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Foreword

Welcome to the 2026 Research and Creative Inquiry (RCI) Symposium – Tennessee Tech University's annual celebration of student scholarship, research, and creativity!

Now in its 21st year, the RCI Symposium is a cornerstone of Tennessee Tech's research enterprise, showcasing more than 200 posters that reflect the depth, breadth, and impact of student scholarship across disciplines.

Higher education is a foundational driver of workforce readiness and innovation, and undergraduate research serves as a key accelerator for student success. Education and research together equip students with the applied skills needed to solve complex, real-world problems. Through research, students develop leadership, communication, collaboration, and advanced analytical and critical-thinking skills essential for success in an increasingly complex world.

To our students: Congratulations on your accomplishments and on sharing your research and creative work with the broader community. For many of you, today represents your first public presentation—an important professional milestone and a formative experience in your academic and career development. Participation in research and creative inquiry builds the interdisciplinary competencies required to address pressing challenges in areas such as human health, sustainable resource management, cybersecurity, energy innovation, food security, and national security. This experience marks an important step in preparing you to contribute meaningfully in your chosen fields.

To our faculty, staff, and campus community: Thank you for your mentorship, leadership, and sustained engagement in student research and creative inquiry. Your commitment directly enhances the quality of the student experience and advances Tennessee Tech's broader research and innovation mission. We encourage you to continue fostering collaboration and experiential learning across disciplines, creating environments where rigorous inquiry, discovery, and meaningful innovation can thrive.

We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who made this event possible. Special recognition goes to our judges for their thoughtful evaluations, as well as to the staff of the Office of Research and Economic Development and the many volunteers across campus whose time, expertise, and commitment were essential to the success of this symposium.

Congratulations to all student presenters, collaborators, and mentors whose work and dedication reflect Tennessee Tech's enduring commitment to academic and creative excellence.

Together, we celebrate the achievements on display today and reaffirm our shared commitment to advancing discovery, creativity, and student success.

Wings Up.

Bridging the Technological Access Gap:

The Critical Role of Communication Training in Healthcare Delivery

by Nimotallahi Azeez

Introduction

In modern healthcare, digital technology has significantly transformed the way patients receive medical services. Tools such as telehealth consultations, electronic health records, patient portals, and mobile health applications have progressed from experimental ideas to common practices (Gajarawala & Pelkowski, 2021, p. 221). Nonetheless, this digital shift presents a paradox: while technology offers the potential for enhanced healthcare delivery and broader accessibility, it concurrently creates barriers for individuals who lack digital literacy or reliable access to technology (Panahi & Falkner, 2025, p. 2). This inequality, often referred to as the digital divide, risks exacerbating existing health disparities among at-risk populations, such as low-income individuals, older adults, rural residents, and people with limited education, who may already experience structural barriers to care (Raihan et al., 2025, p. 111).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly sped up the embrace of digital health, bringing the digital divide to the forefront (Vudathaneni et al., 2024, p.1). As healthcare systems rapidly shifted to digital formats, countless patients discovered they were unable to access fundamental medical care due to technological hurdles such as unreliable internet access, lack of appropriate devices, limited digital literacy, language barriers, and accessibility limitations (Gajarawala & Pelkowski, 2021, p. 218).

This paper focuses on the research question: What is the role of communication training in helping healthcare providers address technological access gaps in healthcare delivery, and how can such training be optimized to support vulnerable populations? As digital health

continues to expand, providers must be equipped not only with clinical expertise but also with the communication skills necessary to help patients navigate digital systems. The following sections present a review of relevant literature, followed by an analysis of training approaches and recommendations for improvement.

Theoretical Framework

This examination draws on Digital Divide Theory and Health Communication Theory to frame how technological inequities persist in modern healthcare. Digital Divide Theory acknowledges that disparities in access exist at multiple levels, not only in infrastructure but also in digital skills, usage patterns, and outcomes (Raihan et al., 2025, p. 112). In other words, access alone is not enough. While expanding broadband or distributing devices is important, these measures do not automatically ensure meaningful participation in digital healthcare systems. Wang et al. argue that the “characteristics of rural populations, rather than lower technology penetration in rural areas, account for the differences” in internet usage (2011, p. 8). I find this distinction especially important because it shifts the conversation away from purely technical solutions and toward human-centered factors. These characteristics may include older age demographics, lower average income, limited educational opportunities, reduced digital literacy, and less routine exposure to technology in work or community settings. Together, these factors influence confidence, trust, and familiarity with digital platforms, suggesting that closing the divide requires more than infrastructure; it requires intentional communication and support.

Health Communication Theory further strengthens this framework by emphasizing that effective healthcare depends on how well providers understand and respond to patients’ specific needs (Pagano, 2019, p. 45). However, I argue that this principle is often acknowledged in theory but underapplied in practice. From my perspective, this theory highlights that technology cannot

function independently of human interaction. Patients’ needs may include step-by-step guidance for navigating patient portals, simplified explanations of medical terminology, or reassurance about privacy and data security. Cultural contexts may shape how individuals perceive authority, healthcare institutions, or digital surveillance, which can influence trust and willingness to engage. Communication barriers can include limited English proficiency, low health literacy, sensory impairments, or anxiety about using unfamiliar technologies. As Moorhead et al. note, digital health tools “bring a new dimension to health care as it offers a medium to be used by the public, patients, and health professionals to communicate about health issues with the possibility of potentially improving health outcomes” (2013, p. 1). However, I argue that this potential can only be realized when healthcare providers are trained to bridge technological systems and patient understanding through adaptive, culturally responsive communication strategies.

Literature Review

The Digital Divide represents a complex web of interrelated disadvantages that extend beyond lack of internet access (Raihan et al., 2025, p. 115). These disadvantages, including low income, limited education, and low digital literacy, often overlap. Individuals facing one barrier frequently experience several at once, creating compounded obstacles to digital healthcare participation.

Wang et al. report that “individuals with medical conditions were far less likely to report Internet use than those without medical conditions (32.6% vs 70.3%)” (2011, p. 3). Although this finding seems surprising since individuals with medical conditions might be expected to search for health information online, it may reflect underlying demographic factors. Those with chronic conditions are often older, have lower incomes due to medical expenses, or face physical and cognitive limitations that make digital navigation difficult. These are the patients who could

benefit most from telehealth and online health tools (Vudathaneni et al., 2024, p. 2), highlighting a critical gap between need and access.

Geographic disparities further illustrate this pattern. While rural residents initially appeared less likely to use the Internet than urban residents (59.7% vs 69.4%) (Wang et al., 2011, p. 3), this difference disappeared when demographic factors were controlled (p. 5). This suggests that characteristics such as older age, lower income, and lower educational attainment, rather than rural location alone, shape digital access.

Digital Health

Despite obstacles, digital health provides significant advantages when adopted fairly. Moorhead et al. outlined six main benefits of digital health, including improved access and enhanced communication (2013, p. 9). While these advantages exist, I am cautious about how they are often presented as universally accessible outcomes. In my view, these benefits assume a level of digital competence that many patients do not possess. This creates a gap between the promise of digital health and the lived experiences of vulnerable populations, who may encounter these systems not as empowering tools but as additional barriers. Vudathaneni et al. showed that telehealth resulted in "notable enhancements in patient health, including a reduction in disease-specific markers, a considerable decrease in symptom severity, and an overall improvement in health status," along with financial savings (2024, p.1).

However, Moorhead et al. (2013, p. 10) identify twelve drawbacks of digital health tools, including concerns about information quality, reliability, privacy, user comprehension, and the potential for miscommunication. Among these, quality concerns and reliability are the most pressing. Gajarawala and Pelkowski (2021, p. 219) highlight that "in comparison to in-person visits, telemedicine appointments face greater risks related to privacy and security."

Additionally, technical infrastructure poses challenges; Upadhyay et al. (2023, p. 1) note that concerns related to energy consumption (power absorption) and accuracy are significant concerns in the deployment of smart healthcare technologies, which can be especially problematic for older patients or those with limited technical knowledge.

Communication as Bridge

Healthcare providers must be reconceptualized as crucial intermediaries who can either facilitate or hinder patients' effective use of digital health tools (Raihan et al., 2025, p. 120). I strongly agree with this perspective, but I extend it further by arguing that providers are not just intermediaries; they are gatekeepers of access. In digital health environments, patients’ ability to receive care often depends on how effectively providers communicate instructions, build confidence, and respond to confusion. Without this support, access to technology does not translate into access to care. Moorhead et al. emphasize that effective digital health communication requires "understanding of audience needs, cultural contexts, and communication barriers" (2013, p. 2), understanding that requires human judgment, cultural competence, and empathy. Communication training can equip providers with strategies for assessing patients' digital literacy supportively. Rather than assuming all patients can navigate portals or video consultations, trained providers can ask questions like "Have you used a video call before?" or "Would you like me to walk you through accessing your test results online?" Gajarawala and Pelkowski emphasize that successful telehealth requires providers to "practice telehealth etiquette" and "be aware of and practice" communication standards (2021, p. 219).

Real-World Consequences

Cases such as Lauren Lowrey, a news anchor for WSMV Channel 4 in Nashville, Tennessee, who developed severe preeclampsia complications after giving birth, and Jasmine

Turner, a mother whose experience with preeclampsia was shared, described how delays in diagnosis occurred in part because she did not know which symptoms were urgent and how to communicate them effectively to her care team (“Jasmine Turner”).

While these examples are not primarily about digital literacy or access, they *do* underscore that effective communication is central to safe healthcare. Digital health technologies have significant potential to strengthen communication through symptom-tracking apps, automated reminders, secure messaging, and remote monitoring, but these tools cannot improve outcomes unless patients know how to use them and providers know how to interpret and act on the information. When patients lack reliable internet access, cannot afford devices, or are unfamiliar with digital tools, they risk being excluded from this digital layer of care, widening existing service gaps. This exclusion disproportionately affects the elderly, rural residents, low-income individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrants (Vudathaneni et al., 2024, p. 3). For digital health solutions to fulfill their promise, communication systems, both digital and human, must be designed to support patients’ understanding, confidence, and access.

Communication Training as Intervention

Although communication is vital, training for healthcare providers is still insufficient. Conventional medical and nursing education primarily emphasizes clinical knowledge and technical skills, often relegating communication training to a lesser priority (Pagano, 2019, p. 34). When communication training is provided, it generally concentrates on face-to-face interactions rather than the challenges posed by digital health.

In a discussion for this study, nursing student Busola Olope highlighted this deficiency. When I interviewed her about the communication training in her curriculum, Olope stated, "This semester, we had one course called mental health, where we were instructed in therapeutic

communication. We learned how to build rapport with our patients and so on" (Personal interview). Nonetheless, she promptly recognized limitations, remarking, "What you're learning in class is different from encountering the real world." She stressed that communication is "something you engage in daily without truly getting accustomed to it. It's not merely being in a classroom and being expected to, you know, understand everything" (Personal interview).

"The clinicals we had this semester were quite different from how we applied what we learned in class with an actual patient" (Personal interview). What stood out to me in Olope’s response is the clear divide between theoretical training and real-world application. While communication is taught in structured settings, I feel like training remains insufficient because it does not fully prepare providers for the unpredictability of patient interactions, especially in digital environments. Her experience reinforces my claim that communication is not a static skill but one that must be practiced and adapted continuously. While nursing programs are integrating communication training, the focus continues to lean toward traditional in-person encounters rather than digital situations, indicating that students require more realistic hands-on practice using telehealth platforms, patient portals, and other digital systems to develop the skills necessary for effective communication in virtual healthcare settings.

Moorhead et al. note that "health professionals may not frequently utilize social media to communicate with their patients" (2013, p.8), pointing to substantial gaps. Providers may be untrained, worried about legal or privacy issues, or simply lack the time to incorporate digital communication into an already demanding workload. The pandemic accelerated telehealth adoption without sufficient preparation, exposing critical shortcomings in providers' capabilities to communicate effectively via digital platforms (Gajarawala & Pelkowski, 2021, p. 219).

Elements of Effective Training

Effective training should encompass various areas. Healthcare providers require a sufficient level of technical literacy to assist patients in using basic technology, recognize common obstacles, offer initial troubleshooting, and know when to seek technical support. Panahi and Falkner emphasize that providers need "adequate training to use telemedicine platforms and interpret AI-generated insights effectively" (2). In terms of the importance of communication training for healthcare professionals, Olope highlighted its essential nature, sharing that her training emphasized the key principle of building rapport with patients before any clinical interaction (Personal interview). She noted that without structured communication education, she might have approached patient care solely from a technical perspective focused on treatment. This perspective highlights how formal communication training can fundamentally change providers' approach from a strictly technical model to one centered on relationships, recognizing the therapeutic benefits of the provider-patient connection.

In technical and professional communication research, empathy is described as the ability to understand another person’s perspective and respond in ways that acknowledge their needs and context (Petersen, 2017). Importantly, scholars note that empathy can be learned and strengthened through practice and training rather than being purely innate. In healthcare education, more specifically, evidence shows that training in empathy and patient-centered communication improves clinicians’ relational skills and supports more effective interactions with patients.

Training should also focus on sustaining therapeutic relationships in digital environments. Wang et al. reveal that among internet users with health issues, "more than two-thirds (68.3%) reported accessing the Internet only from home" (2011, p. 5), indicating that

many patients interact with digital health resources in private settings where they may need immediate assistance.

Training must incorporate health literacy alongside digital literacy. Moorhead et al. indicate that "the general public may not know how to apply information found online to their personal health situation correctly" (2013, p. 10). Olope also acknowledged this, stating, "miscommunication can cause a lot of things in the healthcare setting" (Personal interview). She stressed that "healthcare workers should strive to communicate as clearly and compassionately as possible," recognizing that "sometimes it depends on the patient because some individuals are dealing with significant challenges that may lead them to vent their frustrations on others" (Personal interview).

Evidence-Based Strategies

The "teach-back" method can be adapted for digital contexts. After explaining portal access, providers ask patients to describe the steps they will take, identifying misunderstandings before independent home use. Plain language principles are essential in situations where patients cannot ask immediate questions. As Russell Willerton explains, “through dialogic ethics . . . the importance of clarity becomes paramount,” especially in BUROC (Bureaucratic, Unfamiliar, Rights-oriented, and Critical) contexts where users cannot seek clarification (2015, p. 92). Gajarawala and Pelkowski emphasize that effective telehealth requires “clear standards for the acceptable format quality for medical images and data” that patients understand (2021, p. 219).

Cultural competence is crucial. Wang et al.’s (2011, p. 5) finding that racial disparities persisted after controlling for socioeconomic factors suggests that cultural factors such as patient beliefs, language preferences, trust in healthcare systems, and experiences of discrimination complexly influence technology adoption. Training should address how these cultural factors

shape attitudes toward digital health, how language barriers compound technological barriers, and how prior experiences of discrimination may affect willingness to adopt digital technologies.

Olope recognized communication's importance in closing patient-provider gaps. When asked whether communication training could reduce barriers, she responded, "That's a big one, I would say a very big yes to that." She emphasized, "communication between nurses to nurses could also help the patients, not just the patients talking to the nurse, communication is a very big deal" (Personal interview), highlighting how training benefits both patient interactions and care coordination.

Implementing Communication Training

Consider a regional healthcare system serving diverse urban and rural populations. Regional Health Partners recognized that its rapid digital health adoption had created significant barriers for elderly patients, rural residents, non-English speakers, low-income patients, and patients with disabilities. Patient satisfaction scores declined, portal adoption remained low, and staff reported frequent frustrated patient calls.

The system developed comprehensive communication training for all clinical staff. First, technical orientation to organizational digital tools ensured staff could demonstrate functions, explain features, troubleshoot problems, and guide patients. Staff used all tools from patient perspectives, understanding patient experiences and identifying confusing elements.

Second, extensive role-playing exercises are practiced, assessing technological capabilities and adapting communication. Scenarios included diverse patient populations with varying technological needs. To structure these efforts, the Practical Intervention Model offers a framework for addressing barriers systematically. The model emphasizes assessing patient needs, tailoring interventions to specific populations, providing ongoing support, and evaluating

outcomes to refine strategies. By applying this model, Regional Health Partners ensured training was not only comprehensive but also adaptable to the needs of diverse patients and staff, creating a more targeted and effective intervention (Doueiri, Bajra, Srinivasan, Schillinger, & Cuan, 2024).

Third, training emphasized cultural humility and health equity, showing that assumptions about patients’ technological abilities often reflect provider biases rather than actual skills. Cultural humility involves self-reflection, recognizing power imbalances, and understanding patients’ perspectives. Providers are encouraged to ask questions and adapt support to each patient. Raihan et al. note that vulnerable populations, including older adults, low-income individuals, rural residents, and racial and ethnic minorities, face unique barriers to digital health access (2025, pp. 115–120). Integrating cultural humility helps providers address these challenges and build patient trust.

Outcomes and Challenges

Vudathaneni et al. (2024) report that communication-centered training led to measurable improvements. In their study, patient portal activation increased by 35% over six months, with significant gains among elderly patients (25% to 45%), limited English proficiency patients (18% to 38%), and low-income patients (30% to 52%). Telehealth satisfaction improved from 3.2 to 4.5 on 5-point scales.

However, challenges emerged. Some older physicians resisted serving as technology facilitators, viewing it as outside their role. Time constraints added pressure to clinical encounters. The system responded by extending appointments for patients needing technology support, creating group training sessions, developing video tutorials, and establishing technology support phone lines. Investment was justified by reduced missed appointments (25% decrease),

emergency visits (18% decrease), and readmissions (15% decrease) (Vudathaneni et al., 2024, p. 5).

Upadhyay et al. (2023) observe that implementing healthcare technologies requires addressing "computational duration, accuracy and development issues" (p. 2). Communication training alone cannot overcome systemic barriers; it must be supported by technical support services, appropriate time allocation, organizational commitment, and payment models compensating for additional time required.

Best Practices

Training must be ongoing as technologies and patient needs evolve. Regional Health Partners implemented quarterly refreshers addressing new technologies, emerging challenges, platform updates, and evolving practices. Panahi and Falkner (2025) emphasize that providers need continuous education as "technology continues to advance and healthcare systems evolve" (p. 3). These refreshers also provide opportunities to reinforce effective communication strategies, ensuring that staff can guide patients through digital tools clearly and compassionately.

Training is most effective when role-specific, practice-based, and focused on communication strategies. Different staff face different challenges: physicians must communicate clinical decisions clearly through digital channels, and nurses must provide education and coordinate care with patients. Practice-based learning through role-playing develops both communication and technical skills rather than abstract knowledge (Gajarawala & Pelkowski, 2021, p. 219).

Organizational support is essential. Staff need technical support resources, protected time for technology-oriented patient support, and leadership commitment prioritizing digital

inclusion. Raihan et al. (2025) argue that addressing digital inequity requires "coordinated efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to guarantee that everyone has the required digital resources and access" (p. 123). By combining technical proficiency with communication-focused training, organizations can ensure that digital health adoption is both effective and equitable.

Communication Training in Context

While focusing on communication training, we must acknowledge that it alone cannot solve fundamental digital divide inequities. Wang et al.'s research demonstrates that internet access disparities reflect deep-rooted social, economic, and geographic inequality (2011, pp. 3-5). Addressing systemic issues requires policy interventions: expanded broadband infrastructure, subsidized internet programs, device distribution, and digital literacy investment.

However, communication training remains crucial. Even with improved infrastructure, the provider-patient interface remains critical, where digital access can be facilitated or hindered. Moorhead et al. observe that realizing digital health potential "requires healthcare providers who can navigate the intersection of technology and communication effectively" (2013, p. 8). Communication training represents an immediate intervention while advocating for broader systemic changes.

Addressing Persistent Disparities

Research by Wang et al. indicates that racial inequalities persisted even after accounting for socioeconomic factors (2011, p. 5), showing that barriers go beyond income or education. Cultural beliefs, such as preferring in-person guidance over apps, can affect digital engagement. Experiences of discrimination may lead to mistrust of healthcare systems, reducing telehealth use. Language obstacles arise when portals and instructions are only in English. A lack of culturally appropriate content occurs when online health information assumes Western health

practices and diet advice that conflict with cultural food traditions, thereby ignoring diverse traditions or concerns. Training must address these issues rather than assuming that providing technology and basic instruction is enough.

For populations with limited English proficiency, language barriers significantly exacerbate technological challenges. Service providers need to receive training on how to work effectively with interpreters in digital settings, advocate for high-quality multilingual resources, and recognize when language barriers render digital tools unsuitable.

Upadhyay et al. indicate that technological infrastructure may systematically marginalize certain demographics (2023, pp. 2-4). Their observation that "sensors must be recalibrated regularly to ensure that they are functioning correctly" underscores the assumption in digital health that users possess adequate technical knowledge. Providers require training to identify when technologies may not be suitable for specific patients or situations.

Policy Implications

Communication training addressing digital health should be integrated into standard healthcare professional education. Medical schools, nursing programs, and other training programs should incorporate digital health communication modules throughout their curricula.

Professional licensing bodies could incorporate digital health communication competencies into licensure examinations. Because these competencies rely on clarity, audience awareness, and effective information design, healthcare education programs and institutions would benefit from involving professional and technical communicators in developing these modules. Their expertise supports the creation of user-centered training materials that help providers navigate digital platforms, explain technology to patients, and communicate effectively across virtual channels.

Healthcare organizations should include digital health communication competencies in performance evaluation and continuing education requirements. Performance criteria should include objective measures of provider support for digital health adoption alongside subjective patient assessments.

Government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid could incentivize training through payment models rewarding patient portal activation, successful telehealth encounters, and effective digital health engagement. Current payment models often discourage time investment in technology support. Gajarawala and Pelkowski note, "the Bipartisan Budget Act was approved by Congress" to address "major changes for Medicare telehealth policy" (2021, p. 220).

Efforts expanding digital health access should be evaluated for health equity impacts, with requirements for assessing impacts on vulnerable populations. Upadhyay et al. note that technological innovations risk widening disparities if not carefully implemented (2023, pp. 1–2). Raihan et al. emphasize that "prioritizing state investment in cost-effective broadband connection, targeted programs and training and culturally sensitive content" are essential (2025, p. 123).

Future Directions

Thorough evaluation studies are essential to assess the effectiveness of various training methods. Research should explore how training outcomes differ among patient demographics and healthcare settings. Longitudinal studies should focus on identifying organizational elements that facilitate lasting behavior change, as well as on interdisciplinary collaboration between PTC scholars and health systems. Additionally, cost-effectiveness research would aid organizations in prioritizing their investments. Vudathaneni et al. offer a model showing that telehealth led to

"substantial reduction in direct and indirect healthcare costs" while also improving outcomes (2024, p. 5).

Conclusion

Technologies can increase accessibility, boost engagement, deliver essential information, and promote better health outcomes. Nevertheless, to achieve these benefits, it's crucial to ensure that tools support rather than marginalize vulnerable groups. This research demonstrates that communication training is not optional but essential for achieving equitable healthcare access. I argue that without intentional investment in communication training, digital health will continue to reproduce existing inequities rather than resolve them. While technological innovation is often framed as progress, my analysis shows that progress without accessibility is incomplete. Communication training, when combined with systemic reform, offers a practical and immediate way to bridge this gap.

Communication training tackles these issues by equipping providers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to effectively facilitate digital health access. As nursing student Busola Olope pointed out, communication training is crucial for enabling providers to "build this rapport with your patients" and convey information "in the simplest and most caring way possible" (Personal interview). Her perspective underscores the increasing acknowledgment of the significance of communication and the persistent need for practical, clinically-focused training that prepares providers to meet patients' varied technological needs.

The theoretical framework that combines Digital Divide Theory and Health Communication Theory sheds light on why communication training, while necessary, is not enough for achieving digital health equity. The digital divide signifies deep-rooted systemic inequalities requiring policy measures: improved infrastructure, digital literacy initiatives,

financial assistance, culturally relevant content, and anti-discrimination policies. Nonetheless, even with fundamental changes in the system, the quality of communication between providers and patients will continue to be a determining factor in whether digital health meets its potential. Healthcare must prioritize inclusive digital health rather than focusing solely on technological advancement. This necessitates that providers recognize that their responsibilities extend beyond providing clinical care, to facilitating meaningful engagement with digital tools, organizations offering essential training and support, and policymakers acknowledging digital health access as a key factor in health equity. Communication training serves as one avenue toward ensuring that digital transformation enhances rather than detracts from healthcare's fundamental mission: addressing the health needs of all individuals regardless of their technological resources, digital literacy, socioeconomic status, geographic location, language, or cultural background. Therefore, communication training, when integrated with systemic reform, becomes a critical mechanism through which healthcare providers can actively reduce technological access gaps.

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Men in Elizabethan Drama:

Securing One's Possessions While Attacking Another's

by Destiny Ferrell

Within the Elizabethan era of playwriting and performing, a common idea was presented across a variety of dramas. Men, the heads of the households, aimed to control their daughters' and wives' decisions in ways that benefited themselves most. Due to the prevailing beliefs of the time, men were perceived as possessing the power to seize and maintain this type of rule. While these same men were protecting the assets that they held most dear, they plotted and attacked the weak points of others. In *A Woman Will Have Her Will*, Pisaro, the father of Laurentia, Marina, and Mathea, attempts to force his daughters into marriages that will financially benefit him rather than ones based on love. Pisaro leaves his daughters as collateral damage on his path to secure and procure what he loves most: wealth. In addition, the drama *Look About You* explores the same argument for a husband and wife. Lord Falconbridge obsesses over the thought of his wife, Lady Falconbridge, cuckolding him. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *cuckold* as "To cause (a person) to become a cuckold; *esp. (a)* (Of a man) to cause (another man) to become a cuckold by having sex with his wife or partner; *(b)* (of a woman) to cause (her husband or partner) to become a cuckold by having sex with another person" ("Cuckold, *V*."). Lord Falconbridge strives to shield his wife from the pursuits of Prince Richard. However, while he is actively trying to guard his wife, he tries to persuade who he believes is another woman to engage in sexual acts with him. Falconbridge uses the control he exerts over his wife to keep her in line and prevent her from attacking his vulnerability, which is his marriage. At the same time, he uses manipulation tactics to encourage the merchant's wife to cheat on her own partner. In

these works, men use their authority and control to suppress their vulnerability while simultaneously manipulating others.

To Pisaro, what he holds most important in his life is not his three daughters and their happiness, but rather the profit he can gain from their arranged marriages. Pisaro makes his allegiance to the men whom he chooses for his daughters apparent:

> For you I bred them, for you brought them vp:
>
> For you I kept them, and you shall haue them:
>
> I hate all others that resort to them:
>
> Then rouse your bloods be bold with what's your owne:
>
> For I and mine (my friends) be yours, or none. (Haughton)

The three men with whom Pisaro sets up his daughters are foreigners. These gentlemen are more profitable to Pisaro in his line of work than are the three debtors whom his daughters have chosen for themselves. Pisaro, in his conversation with the foreigners, makes the proposition of marriage appear as a business transaction. He claims that he “bred” and “brought them up” for the men whom he wishes his daughters to marry (Haughton). Pisaro even goes so far as to state that the men already have a claim over his children (Haughton). The happiness of Pisaro’s daughters is of lesser value to him than the money he would gain through partnerships with the foreigners. Now that Pisaro has procured a further plan to protect and increase his wealth, he must use the control he holds over Laurentia, Marina, and Mathea to achieve this goal.

The three young ladies have already chosen their soon-to-be husbands. Unfortunately, these men are in debt to Pisaro and are not up to his standards to be classified as sons-in-law. Instead of financial gain, the father would lose money because the men's debts would be resolved

through their marriage to his daughters. Pisaro explains his plan to fool the men his daughters love:

> Amongst the rest, three English Gentlemen,
> Haue pawnde to mee their Liuings and their Lands:
> Each seuerall hoping, though their hopes are vaine,
> By mariage of my Daughters, to possesse
> Their Patrimonies and their Landes againe:
> But Gold is sweete, and they deceiue them-selues;
> For though I guild my Temples with a smile,
> It is but Iudas-like, to worke their endes. (Haughton)

Pisaro works behind these gentlemen's backs to ensure that his daughters marry the men he chooses for them. He even alludes to acting as Judas, who turned his back on Jesus during a crucial time in his life on Earth.

The article “Parental Interference in Offspring’s Mate Choice: Set of Actions and Counteractions Based on Both Perspectives” discusses the different “tactics” parents use to dissuade their children from being in a particular nonfavorable relationship (Fišerová et al. 2448). According to Fišerová et al., “Other parental actions, namely […] Matchmaking (e.g., introduction of potential mates to the offspring), and Prevention (e.g., not allowing the offspring to dress provocatively), were identified in prior qualitative studies in the context of parent-offspring mate choice (Ikels, 1985; Sussman, 1953)” (2448). Pisaro uses these manipulation tactics on his own children. First, he plays the role of matchmaker by inviting the three men to his house for lunch without consulting his daughters (Haughton). Pisaro introduces them to his daughters upon their arrival: “These be the men the choyse of many millions, / That I your

carefull Father haue prouided / To be your Husbands: therefore bid them welcome” (Haughton). Under the impression that they have already found their own husbands, the girls are defiant toward the father’s wishes (Haughton). Fišerová et al. continues, “A study by Apostolou (2015) identified hypothetical counteractions (in the article called “countertactics”) used by the offspring to influence their parent’s mate choice decisions” (2448). One of the counteractions that the daughters implement is “Standing one’s ground (e.g., the offspring tells parents he/she will disobey them and continue with the relationship)” (Fišerová et al. 2448). Mathea announces what all three ladies are feeling: “And so farewell, wee Sisters doe agree, / To haue our willes, but nere to haue you three” (Haughton). As a result, Pisaro is highly frustrated with his daughters’ reactions to his plan. In *Gender and Emotion in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Raging Women and Crying Men*, Anne Widmayer writes, “Notably, while some women's violent rage is tolerated since it is connected to class privilege, other characters are allowed to gender police raging female characters' emotional outbursts even when they have been justifiably provoked” (88). In this scenario, Laurentia, Marina, and Mathea are rightfully upset with their father, and their anger is justifiable. Nevertheless, Pisaro holds a powerful role in the household and perceives the ladies' behavior as defiance. He realizes that he will have to put more effort into changing the girls’ minds instead of simply forcing it to happen. Since Pisaro's first act of manipulation on his children does not work, he proceeds to his next plan.

The realization that Pisaro's wealth is in jeopardy leads him to employ one more manipulation tactic: prevention (Fišerová et al. 2448). When he is made aware of his daughters’ plan to see their significant others, he conspires to switch them with the three foreigners and thus intercept the couples’ reunions:

each one shall change his name:

> Maister Uandalle, you shall take Heigham, and you
>
> Younge Haruie, and monsieur Delion Ned,
>
> And vnder shadowes be of substance sped (Haughton)

According to Pisaro’s plot, when Laurentia, Marina, and Mathea mistakenly sleep with the foreign suitors, Pisaro will then have his way. In the seventeenth century, it was looked down upon for a young woman to lose her virginity to a man whom she did not intend to marry. Weir clarifies,

> A precontract, in that period, was a promise before witnesses to marry followed by sexual intercourse. A precontract was as binding as a marriage and could only be dissolved by the ecclesiastical authorities. By 1330 the law recognised that an existing precontract with one partner was a bar to marriage with another and sufficient to bastardize any children of a subsequent marriage. (119)

After the planned intimate events take place, Pisaro will have even more authority to push his agenda, due to the expectations of the time. The trio’s father worries about his ability to increase his wealth when his daughters are interested in marrying men who owe him money. To secure his capital, Pisaro deceives those around him in a way that could profit him. Therefore, Pisaro advances and guards himself at the expense of others.

Another relationship in which a man exerts all options to protect himself and what he values while disregarding the vulnerability of others is marriage. In the play *Look About You*, Lord Falconbridge feels insecure in his relationship with his wife due to the interest Prince Richard has taken in her (Scene 2). To protect his feelings from being hurt through the act of being cuckolded, Falconbridge creates a plan to watch the moves of Prince Richard (Scene 2). Lord Falconbridge explains, “Prince Richard's very kind; I know his kindness. / He loves me, but

he loves my lady better” (Scene 2). He feels threatened and anxious by the behavior that the Prince has been displaying toward his wife. Alexandra Shepard, in her article “From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700,” elaborates, “Manhood was won through the assertion of heterosexual male identity, ideally within the confines of marriage, which in turn rested on men’s efforts to tame female sexuality, itself paradoxically constructed as naturally unruly and largely beyond control. The patriarchal male, therefore, was rendered perpetually anxious by the specter of his own cuckolding” (2005). The task of controlling his wife's desires was considered to be nearly impossible. This situation leads to further tension in the Falconbridges’ marriage. Prince Richard’s flirtatious acts toward Lady Falconbridge are seen not only as an attack on Lord Falconbridge's marriage but also on his manhood. Bradley Irish, in “Jealousy in Early Modern England,” argues, “honor, and the related reputation, were concepts broadly guarded by the protective functioning of jealousy in the period” (441). To protect himself from vulnerability and decrease his anxiety, Falconbridge creates a plan that he believes will protect him from his fate of becoming a cuckold. Falconbridge explains, “No more. I'll watch him; I'll prevent his game” (Scene 2).

As the play continues, Lord Falconbridge carefully watches Prince Richard's movements and meticulously dissects their conversations to avert any trickery:

RICH. Sir Richard, first make suit unto my father,

I'll follow you to Court, and second you.

FAU. Follow to court, ha? then I smell a rat,

It's probable he'll have a bout again;

Long siege makes entrance to the strongest fort.

It must not be; I must not leave him here. [*Aside*.

> Prince Richard, if you love my brother's good,
>
> Let's ride back to the court: I'll wait on you. (Scene 10)

Still at his manipulative games with Lady Falconbridge, Prince Richard commands Falconbridge to leave and seek his father, the King (Scene 10). He tries to provide the husband comfort by stating how he will be right behind him (Scene 10). In spite of Prince Richard's promise to follow, Falconbridge instantly recognizes the young man’s underlying motive for dismissing him first. Following his absence, Prince Richard would be left alone with Lady Falconbridge once more (Scene 10). While she has not given in to Prince Richard’s request thus far, Falconbridge is not confident in her ability to maintain this status under the constant pressure the Prince is applying (Scene 10). For this reason, Falconbridge appeals to the emotions of his high ranking officer and friend to persuade Prince Richard that the men should exit together (Scene 10).

The anxiety of being cuckolded starts to overwhelm Lord Falconbridge and consume his life. He finds himself struggling to obey authority and trust his spouse. Kellye Corcoran cautions, “the shame and ridicule associated with being a victim of marital infidelity, coupled with the oppressive cult of masculine honor, led men to feel compelled to acts that were inherently disruptive of social life” (544). Falconbridge goes from portraying himself as a confident and proud man to an anxious and suspicious one. These new profound emotions lead Falconbridge, master of the household, to confide in and ask house servant, Block, to eavesdrop on the conversation between Lady Falconbridge and Prince Richard (Scene 10). Falconbridge states, “Leave quaffing, sirrah, listen to their talk” (Scene 10). The servant replies, “O, while you live, beware, two are sooner seen than one; besides, bear a brain, master, if Block should be now spied, my madam would not trust this sconce neither in time nor tide” (Scene 10). Block tries to warn his master of the consequence that could arise through the discovery of their

eavesdropping. Falconbridge seems to understand where Block is coming from and dismisses his presence (Scene 10). In spite of the directions he has given, he stays and waits for his wife to make a verbal or physical move on King Richard (Scene 10). Falconbridge’s behavior is highly out of character but necessary in his endeavor to protect his wife and honor. When Lady Falconbridge gives in to Prince Richard, as he predicts, he will be there to put a stop to it before any unfaithful acts can take place. No man is allowed to cuckold Lord Falconbridge with the careful eye he keeps on his wife. However, this does not stop him from trying to cuckold another woman's husband.

When a man was deemed a cuckold, he was given a set of metaphorical horns to wear that represented his wife’s infidelity. In *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, “goat” alludes to the concept that “Pan and the Satyr, lustful by nature, have goat-like features: horns, hairy legs, hooves. The goat is an attribute of lust personified” (Hall 144). This explains why men whose wives had cheated on them bore the horns of their partners’ infidelity. While Lord Falconbridge despises the thought of receiving horns, he never hesitates to help other men gain theirs. Unbeknownst to Falconbridge, the pretty lady who he hopes to steal away is his own beloved in disguise (Scene 28). Lord Falconbridge boldly expresses his sexual desires for the merchant’s wife:

> An old knave,
>
> And cannot be content with such a peat!
>
> Come to my closet, girl, make much of me;
>
> We'll appoint a meeting-place some twice a week,
>
> And I'll maintain thee like a lady, ha! (Scene 28)

For clarity, he is offering not merely one night of intimacy but twice a week indefinitely. Falconbridge goes on to brag about his ability to please the woman with no thought given to her husband or his own wife. Upon the transpiring of these events and the merchant being made aware, his horns would be on display for all individuals to notice. The merchant would be deemed as incapable of controlling his wife’s lust and viewed as weak in his role as head of household. Therefore, this man’s image would be considerably affected by the actions in which Falconbridge is persuading the merchant’s wife to engage. In his process of convincing this lady to have sex with him, Falconbridge, like Prince Richard, speaks words of comfort to make the situation seem permissible. Falconbridge asserts, “Thy husband was an unthrift and a bankrupt. / And he be so, tut, thou hast favour store; / Let the knave beg, beauty cannot be poor” (Scene 28). Her husband, according to Falconbridge, does not deserve someone of her beauty, which justifies their betrayal. As stated previously, women were viewed as not being able to control their feelings of eroticism, which makes Lord Falconbridge view them as easy prey. Just as he assumes that his own wife would give in to Prince Richard with a few sweet conversations, he hopes for the same response in this situation.

The final tactic Falconbridge employs is dismissing the woman’s need to be loyal to her husband, a quality he admired in his own wife earlier:

> FAU. Ha! do he so? then give him tit for tat,
>
> Have one so young and fair, and loves another?
>
> He's worthy to be cuckolded, by the mass!
>
> What is he, old or young? (Scene 28)

Falconbridge addresses the unacceptable behavior of the merchant toward his young, pretty wife. He advocates for her to cuckold her husband in return, due to her husband’s past unfaithfulness.

In contrast, Falconbridge is still keeping a watchful eye on Prince Richard and his wife after this attempted seduction. In the following scenes, when one member of the couple is present, so is the other. Through the strategy that he imposes on the merchant’s wife, Lady Falconbridge would be excused in her adulterous deeds with the Prince. He targets another man’s behavior toward his own wife by manipulating the feelings she has expressed about her husband cheating on her. Falconbridge intends for his acts of misguidance to coax the merchant’s wife into his cheating scandal. Thereupon, Lord Falconbridge guards his wife from the tactics her pursuer utilizes on her while concurrently employing his own on another woman.

In conclusion, late-sixteenth century plays portrayed a common role among men: through the use of power and sly trickery, a man would protect what was deemed as his greatest prize while fooling another man out of his own. Pisaro, in *A Woman Will Have Her Will*, prioritizes wealth and ways of accumulating it over the true happiness of his three daughters. To ensure a promising future for himself, he scouts out three more suitable lovers for his daughters and prevents his daughters from seeing their chosen suitors. These men would allow Pisaro to have a wider network of close partnerships with other foreigners, which would benefit his career. On the contrary, his daughters are indifferent to this matter and insist upon their marriage to the three debtors. Pisaro uses his given rights as Laurentia, Marina, and Mathea’s father to influence the ladies’ decision about marriage as a way to financially promote himself. When this does not work, he employs a variety of manipulation tactics to aid himself in getting his way. This form of manipulation was also present in marriages of the time. *Look About You* explores the anxiety men felt when threatened with the possibility of being cuckolded. To prevent this type of humiliation, Falconbridge carefully watches the interactions between his wife and Prince Richard. Simultaneously, Falconbridge proposes the same infamous act of cuckoldry to the

merchant’s wife. He argues and explains how their acts of infidelity are justified through the unfaithful behavior in which her husband has already been engaging, thus trying to break down her resistance. In each play, the men gauge themselves to be more important than those they are supposed to lead, and understanding this concept gives them the confidence to deploy their plans and hope for a successful outcome.

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Thomas Dekker's Eden: The Unattainable Virtue

by Lana Lowe

Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* follows the character of Fortunatus, who, after finding favor with Fortune, is given the chance to choose one of various gifts and chooses riches. Upon misusing his new gift, he dies and leaves the magic purse he received from Fortune, as well as a stolen magic hat, to his two sons with instructions not to divide them and to use them wisely, which both sons disobey. Dekker explores themes of morality within the play, presenting personifications of Fortune, Vice, and Virtue, with tangible effects on characters' lives. Virtue and Vice both plant trees at the beginning of the play to represent their respective natures, and through these trees, Dekker constructs an alternative to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden, they represent virtue unsullied by vice. After eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the knowledge they gain brings shame, and they are thus no longer welcome in the Garden. In contrast, Dekker's characters already embody moral failings and so are not tempted as Adam and Eve are. Eating Vice's fruit alters their outward appearance, while Virtue's fruit cleanses them. However, these characters are not virtuous before or after eating the fruit; in fact, there is no truly virtuous character within the play, not even Virtue herself. Instead, she represents an abstract type of virtue, one that is performative in nature. Virtue's fruit allows a person to attain virtue; however, just as the knowledge of good and evil is out of reach to Adam and Eve, the characteristics of virtue are unattainable to the characters of *Old Fortunatus.*

The characters in the play misunderstand virtue, making it harder for them to achieve it. Fortunatus chooses wealth after being offered the choice between "wisdom, strength, health, beauty, long life, and riches" (Dekker 300). He assumes that with money, he can gain the rest.

However, Fortune implies that wisdom is the correct choice. Later, while lamenting that there is nowhere that welcomes her, Virtue expresses that Wisdom has “fled to some bosom: if I meet that breast, / There I’ll erect my temple, and there rest” (315). This speech reveals that she needs someone wise to extol virtue. *Wisdom*, as defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, can mean the “capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct” (“Wisdom, *N.*”). This definition suggests that virtue cannot exist without wisdom. And by her own admission, even Virtue is seeking wisdom. Nonetheless, she still acts as a judge of what constitutes virtue throughout the play, revealing that for her, appearing morally right is more important than actually being morally right. This implies that the ability to judge what is virtuous might be more important than actual virtue, at least to Virtue herself. Again, wisdom is the choice Fortunatus should have made, because wisdom would have allowed him to achieve virtue. His belief that wealth can enable one to achieve all of Fortune’s other gifts shows that he is only aware of a superficial type of virtue.

Ampedo exhibits moral superiority and willful ignorance. Despite being referred to as “brother virtue,” Ampedo does not exhibit virtuous characteristics (Dekker 308). He remains passive throughout the play, staying away from the main action. However, Ampedo and the characters around him believe that he is virtuous, which is all that matters. He protests dividing the hat and purse, per his father’s wishes, but relents fairly easily, saying, “do you as you please, the sin shall not be mine. Fools call those things profane that are divine” (334). Ampedo thinks that his refusal to divide the gifts will spare him from corruption. Even though he likely does not use the hat, he is still complicit in his brother’s actions. In this mind, his brother is the “fool,” yet his own docility makes him the fool as well.

Andelocia assumes that once he has eaten Virtue’s fruit, it guarantees his virtue, yet he returns to the same negative behavior fairly quickly, chasing Agripyne and harming others to serve himself. As soon as the fruit has removed his physical deformities, he expresses the desire to regain his magical items, claiming, “O had I now / My hat and purse again, how I would shine, / And gild my soul with none but thoughts divine” (Dekker 361). If Virtue’s fruit is truly meant to purify him, and he believes this to be the case, then he has no need for his hat and purse. The use of the word *gild* specifically implies a sort of embellishment. To gild something means to apply a thin layer of gold, and in later uses an imitation of gold, to an object to make it appear as gold; usually this is for decoration or to make something appear grander than it is (“Gild, *V.*”). By saying that he wishes to gild his soul with divine thoughts, Andelocia admits that he does not plan to change how he acts. Instead, he will cover his flaws, similar to the process of gilding. He will embellish what he perceives as virtuous, in this case by thinking unspecified divine thoughts.

The character Virtue demonstrates a sense of superiority instead of virtuous characteristics; she desires to win over what is actually virtuous. *Virtue* is defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary* as a “moral quality regarded (esp. in religious contexts) as good or desirable in a person, such as patience, kindness . . . a particular form of moral excellence” (“Virtue, *N.*”). Virtue claims that once she finds the person within whom wisdom is hiding and erects her temple there, her appearance will change, and she will “shine in glory” to see those against her “conquered” at her feet (Dekker 315). She is unconcerned with the actual morals of any of the characters and readily admits that she will favor whomever is willing to eat her fruit. Near the end of the play, when arguing with Vice and Fortune, she boasts, “yes, in all countries Virtue is of price, / In every kingdom some diviner breast / Is more enamoured of me than the rest” (383).

She acknowledges here that while most follow Vice, there are a few who uphold Virtue, but she is greater because she only needs those few followers. The moral qualities of virtue can be further defined as the four cardinal virtues, justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude, and the three theological virtues, hope, charity, and faith (“Cardinal, *Adj*.”; “Theological, *Adj*.”). Virtue feigns some of these. For instance, when Andelocia falls prey to Vice, Virtue at first seems to show him kindness, offering that if he eats her fruit, then she will restore him, but first he must “woo” her (Dekker 359). She offers him justice but for a price. However, once he has eaten the fruit, she does not actually offer guidance. She does not argue against Fortune’s suggestion to take apples from both trees in order to reobtain his magical items. This decision sends him back on the path towards vice and ultimately results in his and Ampedo’s deaths. Rather than guiding virtuous behavior throughout the play, Virtue withdraws from the action, similar to Ampedo, only reappearing at key moments to see if she has “won” yet.

What Virtue actually displays throughout the play is pride and hypocrisy; she takes pride in being difficult to obtain and lacks compassion. *Pride* can be defined as “an excessively high opinion of one's own worth or importance which gives rise to a feeling or attitude of superiority over others” (“Pride, *N*. (1)”). This is clear from her first description of wearing a coxcomb on her head and claiming, “fools placed it on my head that knew me not, / And I am proud to wear the scorn of fools” (Dekker 314). This reveals her hypocrisy since she has just said, “Virtue abhors to wear a borrowed face” in response to the suggestion that she dress more appealingly, as Vice does (314). Virtue’s abhorrence of a pretty appearance is visible in the withered, unappealing nature of her tree and in the sourness of her apples. While this might appear to suggest that she lacks vanity, in reality, her vanity lies in her being disregarded and unattainable. She takes pride in appearing foolish and being misjudged, bragging that the path to her court is a

narrow, thorny, uphill, bitter journey (360). Likewise, she has traveled the world and found nowhere good enough to plant her tree, saying, “How many kingdoms have I measured . . . but no ground can prove / So happy; ay me, none do Virtue love” (312). Moreover, this speech contrasts with the boasting, mentioned previously, of only needing a few followers, since here she is lamenting a lack of virtuous individuals. Likewise, she admits that if this spot proves unfruitful, she plans to return to heaven and claim that she has been banished from the Earth. It is notable that the spot is described as a “wood in Cyprus” and later as “wilderness” with little civilization around (293, 354). So, not only has she already adopted a defeatist attitude, but she also is not offering a fair chance to the humans within the play to actually find her withered tree.

Virtue and Vice’s trees represent the trees in the Garden of Eden. Just as in the Garden of Eden, there are two trees, though within Eden there is no indication that one tree is more desirable in appearance than the other: “Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Genesis 2.9). However, the trees in the Garden of Eden represent slightly different concepts, the first being Life and the other, Knowledge of Good and Evil. Vice’s tree represents evil on a physical level, transforming whoever consumes it, while Virtue’s tree represents life and an abstract knowledge of good. It is also implied that Virtue’s tree leads a person to heaven. Both pairs of trees are surrounded by wilderness, but while Eden is described as lush with rivers, fruit trees, and animals, Andelocia describes his wilderness as follows: “here’s neither spring nor ditch, nor rain, nor dew, / Nor bread nor drink,” until he finds the apple trees of Virtue and Vice (Dekker 357). Instead of a serpent tempting Andelocia to eat, he is tempted simply because there is nothing else readily available.

Andelocia is the new Eve in Dekker’s false Eden. When Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they gain knowledge of good and evil: “then the eyes of both were opened,” and they become aware of their own nakedness (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Genesis 3.7). Likewise, after eating Vice’s fruit, Andelocia acknowledges his shame by saying, “I am beset with anguish, shame and death” and begs to die because his eyes have also been opened to his own moral failings (Dekker 359). He wants to die because he does not wish to face the consequences of his actions, and having eaten Vice’s fruit, his appearance now reflects his corrupt nature. Graham Ward describes the shame of Adam and Eve in their own nakedness, saying, “To admit what one is ashamed of is more exposing” (310). Andelocia readily admits his shame; however, it is clear that he wishes for an easy escape. Ward goes on to describe how it is notable that God does not shame Adam and Eve; instead, they shame themselves (312). This directly contrasts with Vice’s mocking Andelocia after he eats her fruit. This false Eden brings more corruption to already corrupt individuals if they choose the wrong fruit.

Andelocia, Adam, and Eve all feel shame centered on their physical appearances. Adam and Eve are most ashamed of their nakedness, while Andelocia is ashamed of his perceived ugliness caused by the horns that have grown on his head. Both of these cases represent vulnerability. Besides being a source of modesty, clothing also protects a person from the elements. Since Adam and Eve no longer have the safety of the Garden due to their disobedience, their nakedness makes them vulnerable. Metaphorically, they do not repent their actions, and by hiding, they break their relationship with God: “Adam and Eve are shamed and hide because their interest and commitment in their act remains” (Ward 313). However, their knowledge of good is “confused now with a knowledge of evil” (320). In contrast, Andelocia’s vulnerability is his perception of his own beauty and directly relates to his superficial and

shallow perceptions of virtue. Unlike Adam and Eve, Andelocia does not truly repent. He beseeches Virtue to cure him, but only because he is aware that by obtaining Virtue’s fruit, he will regain his normal appearance (Dekker 360). Andelocia is ashamed not because he has been caught in an act of potential sin but because others will be able to see his transformation.

Virtue benefits from shame more than Vice does, for if people have no sense of shame, then they will not recognize what is virtuous. Ward presents the idea that shame does not necessarily correlate with wrongdoing and that “shame is not always associated with guilt” (311). Andelocia demonstrates that he does not feel guilty for eating Vice’s fruit and certainly not for his actions of abducting Agripyne beforehand (Dekker 354). Additionally, Virtue recognizes the concept of shame as something that supports her power when she argues with Vice, “why that’s my glory too, for by their shame, / Men will abhor thee and adore my name” (383). Virtue is saying that regardless of people falling to Vice, they will still inevitably support her. If they are destroyed by Vice, they will recognize the virtue they lack, and others will also be more willing to follow Virtue, so they do not end up like Vice’s followers.

According to Virtue, the character who comes closest to exhibiting true virtue is Shadow. Near the end of the play, once Virtue has been crowned the victor over both Fortune and Vice, Virtue reveals that she herself is an imitation by telling Shadow, “I am a counterfeit, you are the true; / I am a shadow, at your feet I fall” (Dekker 384). She takes the mantle of Shadow upon herself and gives him the title of Virtue. If Virtue is taken literally in this moment, then she is claiming that her entire being has been a pretense. She has only embodied virtue superficially, while Shadow has demonstrated what she perceives as virtue through his actions. Similarly, this is a broader message to the audience, that virtue lives inside of them, and it is through action that virtue may be victorious. Returning to the definition of virtue, Shadow has shown kindness

through his loyalty to both Andelocia and Ampedo. Also, it is Shadow who runs for help when Fortunatus is dying (Dekker 332). He shows patience through his participation in Andelocia’s schemes to distribute apples to the court, something that could have resulted in his death (362). His humility comes across as genuine; however, like the other characters, Shadow does not achieve virtue due to his compliance. Similar to Ampedo, he is indifferent to the sins being committed around him, but unlike Ampedo, he actively participates in much of the action of the play. He does not try to deter Andelocia from acting on his vices; in fact, he enables Andelocia’s behavior.

In the end, the consequences of eating the fruit of Vice or Virtue are basically the same, which contrasts with the trees in Eden. Adrian D. Covan describes the various attributes of the Garden of Eden and the relationship between God and the Garden, as well as Adam and the Garden, who is also appointed as caretaker. The problem of eating the fruit, according to Covan, is that the tree was an exception to all the trees being available as nourishment: “representing the decision reserved to God of what is right and wrong” (7). In Dekker’s false Eden, Vice and Virtue want their fruit to be eaten, as that will result in one of them “winning.” The knowledge one may gain from eating the fruit is irrelevant, and in reality, the knowledge is mostly an illusion. Certainly for Andelocia, both paths lead to the same ending. Either the apples of Virtue were too late to correct his path, or he was doomed from the moment he inherited the magic items from his father.

The consequences of eating the fruit for Andelocia are different than in Eden. There is no direct description of someone eating from the Tree of Life in Genesis; however, the fruit allows the person to live forever. Virtue’s fruit not only removes the horns Vice’s causes but also, it is suggested, leads a person to heaven. Virtue explains that, having successfully travelled the path

to virtue, one will find “heavenly sweets” and “towers of pearl and crystal” (Dekker 360). This imagery, specifically of pearls and crystal, is found in descriptions of the gates and streets of heaven in Revelation, indicating that eating the fruit from Virtue’s tree allows one to reach heaven (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*). In the Garden of Eden, eating the fruit results in death. God tells Adam, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Genesis 2.16-17). Bruce Wells writes of a physical rather than metaphorical death: “The humans were changed from immortal to mortal at the moment of their eating . . . physical death at any stage of life would count as premature for someone who had initially possessed immortality” (654). The consequences of eating the fruit for Andelocia depend on which fruit he partakes of. However, similar to how Adam and Eve are unable to maintain immortality after being cast out of Eden, the characters Fortunatus, Ampedo, and Andelocia all have their lives cut short due to the use and misuse of their magical items, and ultimately by becoming part of the personified Virtue and Vice’s competition.

Within the play, this false virtue results in death. At first, Andelocia would rather die than face the truth of his actions. And rather than being cast out of the garden, a type of spiritual death, and not allowed to take anything, like Adam and Eve, he is encouraged to take fruit from both trees and return to court (Dekker 361). This moment not only reveals his lingering desire to return to his old habits but also portrays the gifts of Virtue as merely a pretty façade. Since he is no longer physically deformed, he can return to civilization. In contrast, Adam and Eve’s nakedness must be covered before they can join a civilization outside of Eden. It is Fortune who encourages Andelocia to return to court, and after he eats her fruit, Virtue does not talk to him again. Her next line asks Vice if she has won yet (361). Since he is given little guidance from

Virtue, Andelocia returns to Vice rather quickly by causing mayhem at court in the name of revenge. After being caught, he once again begs to die, but this time he truly realizes his faults: “Virtue, forgive me! for I have transgressed / Against thy laws; my vows are quite forgot” (379). He acknowledges that he abused the riches and knowledge he received and takes accountability for his actions. However, this has nothing to do with Virtue. Arguably, Andelocia takes accountability because he has just witnessed his brother Ampedo’s death as a direct consequence of his actions. He says, “O miserable, miserable soul! / Thus a foul life makes death to look more foul,” and though he seems to be talking about Ampedo’s death, the “foul life” is likely his own (378). Through his brother’s death, he anticipates his own and realizes how he has caused his own downfall, lamenting that he deserves to die over Ampedo.

Ampedo and Andelocia serve as foils for each other, but both fall short of true virtue. Though Ampedo serves as the example of virtue and shares similarities with Virtue as a character, he does not embody the characteristics of virtue. J. W. Ashton explores the presence of folk motifs as a framework for the play’s moral and social satire. Ashton states that all of the characters of *Old Fortunatus,* with the exception of Ampedo, “are subject to the same weaknesses, are ready to cheat, to steal, to lie, to betray one another until in the end, with no observance of poetic justice,” and they “all come to grief, even Ampedo” (242). Moreover, Ashton mentions a minor theme of these two brothers, “one worldly and the other a scholar,” that simplifies the relationship between Ampedo and Andelocia (241). However, Ampedo’s scholarly nature reveals his passivity and the performative quality of his virtue. He cares more about being perceived as virtuous than fighting for virtue. Like Virtue, he abstains from the action, and that is part of his downfall. He only shows up to reclaim his hat and is then pulled into the mayhem

Andelocia has caused. Then, when he finally decides to act by burning the hat and purse, the decision is revealed to have come too late, causing both his and Andelocia’s deaths.

By alluding to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Dekker presents the idea that the world is already corrupt, and people will always return to vice. The fruit has very little to do with the characters’ corruption; instead, the actions of the characters themselves cause corruption. In fact, it matters little which fruit the characters of *Old Fortunatus* eat since both paths can lead to vice. In Dekker’s world, wisdom is the true means to attain virtue; thus, wisdom would have allowed the characters to reach heaven. Additionally, characters' misunderstanding or superficial knowledge of what constitutes virtue causes them, including Virtue herself, to move farther away from the concept of true virtue. Though most of the consequences for eating the fruit and the knowledge gained are different for Andelocia than in the biblical story, Adam and Eve share similarities in their shame and relation to death. Just as the Garden of Eden and immortality become out of reach to Adam and Eve, true virtue is out of reach for the characters of *Old Fortunatus*.

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Codifying Gender in *The Two Angry Women of Abington*

by Tyler Schrichte

Early modern drama provides a rich and varied textual landscape that allows for extensive examination of gender. The social status, and cultural understanding of, women are revealed through an analysis of various aspects of early modern texts. Women's political status, the extent to which they were considered citizens, and expected social behaviors are all readily present and readable within the texts of early modern drama. Judith Butler, in her seminal 1990 work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* identifies gender as a kind of performance. Butler contends, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (45). Butler's theory lends itself well to an examination of the construction of gender on the early modern stage.

This paper endeavors to examine the social forces and cultural conventions that constructed the category of women in early modern English drama. Since all female roles were played by cross-dressed male actors, those actors needed to establish themselves as women. Butler's framework for analyzing gender is perfectly applicable to the early modern English stage. Butler contends that gender is a performance; early modern actors embodied this performance as they "became" women. *The Two Angry Women of Abington* will be critically examined in order to identify the means of gender construction employed in the text.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *gender* as "The state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one's sex. Also: a (male or female) group characterized in this way." ("Gender, *N.*, sense 3.b"). This

definition aligns with Butler’s theory of how gender is constructed. The term *gender* will be used in this sense throughout the analysis. The theoretical connection to Butler is found in the cross-dressing that was ubiquitous on the early modern stage. If gender is performative, then the stage provides a literal example of performing gender. Cross dressing provides a significant line of inquiry into the issue of gender construction. The actors themselves contribute to our understanding of gender construction. Embodiment and speech reveal much about early modern thought regarding gender. In fact, the ways that other characters speak about women say just as much as the speech of women themselves.

Prior to critical analysis, a brief examination of the broader social positioning of *The Two Angry Women of Abington* is warranted. Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson state in *British Drama, 1533-1642: A Catalogue* that “[*The Two Angry Women of Abington*] shows the influence of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in its focus on the wives and its realistic English setting, which was otherwise unprecedented in English comedy” (70). This play stands out in the canon due to its focus on female characters. Stephen Orgel points out in *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* that early modern England was a patriarchal society (13). Thus, the majority of literary works primarily focus on men.

The Two Angry Women of Abington stands out for its focus on female characters. One way that we can understand the category of women is that, in relation to men, they were secondary figures; women, as a category, were understood to be lower priority members of society in comparison to men. The fact that *The Two Angry Women of Abington* was otherwise unprecedented at that point in the English comedic canon is foundational to understanding the category of women in Early Modern England.

Additionally, the concepts of a rationality gap and the triad of socially sanctioned marital states, identified by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford in *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* as maid, wife, and widow, are critical to an analysis of gender construction (64). Mendelson and Crawford characterize these marital states as pervasive stereotypes. These stereotypes align with Butler’s broader theoretical framework. Several passages in *The Two Angry Women of Abington* illustrate the maid/wife/widow trichotomy and the widely adopted idea of the “rationality gap” between men and women, particularly in scenes where the wives are in the throes of conflict.

The feud between Mistresses Barnes and Goursey begins with a game of tables (Porter). Emma Katherine Atwood points out in “Parlor Games, Spatial Strategy, and *The Two Angry Women of Abington*” that “gaming [in early modern England] has been seen as a masculine practice . . .” (133). “Tables” was backgammon. It would have been unusual for a woman to play or have proficiency at a game of chance. Since games of chance were thought of as a masculine practice, women playing them would have been out of the ordinary.

However, one component of gender construction that is remarkably ordinary is emotion. Emotions were heavily gendered. The gendering of emotions had multiple components. Jealousy was especially gendered. Bradley Irish explains in *Jealousy in Early Modern England*, “the structures of early modern patriarchy ensured that male jealousy was a constant (and pernicious) tool of regulating feminine behavior” (436-437). Much like the game of tables, *The Two Angry Women of Abington* subverts the expectations surrounding how jealously is implemented.

The appearances of the word *jealous* are sparse yet notable in *The Two Angry Women of Abington*. The following passage appears in the latter half of the play as Mistress Goursey further resists her husband’s attempts at peacemaking:

MRS GOUR. And what?

And a jealous, slandering, spiteful quean she is

On that would blur my reputation

With her opprobrious malice, if she could;

She wrongs her husband, to abuse my fame:

’Tis known that I have lived in honest name

All my lifetime, and been your right true wife (Porter)

The use of the word *jealousy* in is significant due to the subversion of gendered expectations regarding jealousy. Jealousy was manifested in a patriarchal social structure; typically, a husband would be jealous over his wife. That is completely subverted when “jealousy” is repositioned outside of a marital relationship. This seems like a one-off remark in anger, but Porter’s implementation of jealousy contributes to early modern gender construction. It is remarkable that jealousy is used in a quarrel between two women and not in a patriarchal, heterosexual, marital context. This implementation of jealousy was atypical. Women did not typically use jealousy in this way, as they had no social stake in doing so.

Near the end of the play, the Barnes’ daughter Mall discusses marriage with her mother; Mall encourages Mistress Barnes to reflect on the experience she had of transitioning from maid to wife. Mall urges her mother to reconsider her opposition to Mall’s and Frank Goursey’s union, as her mother once experienced the joys that Mall wishes for. Mall entreats her mother:

Do you hear, mother? Would you stay from pleasure,

When ye have mind to it? Go to, there’s no wrong

Like this, to let maids lie alone so long:

Lying alone they muse but in their beds,

How they might lose their long-kept maidenheads.

This is the cause there is so many scapes,

For women that are wise will not lead apes

In hell: I tell ye, mother, I say true;

Therefore come husband: maidenhead adieu!” (Porter)

The focus of Mall’s speech is her own transition from maiden to wife. She asks her mother to remember how excited she was to become a wife. The implication is that it would be a great social and moral wrong to keep a maid unmarried when faced with a good prospective match, thus further reinforcing the maid/wife/widow trichotomy of socially acceptable roles for women. This role trichotomy is further reinforced through drama, being one of the exceedingly few contexts in which a young woman could have a frank discussion about her sexual desires. Since she is discussing it with her mother and in the context of losing her virginity on her wedding night, it both fulfills the requirements of being socially palatable and reinforces the roles to which women were restricted.

Though it differs from today, in early modern England, gender was still a socially constructed force maintained by behavioral regulation and the repetition of styles, acts, behaviors, and speech. The early modern understanding of women, reinforced by popular culture, consisted of both idealized and maligned conceptions of women: on one hand, the silent, chaste, obedient woman; on the other, the quarrelsome and irrational woman who produced a great degree of social anxiety and threatened masculine authority. We can see these issues of supposed lesser rationality and the limited social roles available to women reflected in *The Two Angry Women of Abington*. While the play is at best minimally subversive, it nonetheless provides insight into how early modern England constructed its understanding of women.

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Authentic and Artificial: Walter Benjamin's *Aura* and the Nashville Parthenon

by Megan Trotter

Why do they come? What do they seek?

Who build but never read their Greek.

—Donald Grady Davidson, *On a Replica of the Parthenon*

A crowd streams in between the columns of the Parthenon, gazing up at the massive figures set into the triangular east pediment overhead that depicts Greek gods looking on in awe as the goddess Athena emerges fully formed from the head of her father Zeus. However, the visitors to this temple aren't bearing offerings to the goddess. In fact, when the statue of Athena was installed inside, a local newspaper published a photo of a man holding a sign reading, "Athena = Antichrist." From afar, the proportions of this Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee, mimic the Athenian original with stunning accuracy. Up close, concrete and steel betray the fact that it is a twentieth-century reproduction. Authentic yet artificial, the Nashville Parthenon offers a new angle for examining Walter Benjamin's theory of *aura* from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Is the aura of a reproduced temple and the goddess statue inside the exact same as the original one in Greece? Would the man with the sign have felt any less threatened by the new Nashville landmark if he'd learned that the spear Athena holds is not some pagan artifact, but only a repurposed flagpole from a McDonald's?

When speaking of the aura in regard to a piece of art, Benjamin defined it as an "authenticity" or "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history in which it has experienced" (Benjamin 37). This quality is not something visible on the artwork but rather it is a kind of energy formed

between a singular object and its viewer. It exists purely in the human brain. Any attempt to recreate this aura through a process like photography will only ever capture the way something looks. The aura is created through the history of the artwork. In creating a copy that does not have the same history as the original, it has failed to reproduce the original’s aura (Snyder 162-163). The Parthenon in Nashville is not a photographic copy of the original in Greece, but it is a full-scale architectural replica that stands on the other side of the world from the Athenian temple.

“The word ‘real’ is used to define something that is genuine, something that actually exists,” says the assistant director and facilities manager at the Nashville Parthenon in a video discussing the architecture. “Yes, our building is a replica or copy of another building that was built thousands of years ago, but the Nashville building is a real building, and it was built for a different purpose. Just because something is a replica doesn't mean it's a fake” (Bufferd). The Nashville Parthenon was not just inspired by the original in Athens; it was designed to be its twin in every measurable way. Its first incarnation was built in 1897 out of brick and plaster as a temporary display for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition that included several other reproductions such as an Egyptian pyramid and a bridge from Venice. The interior of this first iteration of the temple held an art gallery. During the six-month event, the Parthenon became so beloved that officials decided it needed to become a permanent fixture in Nashville. The reconstruction was again reconstructed in the 1920s and 1930s, this time reinforced with concrete and cast-aggregate while preserving the details of the original. Each column varies slightly in size and spacing, replicating the subtle adjustments the original builders used to create visual harmony in the Athenian temple. This time they also replicated the interior of the building, creating sculptures from plaster casts of the originals in the British Museum, ensuring every

decorative detail matched the ancient designs. The finished building mirrors the Parthenon of Athens in form and proportion: about 228 feet long, 101 feet wide, and 65 feet tall, making it as close to an exact copy of the classical masterpiece as any structure in the world. In fact, it could be said that it is currently even more visually impressive than the original, as the original temple in Athens is mostly in ruins. But what about the aura?

In 2024, an estimated 4.5 million people reportedly visited the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Its columns still stand, though some are broken or missing, while only portions of the walls, foundations, and the stylized triangular pediments survive. Fragments of sculptural decoration are completely missing, displayed instead in museums scattered around the world. Even though this original site is in such a deteriorating state, something about the place still sparks awe in those who visit, judging by reviews left on Trip Advisor. “Currently the Parthenon is covered in heavy scaffolding undergoing renovation work, but you can still see and appreciate the history and the amazing work that went into building it,” says one reviewer. “Knowing that it is 2,500 years old makes both the size and intricacy of the architecture impressive” (CPaM68). Another reviewer says,

> For all of us who have Greek culture as our benchmark, it is an emotion difficult to describe, which goes beyond the simple visit to a historical monument. Walking where Plato and Aristotle walked was a privilege. . . . The satisfaction of being able to step on those ancient marbles together and being in the cradle of our civilization was an incomparable experience. Although there was some scaffolding due to the deteriorated state of some structures, I loved visiting it. It is a unique monument whose greatness can only be appreciated by observing it live and direct. . . . It is impressive to walk through those ruins, which saw so many events and people important to our history go by.”

(Luis-in-Arizona)

Impressive, amazing, privilege, incomparable, unique, greatness—all words that suggest a certain aura created by standing in the presence of this original landmark. Do visitors to the reproduction in Nashville feel similar emotions?

When the estimated 350,000 yearly visitors enter the reconstructed Parthenon, they are not seeing a temple in ruins; they are experiencing how the building looked in its prime. Towering columns, a 42-foot tall, gilded goddess statue, and massive statuary give a stunning presentation. However, reviews on Trip Advisor are markedly different than the ones for the Athenian temple. “This building is impressive but it's a little silly,” says one reviewer. “I was underwhelmed by all of this, but I understand why there's some interest in the statue” (Kunfushuss). Even the more positive reviews seem a little lackluster. They make brief mention of the Athena statue, using bland adjectives like “cool,” “interesting,” or “nice.” Multiple reviews spend more time talking about the beauty of the surrounding park’s landscaping than they do the actual building. “If you've been to Greece you understand the disappointment that everything is in ruins,” says another reviewer, “so if you are excited to finally experience this historic place as it was meant to be experienced, you won't be able to. In fact, I believe it makes us Americans look ignorant to call this the Parthenon—it's just the building” (Scubagirl999). In the eyes of visitors, something is obviously missing. The reproduction is impressive, but something about it is not the same. As Benjamin says, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 36). The history of the Nashville Parthenon is different from that of the Greek Parthenon, and that difference is palpable to visitors.

This is further demonstrated by a recently proposed project involving the Elgin Marbles—statuary that came from the original Parthenon in Athens, but which currently resides in the British Museum despite arguments with Greece to have the piece returned to its home country. In 2022, the director of the Institute for Digital Archaeology in England proposed a solution to this dispute: scan the marbles with state-of-the-art technology that has the capability of measuring the pieces accurately down to the millimeter. Then, send those measurements to a robot which would carve a replica. Not only would the measurements be exact, but the replica would also be carved from blocks of the same marble used by the original Greek sculptor Phidias and his assistants almost 2,500 years ago (Trabucco). Those in charge of the British Museum rejected the proposal to scan the Marbles, likely realizing the next step in this project would undoubtedly be to suggest that the museum keep the reproduction and send the original back to Greece. Though on the surface it seems like a fair solution, visitors will likely be put off at the idea of making an effort to travel to a crowded museum and pay the cost of admission see a mere copy of a historical artifact. Something changes in a reproduction. As the journalist reporting on the suggestion of copying the Elgin Marble notes, “It is the difference, I suppose, between hearing a famous rock group and a rather good tribute band—in the latter case, something is missing: the awe of authenticity” (Trabucco)[1]. The creation of the Elgin Marbles in Greece, their transportation to London, and even the argument between the two countries as to their proper home are all a part of their history. That is something that could not be reproduced, no matter what authentic materials are used or how precise the measurements. The history of a piece of art is vital to its aura. Logically it follows that when a reproduction is created, it is a new piece of art

[1] Trabucco notes in his article that he is quoting Geoffrey Robertson, author of *Who Owns History?*, who makes the case for restitution of the marbles to Greece.

with its own aura—one that is completely separate from the original. We see this hold true in other reproductions of the Parthenon around the world.

Although the Parthenon in Nashville is currently the only accurate reproduction of the ancient temple, another temple matching the outward dimensions stood for a brief time in Germany. In 2017, an Argentinian artist created a creative installation that utilized a metal scaffolding set up to match the dimensions of the original Parthenon. However, instead of attempting to recreate the temple for artistic or educational purposes, this display was political. Across the scaffolding, the artist hung individual bags of 10,000 books that were either previously or currently banned. The whole piece was erected on the site where Nazi sympathizers burned around 2,000 banned books in 1933. The artist created a similar installation in Buenos Aires in 1983, where the scaffolding held books banned during Argentinian military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983 (Foster). A viewer of one of these installations could certainly be expected to feel an aura quite different than what they would feel on the steps of the Greek Parthenon. Another building constructed to be similar to the original Parthenon is the Walhalla in Germany. The dimensions of the building are very close, and even the approach to the building was built to echo the path from the Agora to the hilltop temple in Greece. However, that is where the similarities end. Inside, instead of a towering statue of Athena, there are around 65 plaques and 130 busts depicting distinguished citizens in German history (Loth). German visitors could be expected to feel the aura of national pride when inside this building. A handful of other buildings take on the façade of the Greek Parthenon, but each has its own aura—from the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia to the former U.S. Patent Office in Washington, D.C., and the Berry Hill mansion in Virginia, each holds a different aura that corresponds to that

building’s history, no matter the similar outward appearance. However, what happens to an aura when people are unaware of that object’s history?

Nashville built its identity by highlighting education and culture in contrast to the frontier around it. In the 1820s, Philip Lindsley, the first President of the University of Nashville, called it the “Athens of the West,” describing not what the city was but what he hoped it would become: a place of educated, democratic citizens. Before the Civil War, wealthy white Southerners used Greek and Roman ideas to justify their social system, including slavery. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, classical ideas continued to hold specific meaning for Nashville’s leaders, and they wanted those ideas to shape the city’s public image. The United Daughters of the Confederacy, founded in Nashville in 1894, played a major role in promoting Confederate memory through monuments and school curricula. The architect of the Nashville Parthenon itself was a proud Confederate veteran. Given the South’s classical traditions tied to slavery, the Exposition’s Jim Crow message, and the strong Confederate atmosphere during its construction, the Nashville Parthenon’s aura was infused with that history (Marquardt). In a 2018 website article, one Nashville critic notes:

> Although the magnificent statue of the goddess in the cella (the tallest indoor statue in the country) makes the Nashville Parthenon a more accurate replica of the Athenian Parthenon, she is not my city’s patron goddess. The public receives her as the goddess of Athens, not the goddess of Nashville. In a city with over 2,000 churches, there was not a god of the Nashville Parthenon. But this monument still makes a claim about Nashville’s right to a classical inheritance, even if we as a city no longer acknowledge what the original architects of this monument intended with this inheritance. (Marquardt)

However, does the monument really still retain the aura of its Confederate-linked history if no one is aware of it? Out of nearly 5,000 reviews on Trip Advisor, only two people mention the Confederate ties to the Parthenon, and both instances are only a passing mention of the architect. Not a single visitor voices concern about the landmark’s origins. If we don’t know the history behind something, it changes its perceived aura. Would the man wielding the “Athena = Antichrist” sign have changed his opinion if he’d known the link to the Confederate history of the temple and the statue inside—that, to its creators, it did not mean the worship of a goddess, but instead the glorification of a world view? A woman viewing Athena on the same day as the sign-carrying man is quoted as saying that when she first caught sight of the statue, she got chills up and down her spine. Two people, one artistic object, two different sentiments. Co-occurring auras. As one student of Benjamin notes, “when the relationship between audience and art-object is reversed so that the audience sees what it pleases in the work, the audience simply projects its own psychology, needs, and obsessions onto the work and sees a standardized echo of itself: thereby it learns nothing” (Todd). Since an aura relies on the history of the object and the person viewing it, it follows that an object’s aura hinges on the knowledge of the individual viewer.

The concept of co-occurring auras—multiple, simultaneous experiences of the same object—extends far beyond the Nashville Parthenon. It can be linked to modern day conflicts, such as what to do with monuments whose histories carry pain. When communities argue about whether to remove Confederate monuments, they are not simply disagreeing about historical facts. They are experiencing fundamentally different auras from the same physical object. For some viewers, a statue of Robert E. Lee emanates an aura of heritage, valor, and ancestral connection. For others, that same bronze figure carries an aura of terror, oppression, and the violent enforcement of white supremacy. Benjamin's theory suggests that both of these auras are

real—not in spite of their contradiction, but because aura depends on the intersection of the object's history and the viewer's relationship to that history. The monument's aura shifts depending on who stands before it and what they know. This raises an uncomfortable question: if a monument's problematic history is unknown to its viewers, does that history still shape its aura? And more troublingly, who benefits when certain histories remain invisible?

The recent erasure of LGBTQ+ people from historical sites and monuments such as the Stonewall National Monument in New York reveals another facet of the issues surrounding the aura of an object. Rather than arguing about whether to remove visible markers of a painful history, we are witnessing the active destruction of evidence that certain people were ever part of history at all. When queer contributions to American culture are deleted from museum exhibitions, something more than information is being lost. The Nashville Parthenon was always acknowledged as a copy, its separate history from the Athenian original never hidden. The erasure of LGBTQ+ history from monuments, however, presents a false original—a monument that appears complete but has had part of its history amputated. Benjamin believed that mechanical reproduction severed art from its aura, but the Nashville Parthenon and the contemporary debates about monuments suggest a more complex picture. Aura is not simply present or absent. It is multiple, contested, and dependent on the knowledge and subject position of the viewer.

In our current moment, where Confederate monuments come down in some cities while remaining fiercely protected in others, and where LGBTQ+ people are being actively written out of historical narratives, Benjamin's concept of aura reveals itself to be not just an aesthetic theory but a political one. The struggle over monuments is a struggle over whose aura counts, whose felt experience of history deserves recognition, and whose can be ignored or erased. The

Nashville Parthenon stands as a reminder that no monument carries a single, stable meaning. Every monument is the site of co-occurring auras, multiple histories, and competing claims to significance. The only question is whether we acknowledge this multiplicity or whether we allow those in power to dictate which auras we are permitted to feel.

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Not For Me:

Examining the Pitfalls of Homonormativity

through *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

by Malcolm Gora

The nature of the term "queer" and the identities and culture associated with it have undergone sweeping changes as the decades have passed and the legal, societal, and political status of the LGBTQ+ community have evolved. What started as a word used to describe anything odd or out of the ordinary, evolved in the early 1900s to be seen as an insult or an all-encompassing label for anything not cisgender or straight, and now serves as a moniker for a community rooted in resistance, change, and pushing back on societal norms. However, in the modern day, it is not enough to simply be gay to fall into the category of queer (Sayers 17). The number of "homonormative" members of the LGBT community has risen as the safety and equality of gay people has become more secure. Peter Drucker, in his book *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism,* describes "homonormativity," saying:

> Duggan has defined the politics of this reconciliation with everyday life under neoliberalism as the 'new homonormativity'. If heteronormativity is the institutionalisation of heterosexuality through the implicit assumption that people are straight unless otherwise labelled, homonormativity is a mind-set that does not 'contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them'. At the same time, homonormativity delivers 'a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.' (20)

This mentality of gay people choosing to uphold the standard institutions of heteronormativity, including its gender stereotypes and passive acceptance of the larger status quo, is antithetical to the foundation of resistance and change which defined the queer community in decades past.

This invites a new understanding of “queer,” not just as a term to mean anything that is not cisgender and straight, but with an added layer of an anti-establishment social identity. The harm that the “homonormative” gay can cause to the queer gay has been studied and noted in terms of an increase in racism, classism, misogyny, and other forms of traumatic violence between members of the LGBTQ+ community as they trend towards assimilation, as opposed to by cishet individuals against members of the LGBTQ+ community (Kelly et. al 1526). As these forms of violence are commonplace standards of heteronormative society, they are carried along into the homonormative mindset. Understanding the role of homonormativity in continuing the traumatization, victimization, and oppression of queer individuals opens up new avenues of understanding the ways in which queer and homonormative individuals interact: ways in which they are the same, ways in which they are different, ways in which they help each other, ways in which they hurt each other, ways in which they help themselves, and ways in which they hurt themselves. To dissect this relationship is to uncover the extreme mental and emotional toll of homonormativity on the homonormative individual, and it shifts the perspective on homonormativity from being an ideology of fitting in and maintaining societal standards into one that can quickly dissolve decades of progress through its requirement of political and social ineptitude. Homonormativity, like an insidious disease, takes root and slowly picks away at the self-respect, self-love, and ability to love others of the LGBTQ+ member who expresses or chooses to interact with it. It acts as a sort of betrayal of oneself: their identity, their history, and their social relationships with others in their own community. As with many societal trends, this

slow tendency towards homonormativity and the damages it can create has begun to make its way into the arts to be tracked, analyzed, and observed through that lens as well.

My paper focuses on Ocean Vuong’s novel *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* and the ways in which its major relationship between Little Dog and Trevor highlights the differences between a queer gay identity and a homonormative gay identity. Little Dog’s race, class, gender expression, and understanding of the world around him showcase his queer identity; Little Dog assumes an identity rooted in otherness, which draws the ire of the world surrounding him and passively resists its norms. Particularly, his expression of gender, his understanding of bottoming and servitude, and his acceptance of trans people fall in line with a queer identity and world view. Ocean Vuong repeatedly and intentionally uses and calls attention to this word, as using and understanding it is critical to a complete understanding of the novel. As Jian Zhu puts it, “similarly, the stigmatized words of ‘queer’ and ‘faggot’ have been reclaimed within the gender minority community, imbuing them with power and agency, which makes the narrator/author feel proud to embrace his identity as ‘the queer yellow faggot’ (199)” (3). Trevor, on the other hand, engages in homosexual activities and relationships, but is outwardly presented as a strong, straight, white, American male. Trevor also exhibits a problematic understanding of race, femininity, and the sexual role one should take when considering these factors. He actively hides his gayness and chooses to forgo anything that makes him feel like a “bitch.” His rugged nature and his outward expression of a staunchly male gender stand in stark contrast to the femininity of Little Dog. This contrast at times actively hurts Little Dog, who exhibits a sort of fear of Trevor rooted in his expectation that Trevor is no different than his outward expression of gender and identity. Trevor’s treatment of Little Dog, from the passive racism to the refusal of a submissive sexual role to his denial of his own sexuality lay the ground for a toxic relationship that is not as

mutually supportive as it should be and which is common of the wider, toxic, oftentimes violent or destructive relationship between the queer community and their homonormative peers.

One element of Little Dog and Trevor’s relationship, which is tantamount to the harmful nature of homonormativity in maintaining healthy homosexual relationships, is revealed through the roles which they take in their sexual encounters. Little Dog almost always takes the bottom role, a dynamic which is called into focus at times that particularly highlight toxic or harmful elements of their relationship with each other. The first is when Trevor tries to bottom and decides against it, with some choice comments afterwards:

> But it was over before it began. Before my tip brushed his greased palm, he tensed his back a wall. He pushed me back, sat up.
>
> “Fuck.” He stared straight ahead. “I can’t. I just—I mean . . .” He spoke into the wall. “I dunno. I don’t wanna feel like a girl. Like a bitch. I can’t, man. I’m sorry, it’s not for me—” He paused, wiped his nose. “It’s for you. Right?”
>
> I pulled the covers to my chin. I had thought sex was to breach new ground, despite terror, that as long as the world did not see us, its rules did not apply.
>
> But I was wrong.
>
> The rules, they were already inside us.
>
> Soon the Super Nintendo was on. Trevor’s shoulders shook as he hammered away at the controller. “Hey. Hey, Little Dog,” he said after a while. Then, softly, still fixed on the game: “I’m sorry. Okay?”
>
> On the screen, a tiny red Mario jumped from platform to platform. If Mario fell off, he would have to start the level over, from the beginning. This was also called dying.
>
> (120)

Trevor’s refusal comes not from a place of healthy boundaries or anticipation of dislike, but from an internalized fear of feeling like a “bitch.” In acknowledging the feminine nature of taking the bottom role in the sexual encounter and the discomfort he feels in taking it, he makes the assumption that Little Dog would simply be fine to take it instead. A number of ideologies are on display here, showcasing Trevor’s internalized homophobia and misogyny, but also importantly racism.

It is not uncommon for Asian men to be feminized by American society, especially in the wake of the Vietnam War. Maria Abizanda-Cardona touches on the gender dynamics of war narratives.

> In War and Gender (2001), Joshua Goldstein explores how gender identity becomes “a tool with which societies induce men to fight” (252), attaching the achievement of manhood to qualities such as physical courage, endurance, strength, honor, and sexual prowess. Men who fail to comply with this standard are publicly shamed and held as a corrective example, particularly by associating their lack of virility with homosexuality and effeminacy. Hence, under the militaristic cult of violence, gender and sexuality become “a code for domination” (Goldstein 333), whereby enemies and subordinates are gendered as feminine, and defeat is conveyed in terms of castration.
>
> These codes animated political and social discourses on the Vietnam War. The American intervention in the country was projected as a “Western ‘Orientalist fantasy’ of sexual conquest in Asia” (Goldstein 359), interwoven with longstanding racist discourses that conceptualized Asian males as effeminate, 1 and all-American myths of exceptionalism.

Trevor here is acting on stereotypes. His childhood and his understanding of Asian males lead him to believe that Little Dog is naturally inclined to take on a feminine, submissive role to himself, the powerful white American male. Trevor is desperate to maintain this image both outwardly and inwardly, as his internalized homophobia repeatedly comes into play and makes him question himself, his worth, and his relationship with Little Dog. His strict adherence to an American heteronormative view of gender, sexuality, and identity does harm to both himself and Little Dog. Trevor is actively frustrated at himself, stumbling over his words, throwing together a half-baked explanation for his denial, taking out his aggression on the controller, distracting himself from the reality of the situation he is in by replacing it with the game on the screen. This distracted state is what allows him to find it in himself to apologize to the boy he is dating, the person he should trust and value more than almost anyone; he understands it is wrong, but only when his conscious mind is distracted and he can treat the apology and the harm he is doing as an aside, rather than confront it directly. When Mario falls off the ledge into the pit, he is forced to restart the level from the beginning, which is compared to dying. When Trevor makes an attempt at shedding his own hypermasculinity to share this intimate moment with Little Dog, and fails, both he and Little Dog are transported directly back to a sort of square-one or level-start of their own; any perceived progress they had made towards leaving the unfair rules of the heteronormative world outside the room at the door and engaging the way they truly want to is lost at once, and this in essence is compared to dying as well.

This failure does even more harm to Little Dog, who allowed himself for a moment to be comfortable and have hope that things would be different, only to have the rug swiftly pulled from underneath him. Little Dog pulls the covers not just over his lower extremities, not just over his chest, but all the way up to his chin, hiding all but his eyes in shame that has leeched from

Trevor and into him. Little Dog has lived a life of service and appeasement and, rather than finding a respite from that in Trevor, he has run face first right back into the brick wall that is the rules of the outside world. This destroys Little Dog’s confidence and sends him back to the start of the level as well, in an instant going from being openly engaged in a sex act to desperately pulling the sheets over his body and hiding his reality from the outside world which has suddenly invaded the room and invaded the boys within. Little Dog’s assertion that the rules are inside of him and Trevor reflects this fact, and Little Dog’s desire to be apart from these rules further proves his unique identity compared to Trevor, who desires above all else to exist within them.

Trevor’s hyper-masculine, hyper-American identity confuses and harms Little Dog again during Little Dog’s description of their first penetrative encounter, showcasing the fear that Trevor’s homonormativity has instilled in Little Dog, thus making him slow to accept that Trevor might really be stepping out of his hard shell for a moment to show empathy. After Little Dog’s accident, he fears the reaction that Trevor will have to him and prepares himself for the worst, even going so far as to hear Trevor say “lick it up” (204) when he did not. This fear is rooted in Little Dog’s perception of Trevor as a similar threat to the ones he’s faced in his life up to that point. Little Dog, as well as the reader, making such a negative assumption about Trevor, could be construed as a moral failing on the part of those perceiving Trevor. However, what other choice does he have? Little Dog’s only frame of reference for people like Trevor is one of racism, homophobia, violence, and otherwise hatred. Trevor’s personality and identity itself degrade Little Dog’s ability to trust him and cause unnecessary harm in the process. Little Dog’s assumption about Trevor’s character in that moment is well founded and understandable.

This scene later develops with Trevor briefly shedding his homonormativity, showing empathy for Little Dog and helping him to clean himself afterwards; one of Trevor’s softest,

most human moments comes as he welcomes a truly queer experience out of love for Little Dog, which is a common theme for his character. He does not chastise or punish Little Dog in any way. Instead, he washes him, cares for him, and makes him feel like things will be okay. This is the first time Trevor accepts a non-heteronormative outcome in their relationship, so to speak, and instead allows the two of them to be mutually accepting of their queerness and vulnerability. Trevor steps outside the bounds of his masculine identity, unbothered by the “faggotry,” and engages in mutual emotional support. This one of the rare instances of Trevor not allowing his internalized homophobia to stand in the way of the health of Little Dog and their relationship.

> The scene and its ethics of care rewrite the racist and heteronormative politics of anal vulnerability, instead offering reparation in the form of a stylized baptism. Importantly, however, this baptism does not eschew the sexual: rather than cleansing and thereby excising the “filthiness” (according to a prominent homophobic script) of especially anal sexuality, the scene re-introduces anality into the very act of purification. (Lippert 52)

Ocean Vuong, rather than completely dismissing Trevor as a hopeless case of homonormative shame of oneself, offers this reprieve; this proof of hope for one moment, when Trevor fully accepts himself, Little Dog, and what they mean to each other, and they are able to be happy. The moment, of course, is fleeting, given Trevor’s eventual demise, but this part of the book is at least evidence that, had Trevor remained alive, he might have one day escaped his own internalized homophobia and adopted a queer identity as well. He is participating in key elements of queerness here, such as community, vulnerability, and mutual support, allowing Little Dog to lean on him and heal through him. If Trevor were able to have this acceptance of himself for more than moments at a time, he might have been able to lean on and heal through Little Dog as well.

The power of community and intracommunal support for queer individuals acts as a sort of crutch for Little Dog in the novel, particularly as he comes to terms with his and others’ gender and expression. The first time he is seen wearing a dress, the kids at school call him “freak, fairy, fag” (14). Later, after coming out to his mother, she says she hopes he doesn’t wear dresses. She warns that people kill men for wearing dresses. Little Dog, of course, “had worn a dress before—and would do so again” (139), but he doesn’t tell her that. She took less issue with *gay* than she did *queer*. She was more concerned that her son might be attacked for his outward expression and beliefs rather than his homosexuality. This mindset is a driving force behind homonormativity from within the queer community: the belief that it is safer to be “normal” and gay, than to be queer. Little Dog is repeatedly made to feel shame by those around him for presenting himself in any way other than masculine. Little Dog does not, however, internalize this and spread it to others, instead opting to show support for and find inspiration in others who also don’t strictly adhere to societal gender expectations.

For example, Little Dog describes a trans woman called Marin who lives in his community. He describes the hate she receives and admires her passive resilience. He describes the clothes she wears and the way she carries herself as a “middle finger” (145) to the people who levy insults and threats in her direction. One of the most pressing internal conflicts within the queer community is rooted in the minimal acceptance of trans people.

> Stone (2009) conducted a systematic examination of the attitudes of gay men and lesbians towards transgender inclusion within the queer movement; she interviewed lesbian and gay men in the Midwest queer activist scene and found that lesbians were more likely to express a sense of ambivalence regarding trans inclusion, while gay men were unlikely to express ambivalence, expressing either clear support or clear opposition

> for trans inclusion. This research reveals that the acceptance of transgender individuals within the queer movement has been inconsistent at best, and that the legacies of trans exclusion remain salient today. (Kelly et al. 1526)

Gay men and lesbian women often struggle to express clear support of their transgender counterparts, but Little Dog here uses powerful language to describe one of the most marginalized members of both his local community and the queer community at large. Little Dog has been there, in his own way, and uses that experience of being shamed and warned against gender nonconformity as a source of empathy and support rather than a source of fear and vitriol. It is a small detail in the grand scheme of the book but intentional on the part of the author in continuing to build an image of Little Dog as open minded, accepting, supportive, and queer.

Later, Little Dog describes an experience of witnessing a drag performance in Vietnam, wherein he discovers the usefulness of gender nonconforming and queer individuals as actors in a larger societal role of coexistence and healing, something which Trevor never came to fully understand, and paid the ultimate price for in the end. He learns that it is common there for drag performers to be hired in the wake of deaths in the community as a means of distracting from the sadness:

> As much as they are useful, paid, and empowered as a vital service in a society where to be queer is still a sin, the drag queens are, for as long as the dead lie in the open, an othered performance. Their presumed, reliable fraudulence is what makes their presence, to the mourners, necessary. Because grief, at its worst, is unreal. And it calls for a surreal response. The queens—in this way—are unicorns. Unicorns stamping in a graveyard. (225)

Little Dog engages in the healing process through them too, hearing one of Trevor’s and his favorite songs in his head while the queen sings something entirely in Vietnamese. Little Dog, in this process of mourning multiple losses at once, is able to lean on other queer individuals and remember his own queer experiences. Where the rest of the town sees the performers as a useful distraction, Little Dog recognizes the subtle hypocrisy of calling on a group the society has marginalized in the times of dearest need, and is able to use their music, identity, and culture as a means to heal nonetheless. Little Dog finds warmth, comfort, growth, and community in the queer in his most desperate time of need, and it helps him to find his way. He carries Trevor with him in his heart to this place where Trevor likely never would have stepped when he was alive. Little Dog stands as a deeply damaged but proudly queer symbol of healing and moving forward with the understanding that one’s identity is one of the only things one can truly call one’s own in the world. His healing stems directly from the support of others and the love of himself, and such a mentality sets him up for a lifetime of healing and understanding. Trevor was only ever able to escape into acceptance for moments at a time. When he allows himself to apologize for his own hypermasculinity, when he tells off his father on Little Dog’s behalf, when he helps Little Dog to be clean and comforts him, when he sits idly by while Little Dog dances slowly in a dress which he had previously been chastised for wearing, when he texts “please instead of plz,” (158), Trevor experiences softness in bursts, being queer only in the moments when he is desperate enough to need his queerness more than he needs to live in denial. In the end, it isn’t enough, and he dies trying to fill the void in his heart where he himself should have been. Little Dog and Trevor, while both “briefly gorgeous,” express that beauty on entirely different measures of brevity; Little Dog, on the scale of the short nature of the human lifetime and Trevor, for the few minutes of his life when he allowed himself to be completely human.

On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous is a fictionalized memoir of its very real author’s lived experience as a queer Vietnamese American youth. As such, it reflects the pains and trauma of accepting a queer identity. However, it similarly portrays the violence, sadness, turmoil, and consequences of being gay and choosing to leave queerness by the wayside. Little Dog and Trevor both experience tragedy and trauma throughout the novel; one from queerness and the other from its denial. The harm reduction brought about by choosing to maintain heteronormative structures whilst being gay is moot in comparison to the incredible trauma brought about by the internalized homophobia, racism, cissexism, and other trauma and negativity they bring about. Trevor, in his softest, most intimate, most genuine moments, is able to set his masculinity aside and embrace his love for Little Dog. He is able to accept the identity within himself that he spends the entirety of the novel fearing, slurring, and avoiding. Little Dog, on the other hand, in his most trying, pressing, difficult times, or while interacting with the most marginalized members of his community, is at the very least himself. He is not perfect. His life is not all he might wish it to be. But he is trying his best and succeeding often to be the person he knows he truly is because what makes him so different is, in the end, an undeniable part of what makes him gorgeous.

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Protective Nonbinary Performance within the Rape Class: The Gendered Ethnocultural Logic of Capitalism and Exploitation

by Morgan Henderson

In *The Hungry Tide*, Piyali Roy—or Piya, as she prefers—exists in the margins of multiple identities, especially in gender and ethnocultural norms in an international setting. Although a variety of interesting characters can be found within Amitav Ghosh's novel, Piya's uniqueness is derived from the fact that she cannot and does not inhabit neatly organized boxes of identity in either the United States or India and Bengal. Through the critical lenses of feminist and postcolonial theories of Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that compliment Jamesonian critiques of the cultural logic of capitalism and exploited classes of gender and ethnocultural identity, Piya's nonbinary performances of dehumanization, appearance and behavior, sexual autonomy, and a trifecta of educational, wealth, and power privileges are not only a direct result of rape culture but also a necessary form of protection and self-defense. This blend of socioeconomic, postcolonial, and feminist-gender critical theories highlights the pervasiveness of rape culture as Piya travels through Bengal's Sundarbans while she not only searches for the subject of her marine biology research but also navigates the binaries that attempt to subjugate her to the rape class by taking advantage of Foucauldian power-knowledge.

In patriarchal societies, the extreme manifestation of sexual domination of men over women or masculinity over femininity is rape culture (Johnson and Johnson NP72-NP73). While a myriad of standalone aspects (such as sexism) and multitheoretical critiques (such as ecofeminism or ecoMarxism) can support or analyze rape culture, the important unifying element is the need to enforce this binary of masculinity over femininity, which exists not only between people of the same culture but also between cultures, such as the colonizer raping the

colonized. Since this power is being exerted over her, Piya, under the weight of historic systems of socioeconomic and gender inequality that disproportionately affect women in India and Bengal and “thus becoming an object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control, engenders at the same time an intensification of each individual's desire, for, in and over h[er] body,” is granted a kind of knowledge produced directly from the powers that allow her to resist said powers for her own safety (Foucault 57, 59). Specifically with the integration of Frederic Jameson’s claim that “this whole global [. . .] postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American [. . .] domination,” this American supremacy/power structure boosts Piya’s ability—simply by being born in the US rather than Bengal—to discover and internalize knowledge for defensive measures to manipulate rape culture (5). For Piya, the four aspects of rape culture that are relevant to her nonbinary characterization pertain to dehumanization, victim blaming, sex and intimacy, and resource imbalances. More specifically, victim blaming will cover both her behavior and appearance, and resource imbalances examine Piya’s position in the hierarchy of privilege that education, wealth, and power provide.

To establish a working definition, dehumanization will be described as the systemic diminishing of the dignity that resides in each person out of the intrinsic fact that they are a fellow human. Rape culture, since it requires a so-called *rape class*, demands that said class be removed from its humanity to make rape more palatable and pervasive. When the rapists’ and rape victims’ demographics establish a consistent pattern, rape culture will state that the victims’ demographic is a rapable offence. If we “[c]onsider that there is a sedimentation of gender norms that produces the peculiar phenomenon of [. . .] any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions,” this can seem to “appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in

a binary relation to one another,” such as the apparent binary of male:female, men:women, colonizer:colonized, and rapist:raped (Butler 524). For example, since Indian women are consistently more sexually abused and harassed by men than Indian men are ever sexually abused or harassed by men, that means rape culture in India has decided that womanhood and any hints of femininity are reason enough to commit sexual crimes, or—in other words—that the gender norms for women include facing sexual trauma and abuse. In fact, the National Crime Records Bureau in India shows that rapes were reported every 22 minutes in 2012, which were overwhelmingly reported by female victims (Himabindu et al.). When she questions the ability of Indian women to speak on the global stage, Spivak remarks, “[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism [. . .] the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’” (61). This removal of women as speakers, as humans, as real bodies ushers in unchecked, unnoticed brutality against them as they are forced to endure the “underside of culture [namely,] blood, torture, death, and horror” (Jameson 5). Because of this, women and femininity are dehumanized to function as the designated rape class to silently maintain the violent binary of rape culture.

For the specific interplay between Piya and dehumanization, she receives this treatment not only from external forces but also from herself as a manner of protection. For example, when Piya is introduced in the novel, readers will notice that much of her speaking and internal dialogue are more reactive to the people around her than truly interactive or proactive. When Kanai first notices Piya in the train station, he is quick to flatter himself as possessing “the true connoisseur’s ability to both praise and appraise women,” as if he is at an auction selecting a broodmare or an art gallery critiquing a vase (Ghosh 3). Despite his secret thoughts to himself, Piya on the crowded platform instantly recognizes “the self-satisfied tilt of his head” as Kanai

“siz[es] up . . . and sort[s people] all into their places” and knows she does not want to be around him, although her wish does not come true and instead she is forced to hold an awkward conversation with him after her chai is spilled by his unexpected paper flipping (8). Later, Piya has the same observation and (dis)comfort level with the forest guard and captain of the clunky diesel steamer (29). In fact, Piya remains relatively reactive in *The Hungry Tide* until she hears Irrawaddy dolphins as she dozes in Fokir’s boat, and it is only then that her character explodes into a full-bodied human. Once she realizes that dolphins are nearby, Piya quite literally jumps into action, scrambles for her binoculars and navigation equipment, and grabs Fokir’s attention so that she can study the dolphins more clearly for her research (94-96).

The next eruption of her personality occurs when Piya realizes that a mob in a small village in the mangroves of the Sundarbans is preparing to kill a tiger. Despite the genuine threat of the tiger, Piya is enraged at the very thought of killing the big cat and has to be physically restrained and “half dragged and half carried” by Fokir (Ghosh 243). Additionally, Piya is closest to Fokir, a man who is more aligned with the crab boats and riverways of the Sundarbans and becomes like a “parrot [. . .] perching on the bar of a cage” when forced on land (173). Although the experience of women in Southeast Asia (SEA) long has been credited for its unfairness and inequality, Ahad and Akgül in their article "Female Body, Femininity and Authority in Bollywood: The ‘New’ Woman in Dangal and Queen" specifically argue that womanhood is a culturally-permitted derivative of manhood, or that femininity is merely a feeble imitation of masculinity, thereby validating the oppression and mistreatment of daughters, wives, sisters, and other women because dehumanized classes need heightened policing and punishing for simply being not-men. Piya, however, takes this dehumanization a step further—not only is she the watery dregs of a man, but she is also the bottom of the barrel of humanity, as she claims, and is

spiritually aligned with animals, turning the anthropocentric human:animal binary on its head. Because she is forced to inhabit the rape class as a woman, her decision to inhabit the class of “not-human” or “animal” largely protects her from sexual harms that the women’s rape class is subjected to.

As the term suggests, *victim blaming* assigns fault and responsibility of crime to the victim rather than the perpetrator. For sexual harms, victim blaming often scrutinizes the appearance and behavior of the victim to find a loophole to protect the sexual offender, which is essential to maintaining the rapist:raped binary in rape culture. Even “senior politicians [in India] type cast the victims of sexual violence,” saying that women “who dressed ‘provocatively,’ were ‘out late in the night,’ or were ‘behaving in a suggestive way that invited trouble’” perhaps deserved their suffering (Himabindu et al). Essentially, raping subaltern women is *perceived* as natural and needed to uphold gendered and imperialist binaries due to the “masculine-imperialist ideological formation that shaped that desire [of using women as a scapegoat and mascot of hysteria]” that extends from the pipeline of Freudian “daughter seduction” to “monolithic ‘third-world woman’” (Spivak 48). Since women, especially subaltern women, are seductive and therefore sinful in the patriarchal matrix of colonialism and racism, rape and harassment are both a natural side effect of their existence and also an appropriate response from men. Because of this threat, Piya leans into her “neatly composed androgyny” to escape harm (Ghosh 3). To protect her female body, Piya makes her appearance masculine through a cropped haircut and clothing most popular with teen boys; her behavior and body language are unwaveringly independent, strong, and confident “like a flyweight boxer” (3).

Even before the age of ten, Indian girls across a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and privileges can recognize and are fearful of the unwanted attention of boys and men; these

girls are also aware of the unfair blame placed upon them for their clothing and behavior, such as wearing shorts during recess and merely attending school in a female body. The threat of violence from nearby male bodies forces Indian girlhood to stop being a period of youthfulness and rather to start a lifetime of self-defense by removing themselves from public spaces like teashops and school (Aruldoss and Nolas). In their field notes, Aruldoss and Nolas noticed that one of the girls, despite being raised in a wealthy family that aimed for equality between their sons and daughter, was still given “homemaking” chores (such as cleaning the shared bedroom with her two brothers) by the age of six with no help from her parents in ensuring that the ones who make the bedroom messy (namely her brothers) are the same ones cleaning up the mess, which supports Butler’s statement that cultural practices over time lead to a false truth/“social fictions” of gendered roles being assigned to bodies (524). This in turn ties to how “via the medium of families, [. . .] a system of control of se[x and gender roles . . .] is established over the bodies of children” (Foucault 56-57). Piya, despite not growing up in India or Bengal, still absorbs these cultural practices through her immigrant parents. By removing her womanhood and femininity from the public eye, much like these girls, Piya is therefore safer by mimicking manhood and masculinity and roles of power and thus avoids gender norms that target women and girls.

Functionally, rape ignores bodily and sexual autonomy. By extension, rape culture casually integrates this dismissal into other areas of intimacy (such as dating and marriage) and the workplace. In her article “A Study of Sexual Harassment and Coping Behavior,” Pathak quotes the Thomas Reuters Foundation and a panel of 370 gender specialists who condemned India as the “worst nation for women” in regard to toleration for all forms of sexual harms against women (347). Pathak notes that both Indian women and men agree when surveyed that

stranger harassment against Indian women is due to these harassers simply being bored, suggesting that sexual harms of all sorts are less of a criminal act and more of an activity to pass the time or feel entertained (348). This leisurely harm of women requires a balancing act by Piya, especially in the cross-section of her American and Indian-Bengali identities. As an unmarried American woman travelling alone for work, she feels comfortable rejecting Kanai’s advances and barely has a second thought towards the crass gestures of the diesel ship’s captain (Ghosh 184, 277, 50). However, as a Southeast Asian woman, Piya is still warned about the dangers of the forest, and “not just because of the animals,” as Nilima alludes to her nephew, Kanai (144). Furthermore, during the major storm, Piya is trapped against the tree under the weight of Fokir’s body, struggling for air and freedom, “bodies so finely merged [that they] fused [. . .] together [and were] made one,” which can easily be understood as a rape scene, even if Fokir was protecting her from flying debris (316, 321). This traumatic event dismissed as an accident resembles the normalization of domestic violence and the legitimization of sexual assault as the equivalent to consensual, companionate romantic and sexual relationships in India, especially in popular media (Ahad and Akgül). Regardless of her fears and genuine trauma, Piya must still perform as an aloof and unbothered woman, so she can satisfy the social expectations of both American and Southeast Asian feminine sexuality and secured autonomy, again showing that her knowledge of the systems of power allows her to manipulate the system to appear powerful and assured.

In the trio of education, wealth, and power as types of resource imbalances, Piya again exists in a limbic area, never wholly privileged nor unprivileged. In the U.S., she is largely othered and powerless as the strange, dark-skinned daughter of immigrants who smells pungently of traditional Indian and Bengali cuisine. She remembers as a child feeling shame

about the “smells of home” that she fought with a “ferocious tenacity, [. . .] shutting [and] sealing them” away (81). Yet in the same country, Piya attends the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, which is considered not just a prestigious graduate program but a global leader of earth and aquatic research and education (Ghosh 62; “About Scripps Oceanography”). Her acceptance into the graduate program is anticipated without major fanfare, exposing the postsecondary education defaultism of her family, while many families both in the U.S. and SEA view education as nothing more than an impossible dream. In addition to Piya’s internationally recognized education, she is even offered a one-of-a-kind contractual invitation to survey Mekong Orcaella by a wildlife conservation group (Ghosh 253).

Because of these advantages which education gives Piya, despite her relative powerlessness in the U.S., she has access to a large amount of wealth. Her expensive technical gear, her freedom to travel, and the deep pockets of petty cash that could easily surpass the gross domestic product of multiple Sundarban villages offer Piya an immense level of power and control over the abject poverty that rules the mangroves (Ghosh 174-175). This financial faculty again makes Piya a nonbinary figure. Although American women usually have some economic authority, India mostly views money as the duty of the husband. Specifically, only 6% of Indians would approve of Piya as a woman being the sole authority of her wealth, once more framing her in the American feminine and Indian masculine simultaneously (Corichi et al.). For all of her American education and wealth and the power they bring, our intersectional interloper still finds herself largely othered and powerless in Bengal (resembling her American childhood). She verbally trips over her fractured Bangla when speaking with others at the train station and Nilima, in addition to the well-established oppression of women in SEA in general, such as the biggest crime hikes in India falling under “Dowry Prohibition Act, Rape, and Kidnapping and

Abduction” cases, all of which disproportionately have female victims (Ghosh 4, 207; Pathak 347). Spivak mentions this precarious identity by arguing that this “collectivity of familial existence [. . .] is discontinuous with, though operated by, the differential isolation of classes” (29). Her familial existence, neither in the family of kin and skin nor in the family of educated socioeconomic peers, is not a guarantor of community or continuity of identity for Piya. Capitalism—as an intrinsic function of colonialism and imperialism—separates her family from the lower classes of her ancestral home, yet racism separates her from her socioeconomic peers, further muddying the binaries of identity. The politics of Piya as a liminal being showcase the call by Jameson for postmodernism to create “the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale,” due to the laundry list of ways that Piya can describe herself and be described by others (54).

Arguably, her very existence is a kind of postcolonial postmodernism. She can only exist as she does due to capitalism on subaltern countries and female bodies in SEA, yet she is not fully limited by it due to the privileges she does have in the U.S. And yet again her seniority is easily undercut by her undeniable link to the subaltern. This oscillating measurement of power and no power, of privilege and no privilege by the resource imbalances Piya experiences is brought forward by Weiss in her article “Sexual Harms without Misogyny,” which sculpts the argument that in the court of law in rape cultures, there must be a multifaceted examination of accusation and defense for better accuracy. In particular, Weiss states that victims should not be viewed only as blameless, virginal damsels but as complex, three-dimensional people who have to navigate socioeconomic detriment, bodily harms, and inherent power imbalances in addition to their sexual autonomy (299, 300, 313). In other words, the sexual autonomy of a single woman can easily be weaponized by a superior at work, such as coercing her to perform a sexual

act to minimize the threat of being unjustly fired and becoming homeless, which is a legitimate threat in capitalist societies that link human survival (food, water, and shelter) to employment. The double standard of rape culture and the legal system that upholds it could state that this sexual harm was not truly rape, especially as the woman in this scenario technically acquiesced and was not forcibly and physically restrained, and therefore offer no legal ramification or recourse. This precarious equilibrium of Piya’s education and wealth that is easily undermined by her status as a woman in America and SEA is an intentional obfuscation by rape culture, as if she should feel grateful for being the highest-ranking member of the rape class. More realistically, though, Piya teeters on the edge of the prison wall encompassing the rape class, connected to both the protected and unprotected sides but belonging completely to neither.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Piya exists on the fringes of both her American identity and her Indian-Bengali heritage, a situation further complicated by her personality, which is neither wholly feminine nor masculine in either culture. In addition to how she freely and loosely performs gender, the rape cultures of both the U.S. and SEA criticize her simply for having the anatomy she was born with, yet demand that she act accordingly without complaint. Moreover, her fated condemnation to the rape class is destabilized when Piya takes systemic dehumanization efforts a step further and chooses to become an animal. And feminine sex-gender pre-determinism is destabilized again when she challenges the bluffs of victim blaming and becomes an amalgamation of masculinity and androgyny in appearance and behavior. Additionally, the infallibility of Piya’s sexual autonomy continuously ebbs and flows like the tides, sometimes a protective shield and sometimes a punishable target, all of which place her within and outside the boundaries of the rape class simultaneously. This sexual autonomy is closely linked with the safety that higher education and wealth give to Piya, which is

immediately compromised not only by her ethnocultural background but also by her female anatomy, yet she secures (even if marginally) her bodily well-being, which again impairs the jurisdictional capabilities of the rape class. Her relentless escape from one-dimensional subjugation is a testimony to Piya’s borderland, interstitial nonbinary existence—almost a surreal, endless, undefinable mission. Every aspect of rape culture demands the upholding of strict binaries with punitive exactness, and as aforementioned, Piya manages to subvert each of them simply by performing gender, ethnicity, and nationality in the dismantled spectrum as she wishes. However, it is possible that Piya’s inability to survive any rigid prescriptions of womanhood is a manifestation of the domination that Western cultures still have over Southeast Asian cultures, even after all the years of independence from the British Crown and other imperialist powers. Further exploration of this transient positionality would do well to include discussions of ecocritical feminism through the postcolonial lens, as well as to integrate more thoroughly the Marxist interpretations of the exploitation of nature, women, and colonial and/or post-colonial territories, especially other critiques of postcolonialists such as Aijaz Ahmad, who pick apart the Eurocentrism of Jamesonian theories.

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Embodied Stories: *The Hungry Tide*'s Alternative Epistemology

by Ben Kelley

As a novelist, Amitav Ghosh is essentially a storyteller, and he dedicates a significant portion of *The Hungry Tide* to the telling of stories—largely through the journal of the character Nirmal, recounting the last part of his life, but there are other stories besides throughout the novel. As is often the case, Indian stories are grounded in history. Ghosh himself has written, "History and storytelling are so closely joined together that it is impossible to pick apart their roots" ("Storytelling" 1552). Within *The Hungry Tide*, though, it is not so much the historicity of the stories that matters as the telling, the novelization, and the *mythologizing* of them. Ghosh has acknowledged that it "may be easier for novelists than for historians to 'address questions of emotion and affect'" ("Storytelling" 1560), but *The Hungry Tide* has no such distinction between the historians and the novelists—the keepers of history and the tellers of story are one and the same. For *The Hungry Tide*, what matters is the telling and *embodying* of myth, not so much that they are recorded or preserved. Ghosh presents myth and story as an alternative epistemology, one neglected by the West but preserved by the subaltern in the Sundarbans.

Stories are integral to a community: "Myths, deeply embedded in cultural traditions, function as a bridge between the past and the present, offering continuity in the face of historical ruptures such as colonialism, migration, and displacement" (Sivasubramanian and Antony 7). Ghosh shares this sentiment and has commented in an interview, "We know the world only in fragments and what concerns me about it is to explore the connections among people and their stories, to retrace the lost pieces from the mosaic" (qtd. in Luo 146). Of course, for Indian stories, there is always an element of "retracing the lost pieces," since as a colonized nation, Western stories and narratives have been imposed on them. *The Hungry Tide*, then, is part of an effort to

reclaim these stories, to create an alternative to the Western stories, to create "a counter-narrative to traditional historiography" (Sivasubramanian and Antony 7). Lusibari, Ghosh's setting for much of *The Hungry Tide*, was created with a myth, created as an imagined community: "The tide country was then conceived as an ideal community for a life in which collectiveness and solidarity would dominate" (Talib 144)—according, of course, to how the English colonizer Sir Hamilton understood a utopia, "in terms of a strongly imperialist and colonialist attitude" (144). Nirmal, a Westernized Marxist, even justifies Sir Hamilton in the story, trying to "paint the ethos of [Sir Hamilton] as a visionary whose ideas were too advanced for the common people of the Sundarbans during his time" (Rahman 307). To win favor in the Western regime, Nirmal absorbed the Western stories and even worked to justify them to others.

But it was not just Nirmal; Colonial India had absorbed these stories. Part of Sir Hamilton's vision was of a caste-less society, but it has been observed that the British Raj more strongly systematized and imposed the castes than had pre-colonial Indian society.[1] This stems primarily from James C. Scott's idea of *legibility*, that the government ought to "arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion" (2). Legibility, though, "[does] not successfully represent the actual activity of the society . . . only that slice of it that interested the official observer" (Scott 3), and it stems from the Western "high-modernist ideology," understood as rationality and "the scientific understanding of natural laws" (4). With this, the Western regime did not care about the stories told by the people; they cared only about the data which was recorded, which was written. This gets to the heart of the Western epistemology: Logocentrism, an epistemology which privileges the written over the spoken. For the West, knowledge is that which is observed directly, or that

[1] See Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*.

which was recorded from another observation. Notably, it is purely secular—again, it is rational and follows scientific understanding. This worldview has brought with it a demythologizing of Western society.

The scholar Stephen Crites, writing about stories and myth, looked instead at traditional (and oral, story-based) cultures: Contrasted with our “fragmented, sophisticated, and anti-traditional” society (295), stories for these cultures are “not only told but ritually re-enacted . . . [they] seem to be allusive expressions of stories that cannot be fully and directly told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants” (295). In these stories, particularly in the *sacred stories*—the myths of the people—“men’s sense of self and world is created through them” (295). Stories, and especially sacred stories, are how people understand the world, are how people reason and know. These stories particularly center around *memory*, particularly the collective memory. Nothing about the world can be known but by the past, which is remembered, and these stories encode and record the collective memory. So for Crites, “All knowledge is recollection! So is all art, including the art of storytelling” (300). This is where myth and story can tie in with history; another scholar, writing specifically on Ghosh’s works, described it as “myth rooted in history” (Graceta 2).

Ghosh manages to provide in *The Hungry Tide* a spectrum of perspectives, ranging from the fully storied to the Westernized and secular. This paper will look at a few of them: Horen stands in here for the archetypal non-Western(-ized) Indian; Kanai is a thoroughly Westernized India native; Piya is an American of Bengali descent; and Nirmal is an Indian Marxist revolutionary, living in the tension between these—caught up between the stories of his own people and of the Marxist utopia. Nirmal is a poet and storyteller at heart, captivated by his peoples’ stories but obligated by his Marxist views to adhere to strict materialist history.

One of the major stories in *The Hungry Tide*, retold multiple times and referenced by many characters, is the myth of Bon Bibi. This story is a central religious story and tenet of the people, and is what would be more widely understood as a “myth” than the other stories, or what Crites would identify as one of the sacred stories of the people. Notably, this story is not only retold but also re-enacted and re-embodied; people invoke Bon Bibi to relive the story in and through other people. But this is to be expected, “for a religious symbol”—such as, in this case, Bon Bibi herself—“becomes fully alive to consciousness when sacred story dramatically intersects both an explicit narrative and the course of a man’s personal experience” (Crites 306). The story of Bon Bibi involves the titular heroine saving a boy from the demon Dokkhin Rai, who—like Bon Bibi—is venerated by the people of the Sundarbans. The first time the story is introduced to the readers, it is being performed by traveling actors—literally re-embodying and re-enacting the story. The Marxist Nirmal dismisses the story, saying, “It’s just a tale they tell around here . . . It’s just false consciousness, that’s all it is” (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 84). But for the other characters, they can place themselves in the roles of the play and of the story; e.g. one native, Kusum, appeals to Bon Bibi just as the boy Bon Bibi saved in the story had done: “Help, O Mother of Mercy, O Bon Bibi” (91). Bon Bibi is appealed to, for “the compassion of Bon-Bibi myth is in contrast with the . . . government which evacuated and massacred the refugees” (Graceta 2).

But many other stories in the novel are shared by Nirmal. Nirmal himself is a contradiction—a poet and dreamer, but wanting to adhere to the strict materialist worldview of Marxism. His nephew Kanai described him as “perhaps the least materialistic person I’ve ever known. But it was very important for him to believe that he was a historical materialist” (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 233). Nirmal tells stories at various points, but he also records the latter years of his

life in his journal, which is gradually shown to the reader. These two reveal the different ways he delivers a story, and the underlying ways in which he thinks of stories. When he imagines teaching children, he imagines teaching them myths alongside geology, as he says, “goddesses are what they have in common” (150). The geology of the world for him is the way to know the stories of the river goddesses. Again, when he looks at the tide boundary, the *bãdh*, he sees it as “not just the guarantor of human life on our island, [but] also our abacus and archive, our library of stories” (168). The material indicates the story, the myth.

One of the accounts from Nirmal’s journal, though, is an interaction that stands in stark contrast to this more poetic lens, where Nirmal speaks with the villager Horen. Nirmal reads to Horen from an Englishman’s account of India, and multiple times Horen interjects that he knows exactly where this Englishman is. But Nirmal dismisses him: “How could you know such a thing? This happened over three hundred years ago” (122). Horen does not push the issue. But what we see here is Nirmal’s fixation on the *fact*, on the material, while Horen is embracing the story. Horen’s defense, even, for knowing that place in particular is that he has seen the very same way the moon shines: “I’ve seen it too . . . and it’s exactly as you describe” (122). *This* story of that scene is only *one such* story of that scene, which is played out time and again, re-enacted and re-embodied, so Horen can experience it just the same. But Nirmal leans instead on the written word and knowledge. The dichotomy in worldviews reaches its pinnacle in a brief later exchange:

> *[Horen said,] “They crossed the line by mistake and ended up on one of Dokkhin Rai’s islands. Whenever you have a storm like that—one that appears so suddenly out of nowhere—you know it’s the doing of Dokkhin Rai and his demons.”*
>
> *I [Nirmal] grew impatient and said, “Horen! A storm is an atmospheric disturbance. It has neither intention nor motive.”* (123)

Horen, again, keeps silent, acquiesces—though he does not change his views—symbolic of how the subaltern voice and perspective is likewise silenced and suppressed by the colonizers or those who have adopted their views, collaborated with them. Ghosh presents both views; as one scholar has said, “Ghosh’s novels are open-ended and encircled with various points of views”—but he is deliberate in doing so, “persistently acting as critique of the Eurocentric notions” (Graceta 5).

The understanding of re-embodied stories, which Horen showed earlier in identifying the place (and which Nirmal had rejected), is again shown in how Horen describes Fokir when a cyclone hits at the end of the novel. When the storm comes, Kanai is worried for Fokir and Piya, but Horen reassures him, saying, “If anyone has a chance, he does; his grandfather is said to have survived a terrible storm” (304). The thinking behind this becomes evident when this is contrasted with how Kanai later retells this: “Fokir will know what to do . . . Others have survived storms on that island, his grandfather included” (314). This is a fundamentally different way of understanding the world; where Horen sees it as a story that Fokir can re-enact and re-embody, Kanai sees it as a data point, mere evidence that these storms can be survived. The link between Fokir and his grandfather is accidental to his chances for Kanai but utterly essential for Horen.

In this same storm, the major books in the novel are lost to the sea: Nirmal’s journal and Piya’s records. This destruction of books, of the Western forms of knowledge-keeping, marks the defeat of the Western way of knowing. What remains is *only* the embodied and told stories. Language is story, it “is embedded in experience and cannot function as a substitute for it” (Griffiths 106). The Western knowledge divorces it from story, separates the person from the event, and this is not knowledge fit for the Indian environment; it does not survive. This is what

one scholar refers to as “the limitations of the ability of elite representation to encompass the reality of the subaltern inhabitants of the Sundarbans” (Griffiths 108). The Western way of thought does not meet the needs of the people of the Sundarbans, who developed their own epistemology to survive, to meet their own needs, and imposing the Western worldview fundamentally does not solve their problems. Ghosh shows that the Western ways simply fail in the Sundarbans. For only one aspect of the Western view imposed on them, Ghosh “demonstate[s] how a western idea of environmentalism fails to consider the subaltern voice” (Rahman 311) and ultimately leads to hundreds of deaths each year to tigers.

With Piya’s records gone and her guide, Fokir, killed by the storm, she begins a new project, mapping the routes of the dolphins that Fokir had known and along which he had taken her, and she names this project after Fokir. This project is based on the route data collected by the “only piece of equipment that survived,” where Fokir “took the boat into every little creek and gully where he’d ever seen a dolphin” (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 328); the only surviving equipment was the one that recorded Fokir’s story, his experience, his “decades of work and volumes of knowledge” (328). This is almost a hybrid of the two epistemologies—the knowledge is clearly Fokir’s, and certainly experiential, but it has been captured by the technology and recorded. This is technology recording the full *experience* rather than language divorced from it. As the only survivor of the storm, this may be what Ghosh is suggesting the solution is—how Ghosh is suggesting one might tie the two together.

Throughout *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh levels a subtle but persistent criticism against the Western worldview and epistemology. Primarily through the character of Horen and the rituals of Bon Bibi, he presents the subaltern voice as an alternative to it. Although he is ignored, the novel shows the ultimate defeat of Western knowledge, leaving only the native worldview alive.

Ghosh does not pretend either is strictly better or worse, though, and provides room in the conclusion of the novel for the two to coexist. He shows a need both for the record-keeping of the West—the epistemology codified in the written word—and for the oral tradition of the Sundarbans, the myths and stories that give meaning and shape to peoples’ lives—meaning in the story, and shape in the re-storying, the re-enacting of the story.

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Revenge and Justice in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

by Trenier Phillips

The Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) defines *revenge* as "The action of hurting, harming, or otherwise obtaining satisfaction from someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at his or her hands; satisfaction obtained by repaying an injury or wrong" ("Revenge, *N.*, sense 1.a"). Likewise, the *OED* defines *justice* as "Management of what is just or right by the exercise of authority or power; assignment of deserved reward or punishment; giving due deserts" ("Justice, *N.*, sense 1.1"). Revenge and justice are often shown, regardless of the enactor, to be two sides of a dualistic action: imparting one's will onto another for the purpose of rectifying a wrong committed by the recipient. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, various actions by both antagonists and protagonists occur for the sake of carrying out the justice they pursue. However, the condition of this justice is displayed by the characters therein as revenge. Likewise, a division is also created between legal justice and moral justice. The characters' biases and egos in *The Merchant of Venice* darken both their perceptions of revenge enacted against them and the justice they seek against their wrongdoers.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the pursuit of vengeance and justice begins in act one, scene three, with the actions of the play's antagonist, Shylock. Shylock stands apart from the other characters: whereas they are all Christians, he is Jewish. This aspect of his identity plays a major part in not only the derision he faces from other characters but also how the justice he seeks is curtailed. The scene in which he is introduced also reveals the basis of his initial search for justice within his bond with Antonio:

SHYLOCK. Signor Antonio, many a time and oft

In the Rialto you have rated me

> About my moneys and my usances.
> Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
> For suff’rance is the badge of all our tribe.
> You call me “misbeliever,” “cutthroat dog,”
> And spit upon my Jewish gabardine,
> And all for use of that which is mine own.
> Well, then, it now appears you need my help.
> Go to, then: you come to me and you say,
> “Shylock, we would have moneys”: you say so—
> You that did void your rheum upon my beard,
> And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
> Over your threshold. Moneys is your suit.
> What should I say to you? Should I not say,
> “Hath a dog money? Is it possible
> A cur can lend three thousand ducats?” Or
> Shall I bend low and in a bondman’s key,
> With bated breath and whispering humbleness,
> Say this: “Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last;
> You spurned me such a day; another time
> You called me dog; and for these courtesies
> I’ll lend you thus much moneys”? (Shakespeare 1.3.100-122).

Shylock is averse to loaning money to Antonio on the basis of the slights placed upon him by Antonio in the past. This is because Antonio, a Christian, both in the past and presently looks

down upon Shylock for virtue of both his business and religion. This combination of religion and business is an extension of the historical contention between Christians and Jews regarding business conduct, specifically, usury. Christians, bound by their faith, were unable to offer loans with interest to others. However, Jews were unhindered by such pious limitations and played an important part in the credit economy bound by Venetian law that sets in motion the events of this story.

On the subject of Jewish heritage and Christian antisemitism, Antonio is not the only character to deride Shylock for his Jewish heritage, as it is commonly used throughout the play by numerous Christians to insult Shylock. Antonio speaks in Shylock’s absence, “The Hebrew will turn Christian—he grows kind” (Shakespeare 1.3.171). Solanio recounts Shylock’s despair at the loss of his daughter and money, “As the dog Jew did utter in the streets” (Shakespeare 2.8.14). The attacks placed upon him by Christians in the play even reach his daughter, who scorns her father, robs him, deserts him, elopes with a Christian, and converts:

JESSICA. Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father’s child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife—
Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (Shakespeare 2.3.15-20).

The bond that confines the fate of Antonio is initially born from the seeking of not legal justice, but moral justice. Legal justice is bound solely within the confines of the law, acting as an auditor of legality to fulfill the will of the state. Moral justice, conversely, stands in part to fulfill the ethical imperatives of those who pursue it.

Shylock, after becoming the victim of further slights at the hands of Christians, turns his search for justice against a wrongdoer into a search for vengeance through the assurance of his bond. Though Antonio has played no part in Shylock’s abandonment by his daughter, nor the theft of his jewels, nor her conversion, Shylock seeks retribution against him for the harm done unto him by Antonio’s fellow Christians. His justice comes in the form of revenge against society as a whole rather than against Antonio as an individual. This point is made succinctly by Stephen A. Cohen: “The result of this effacement, however, is not a pledge of mutual forbearance but a promise of retaliatory violence . . . For Shylock, the bond’s utility is not economic . . . but sociopolitical, through its power as an instrument of the common law to nullify the class privilege that protects Antonio form Shylock’s vengeance” (43).

Not only do the acts done against Shylock by Christians mark his strengthened search for vengeance against Antonio, but they also bring to his mind the unequal conditions to which Christians desire his vengeance to go. Christians, though bound by a similar sacred creed to their God, seek vengeance that is biased and unfair to those of differing faiths. They view whatever vengeance they pursue as just by virtue of their being Christians; and because of this, Shylock, a Jew, is left outside of such graces:

> SHYLOCK. To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions—fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian

> is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die, and if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction. (Shakespeare 3.1.44-60)

Shylock scoffs at the idea of relinquishing his bond, as vengeance is often the right of Christians in the face of injustice. Despite how Christians may portray themselves outwardly, by his analysis, they endure the same wrongs, enact the same wrongs, and deserve to execute the same corrections against those who wronged them. What is their just revenge is his all the same, and as Christians in the past have done to their wrongdoers, he craves his just revenge despite the calls for mercy.

Shylock’s having made his desire for vengeance concrete, he wishes to seek his moral revenge through legal justice, the point of debate throughout the play’s fourth act. The play sets the court scene as the legal power of Venice attempting in all forms to provide a moral justice on behalf of Antonio by having Shylock dissolve the bond and instead take his money back with interest. Shylock contends against such merciful action, as he instead intends to receive legal justice. The bond to which Antonio is indebted was approved by both parties and is binding by the laws of Venice. Shylock even argues that the courtiers of Venice, the Christians who seek him to be most merciful in the dealing of blood, are hypocrites. Just as before, when Christians begged him not to seek revenge, though they are not averse to such harsh proceedings, they beg him to spare a Christian soul for profit when they themselves indulge in the bartering of flesh:

> SHYLOCK. What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?

You have among you many a purchased slave,
Which like your asses and your dogs and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish parts
Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,
“Let them be free; marry them to your heirs!
Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
Be seasoned with such viands”? You will answer,
“The slaves are ours.” So do I answer you:
The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought, ’tis mine, and I will have it.
If you deny me, fie upon your law:
There is no force in the decrees of Venice.
I stand for judgment. Answer! Shall I have it? (Shakespeare 4.1.89-103)

Shylock sees the institutions around him that should stand for impartial justice according to law as being flooded with biases that undermine the justice they stand to enact. The Christians once more show their unwavering pride and willingness to dismiss the principles of legality in the service of their righteousness and self-importance. This is why Shylock rejects the notion of such proceedings and instead seeks his bond.

Later Portia, disguised as a doctor of the law, reveals that just as the moral justice of Venice leans in favor of Christians, the same goes for legal justice:

PORTIA. Tarry a little. There is something else:
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood.

The words expressly are “A pound of flesh.”

Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;

But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed

One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods

Are by the laws of Venice confiscate

Unto the state of Venice. (Shakespeare 4.1.303-310)

The laws of Venice are shown to protect the blood of Christians from outside attack, inherently creating a system in which justice for Christians outweighs justice for any outside parties. As before, when moral justice was used to protect Christians in the face of uncertain danger, the legal justice of Venice stands to enact the same purpose. The law of Venice, which stands to enact justice, then becomes the tool for revenge by the play’s protagonists against Shylock.

Further legal implications are explored where Shylock’s seeking of Antonio’s life strips him of all his wealth and leaves his fate at the hands of the Duke. Gratiano jeers at Shylock,

GRATIANO. Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself!

And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,

Thou hast not left the value of a cord;

Therefore thou must be hanged at the state’s charge (Shakespeare 4.1.362-365)

The Christians who collectively sought mercy are now given the chance to revel in merciless punishment. However, the most striking detail of their punishment is how, though they indulge in revenge against Shylock, they present themselves as being merciful to him:

ANTONIO. So please my lord the Duke, and all the court,

To quit the fine for one half of his goods

I am content, so he will let me have

The other half in use, to render it
Upon his death unto the gentleman
That lately stole his daughter.
Two things provided more: that for this favor
He presently become a Christian;
The other, that he do record a gift
Here in the court of all he dies possessed
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.

DUKE. He shall do this or else I do recant
The pardon that I late pronouncèd here.

PORTIA. Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?

SHYLOCK. I am content.

PORTIA. Clerk, draw a deed of gift.

SHYLOCK. I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
I am not well. Send the deed after me
And I will sign it. (Shakespeare 4.1.378-94)

This excerpt from *The Merchant of Venice* for Shylock’s character serves as the greatest tell for the truth of vengeance and justice in the play. Shylock by all means of the justice system within Venice was wrong and at the mercy of the Christian Venetians. It is now for the merciful and moral Christians of Venice to enact a just punishment on him.

However, despite the way the Venetians present themselves in words, throughout the play they are shown to be just as irreverent as Shylock. Shylock tells Antonio, “You spurned me such a day; another time / You called me dog, and for these courtesies / I’ll lend you thus much

moneys?” Antonio responds, “I am as like to call thee so again— / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee, too” (Shakespeare 1.3.120-24). The Christian Venetians are shown to be just as spiteful as Shylock, as seen in Portia’s delight at her suitor’s misfortune, “Oh, these deliberate fools—when they do choose / They have the wisdom by their wit to lose!” (Shakespeare 2.9.79-80). Irrespective to these truths shown in the play, they present themselves as being merciful and kind, where Shylock presents himself as being neither.

The Venetians see themselves as so kind, they would rather strip a man of the source of his pride, his religion, rather than kill him. However, this addition was never a necessary condition to Shylock’s sentencing. Antonio is given complete freedom by the court to alter Shylock’s sentencing, and rather than have him leave the court in financial destitution, he also condemns him to religious destitution. Rather than show any noble justice, Antonio takes revenge on Shylock to mirror the bond which originally confined him. Shylock’s bond with Antonio was originally a test of will to enter the contract, and Antonio’s sentence is an equal test of will, as the alternative to accepting the sentence is death.

The Merchant of Venice’s plot and characters are entrenched not only in the drama of the justice system, but also in the contentious viewpoints of what justice and revenge are. Shylock indulges himself in an ever-growing lust for vengeance to rectify the wrongs committed against him by the Christians of Venice. He seeks justice through revenge, which he sees as justice in and of itself. Shylock’s words and the action of the play show not only the nature of revenge in its execution, but also its nature in perception. Though the Christian Venetians present themselves as being morally superior to Shylock in their pursuit of justice rather than revenge, their actions are only seen as justice because they hold the majority within Venice to create both moral and legal justice that leans in their favor. In truth, shown clearly within both Shylock’s

dialogue and the plot of the play, the Christians are just as vengeful and immoral, but they operate in such a conceited way that they beg for mercy for themselves while indulging in the most unmerciful conduct in pursuit of their believed justice. Both parties that enact vengeance allow their egos and biases to darken their justice into revenge, but it is only the Christian Venetians who believe their justice is untainted.

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