now become Buridan’s Ass. Buridan’s Ass (now, the fourteenth-century philosopher was talking about a hoofed animal, in case you were wondering) is presented with two equally appealing bales of hay and dies of hunger because there is no reason to prefer one bale (or phone box) over the other. So, the photo depicts my stalled deliberation. Because I am frozen in indecision, just like that poor starving medieval beast, I will never make the call. Come on, just pick one! But which?

I seem to keep going off on tangents, but it is interesting to note that the phone booths were in the Darlinghurst area of Sydney, an area that has sometimes attracted drug users. After I had taken the photo, it dawned on me that the two booths may have been used by drug users to contact their dealers (better than mobile phones for that sort of thing). Perhaps the faintness of the image might now evoke the desire of a desperate person who wishes to leave no trace of their failure to rein in illicit desire.

Or perhaps the photograph might depict the psychological state of the drug user at that moment: a sort of unfreedom in the hands of a relentless craving—a dearth of possibilities rather than a range of alternative possibilities. More optimistically, the picture might denote the freedom of a turning point (both literally and metaphorically). For in the picture, nothing is set in stone (except the phone boxes) and the user might turn away from options that are too faint to clutch the will and hold on.

I can’t claim that I intended to impart that drug connotation (but who knows, whether my subconscious did?). Perhaps it was just chance.
Who’s in charge here? I must say: I still don’t know.
One day, someone might solve the free will problem.
Nothing is impossible. On the other hand, maybe there’s only one possible future. (Here we go again.)

I think I’ll just go back to using a normal camera and wait for someone else to get their head around all of this.

Maybe.
PHILLIP DUPESOVSKI

IN CONVERSATION WITH
THE PERSONIFICATION
OF DEATH

PHILLIP What is your earliest memory?

DEATH To originate from many genealogies, theologies, visions, frenzies, sicknesses, is to have a fractured sense of first memory.Deaths exist everywhere, we are the only shared human experience.

PHILLIP What about light? And breath?

DEATH The blind prophet never sees light, although illuminated. Breath is like birth, sometimes it fails.

PHILLIP Hesiod said you were born from Night.

DEATH Night is the time that humans ascribe to the world of death. I find this odd. The time of death is dawn, a liminal space housing only one thread of pain in the greater tapestry of the soul.
PHILLIP  Speaking of liminal spaces, I’ve always wondered how you negotiate grammatical gender. The Greeks call Thanatos masculine, the Romans call Mors feminine. The Romans also call you Letum, and this is neuter. Where does your truth lie buried?

DEATH  Here is something I’ve observed about all of this, if you’re interested?

PHILLIP  Nods.

DEATH  Let’s begin with Thanatos. One of the most moving scenes in all of literature is that moment in *Iliad* when Thanatos escorts the dead hero Sarpedon away from the slaughterfields of Troy. Zeus weeps streams of overflowing blood, seeing this son of his conquered by the lot of mortality. What is more terrible than a parent witnessing the death of their child, this life-cut-short? But Thanatos becomes the compensation: he who personifies the “good death” that amounts to imperishable glory. On the other hand, Mors is harsh-hearted, arm-bearing, gaping with black jaws, and greedy beyond all, or at least in the poetry of Tibullus, Seneca, and Statius. And she shares much in common with those Greek spirits of destruction known as the Keres, who likewise haunt the minds of the world with their unpredictable jaws of death. It perhaps comes as no surprise that they are also depicted as female. Does this all map onto a wider Greco-Roman notion of women as insatiable vessels of perennial vengeance? Consider socio-linguistic complexities and ramifications: there is something grim in this gendered
dichotomy, and I think it says a lot more about you than it does about us.

PHILLIP And what about Letum?

DEATH Was coming to that. They’re a kind of amorphous, terrible, blanketing being. An enshrouder. Your poets find Letum difficult to describe because they cannot grasp phenomena beyond what they do and what they know. Letum is the answer to the question of gender: gods don’t cling to these kinds of things.

PHILLIP Laughs.

Not really helpful.

DEATH Winks.

Gods never are.

PHILLIP Blushes.

Among your musings on gender, you, perhaps predictably, cite language of the body. Gaping black jaws, corpse-attending, physical things. How does this map onto the divine experience?

DEATH Let me bring to light the staying words of Vernant, who says “the corporeal code permits one to think of the relations between man and god under the double figures of the same and the other, of the near and the far, of contact and separation.” This process of anthropomorphism allows you to categorise us and understand us, but you don’t understand us, really. Body is one part of some of our forms and all parts of
none of our forms. Think of the Chinese taxonomy that Foucault made mention of in his preface to *Les Mots et les Choses*: “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.” It is a catalogue far closer to divine truth. You could learn something from all of this.

**PHILLIP** But how can we discuss the incomprehensibility of the gods without some kind of comprehensible vocabulary?

**DEATH** Create new codes. Dispose of a notion of body in the same way that some are already disposing of gender. Not to say that I don’t enjoy bodies, if you know what I mean.

**PHILLIP** *Cheeks feeling hot.* What is your favourite body of Death?

**DEATH** Oh, it has to be the one found in the poetry of Emily Dickinson:

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stoped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

We slowly drove—He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility—
How charming, seriously! You could imagine him with a top hat and a cane and a monocle and a moustache—

*Death hangs their head, laughing.*

All of those delectable nothings—

*Their gaze returns softly.*

Who is your favourite Death?

**PHILLIP**

*Blushes, again.*

Too many to choose! In Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*, Death is the ever-victorious chess player of this inescapable game called life. Death in Luca Guadagnino’s adaptation of *Suspiria* is a figure of drenched hair and sinewy skin who casts head-splattering spells of steep destruction. And a drunken hedonist in Jack Underwood’s *Holy Sonnets X*, who sips on the lives of mortals like cups of orange juice on a November morning or chilled glasses of Tanqueray. You’re all—

**DEATH**

All ugly in a beautiful way.

**PHILLIP**

*Sighs and exhalations.*

Why is it so hard to be beautiful in this city?

**DEATH**

To be blunt, beauty wasn’t made for you and me. I take inspiration from the character of Sybil, found in Monica Dickens’s *The Winds of Heaven*: “She was tall and dark, with smooth black hair parted like wings on either side of an olive-skinned, narrow face that might have been Italian. She was not beautiful, but she was arresting.” Halting oddities are compelling.
You live in a timeline where being beautiful isn’t enough anymore. Make that your own truth.

PHILLIP

Holding these words like a lover’s hands. Any footnotes?

DEATH

We have spoken of the entrapment of Death and our many legions of pain. I want to redeem Death as release, two case studies in my mind. The first is Lavinia, whose dramatic presence in *Aeneid* is shrouded in a great fog of silence. That is to say, not a single spoken line for this wife of Aeneas in a song of nine-thousand, eight-hundred and ninety-six lines. An opportunity lost. When we first hear from Lavinia in our epic tradition, it is on the third terrace of suffering in Dante’s *Purgatorio*. I quote Stanley Lombardo’s translation, Canto seventeen, lines thirty-five to thirty-nine:

O Queen,  
why through anger have you annulled yourself?  
You have killed yourself so that you would not lose  
Lavinia, now you have lost me, and I mourn  
your ruin, Mother, before another’s has happened.

A perennial scream, anguished by the suicide of her mother, Amata. But to toss off the veil of silence and mourn forever in the psyche of Dante seems a better deal than a living nothing. Alkestis knew this too. Sacrificed her life for her husband, Admetos, to ride the tracks *ad infinitum*. Then, after being unexpectedly brought back from the dead by the techniques of Herakles, she was drenched in Hades’s miasma and couldn’t speak for three days, so say the writings of
Euripides, but the play ends before we get Alkestis’s side of the story, and we are left to wonder if she will ever speak again. Take it from me: she was the only person willing to die for Admetos for a reason. I think she saw the light in afterlife, forsaking the human frame, becoming an untethered will-o’-the-wisp. I think she saw the truth. There will always be this body of yours, this body braised by Death. It will conquer with or without you. Maybe your ashes will flit in the winds and travel through the seven seas, maybe your bones will sleep in a coffin of eternity, maybe your flesh will feed worms whose waste will feed soil whose nutrients will feed trees and life will grow from you again and again. And there will be you, a whole lot of you, in everything and everywhere. The corpse is the key to something greater, beyond the beyond. A source of triumph, forever.
CONTRIBUTORS’ BIOGRAPHIES

ELIZA VICTORIA is the author of several books, including the Philippine National Book Award-winning Dwellers (2014), the novel Wounded Little Gods (2016), the graphic novel After Lambana (2016, with Mervin Malonzo), and the science fiction novel-in-stories Nightfall (2018). Her fiction and poetry have appeared, most recently, in LONTAR: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction, The Best Asian Speculative Fiction, The Dark Magazine, and The Apex Book of World SF (Volume 5), Fireside Fiction, and Future SF. Her work has received several prizes, including the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. Her one-act plays (written in Filipino) have been staged at the Virgin LabFest at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Victoria received her Master of Creative Writing at the University of Sydney and has recently commenced PhD study at the same university.

CLARE PRYOR is a fourth-year of Bachelor of Arts student, majoring in Latin and English, and currently writing an honours thesis on Latin poetry. Growing up, Clare had five great loves: poetry, creative writing, Greco-Roman myth, Latin and music. She now feeds the first four by writing her thesis, and the fifth by playing the pipe organ and piano.

JULIA COOPER CLARK is a PhD student, poet, and reviewer based in Sydney. She lives on Ku-ring-gai and Darug land and works on Gadigal land. Clarke’s doctoral thesis is about the aestheticisation of bodies under consumer culture in contemporary feminist poetry. Her honours thesis, titled “Please Consider Me Forever: The Cuteness of Fiona Hile and Kate Lilley,” won the Dame Leonie Kramer Prize in Australian Poetry in 2017. In 2015, Julia won the University of Sydney Union Verge Award in Poetry for her poem “Another Triptych.” Her criticism and non-fiction has appeared in Archer, Rabbit, Bone Bouquet, and Audrey Journal while her poetry has appeared in Scum Mag, ARNA, Bull Magazine, and Honi Soit.

JEBUN GEETI is currently pursuing a PhD in international comparative literary studies at the University of Sydney. Her PhD thesis is titled “The Critical Reception of Award-Winning Indian Authors in India, the United Kingdom, the United States and, Australia: A Comparative Analysis.” Geeti’s research interests incorporate diaspora, colonialism, imperialism, the East–West dilemma, South-Asian past, present, and future, migration, multiculturalism, transcultural studies, and globalisation.

LUKE BEATTIE completed a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in film and screen production and theatre studies (2016), followed by an Honours degree (first class, 2017), both at the University of Notre Dame Australia. His Honours dissertation focused on the application of Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology to the Japanese anime series Another (2012), focusing on the cultural trauma and sociopolitical rupture suffered by Japan in World War II. Beattie is currently a PhD candidate at University of Notre Dame Australia. His thesis, titled “Transgression and its Practice,” examines the role of cultural transgression in the twenty-first century.
MARTÍN GARCÍA CALLE is an assistant professor in the Department of Language and Literature at the University of Piura (Peru). His area of research centres on the intertextual analysis of twentieth-century Latin American writers and the literary work of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca.

ROGER HANSFORD holds a PhD in musicology from the University of Southampton. He has taught courses in music history and delivered research papers at conferences throughout the United Kingdom. His main research interests are nineteenth-century keyboard and vocal music and their socio-cultural contexts. He has published three books and is an academic editor for Romance, Revolution and Reform, the Journal of the Southampton Centre for Nineteenth-Century Research.

ELLA COLLINS-WHITE is a PhD student at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on the work of experimental writers such as Mark Z. Danielewski, Jess Stoner, and Xiaolu Guo to investigate the effects of various narrative structures on the reader. She presented at the Australasian Association of Literature's 2016 conference and the International Society for the Study of Narrative's 2017 conference.

ALAN MCCAY teaches in the University of Sydney Foundation Program and the University of Sydney Law School, where he is an adjunct lecturer. He is an affiliate member of the Centre for Agency, Values, and Ethics at Macquarie University.

PHILLIP DUPESOVSKI holds a Bachelor of Arts (Languages) from the University of Sydney. He is currently writing an honours thesis in classics at the same university.