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# The Many-Faced Physician: *Time's Arrow* and the Medical Profession

BY  
Shayna Harris

*While I continue to keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times! But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot!*

—Hippocratic Oath

Originating in ancient Greece during the second half of the fifth century B.C., the Hippocratic Oath represents “the moral basis and ethical values of ancient Greek medicine” (Antoniou 3075), and the fact that modern day physicians continue to take the Hippocratic Oath at their medical school graduations reveals the continued reverence for this Oath, even 2,500 years after its creation. Written by Greek physician and philosopher Hippocrates, the Oath holds physicians to an exemplary level of integrity, and Hippocrates himself “supported in his writings that ‘in order to be a good physician, one must first of all be a good human being’” (Antoniou 3078). This affirmation became flouted in a most horrendous manner by Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich during the twentieth century, when the T4 Euthanasia Program became organized at the Graz Feldof Hospital. The program “was named after its headquarters in Berlin at Tiergartenstrasse 4 [and was] a centrally organized systematic plan to exterminate the handicapped, mentally ill, and other patients” (Freidl 31). The doctors at Schloss Hartheim, one extermination camp employed by Feldof Hospital, put to death tens of thousands of victims suffering either mental or physical disabilities, and sadly, the profession of “medicine became an instrument of politics, both acquiescent and self-interested, and contributed decisively to the brutality of fascist ideas” (Freidl 38). Despite their atrocious acts against humanity, after the final exterminations, many of the “physicians implicated in [this] crime were met with understanding; there was a readiness to find excuses” (38), and so the standards of the revered Hippocratic Oath slipped.

Author Martin Amis focuses on this particularly intriguing facet of the Holocaust throughout his postmodern narrative *Time's Arrow* by satirizing the role these extermination doctors historically played. Ironically, the medical profession—indeed, the title “Doctor”—seemed to protect the Nazi physicians, and the fact that they completely disregarded the tenets of the Hippocratic Oath, which states quite plainly to “abstain from all intentional wrongdoing and harm” (Amis 25), and participated in what may be aptly described as “medical slaughter” (Freidl 38), illustrates how the idea of professional integrity can become lost or twisted, a fact Amis craftily addresses in his novel. By repeatedly tying Odilo’s life as a Holocaust doctor to the morally based Hippocratic Oath, Amis skillfully manipulates the tale, revealing much regarding the condoned medical killings that exponentially occurred during the mid-twentieth century.

Basing his novel upon these historical Nazi physicians, Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* follows the life of Odilo Unverdorben, a Nazi doctor under whose “care” thousands of people died, despite his pledged allegiance to the Hippocratic Oath. Indeed, Amis even indicates how Odilo’s framed copy of the Oath mockingly haunts him (Amis 24-25). Like the real-life physicians in the Nazi “hospitals” during World War II, Odilo also receives assistance from sympathizers who help hide his past, creating new identities for him, and shielding him from suffering the consequences of his wrongdoing. The novel itself methodically moves backward from Odilo’s death toward this originating horror, and as Amis skillfully orchestrates the unusual narrative structure of his novel, he utilizes Odilo’s profession to reveal the different guises physicians have worn through the years, including those of savior and tormentor. Amis’s unraveling of the life of Dr. Odilo Unverdorben from end to beginning—using distorted glimpses into Odilo’s work as a primary means of enlightenment—ultimately exposes the fallibility of the medical profession, while simultaneously condemning the doctors who so heinously misused their profession.

Amis’s perversion of the doctoring profession and determination to figuratively reverse time by choosing a markedly unusual narrative structure for his novel destabilizes considerations of “natural” or “normal” given that the exterminations taking place during the Holocaust defied either designation. Indeed, the nar-

rative structure of the novel serves to reflect the complete unnaturalness surrounding the era of the Holocaust by defamiliarizing the familiar:

For the narrator, this about-face toward history signifies Odilo's desire to reverse the trajectory of the Holocaust, undoing the atrocities and his own crimes in an effort to evade moral responsibility. At risk, of course, is turning his helpful actions, such as his attempts to heal, into another source of atrocity and an exposure of his violent past. (Taylor 6)

The destabilization of the fundamental processes of creation and destruction, utilizing the figure of "doctor," indicates a desire to eradicate the gruesome events which occurred during the Holocaust. The text's movement backward through time toward the Holocaust effectively erases the Holocaust and its entire aftermath, and implies in the backwards narration "is the 'time of out of joint' of the Holocaust" (Vice 11). The novel's employment of such an unusual narrative voice also lends to the "unnaturalness" of the text, and the narrator himself claims to be either a "parasite or passenger" (Amis 8) living inside Odilo Unverdorben's<sup>1</sup> head.

Indeed, the unusual postmodern condition of the text's narration suggests that "[Odilo's] soul has split off from his consciousness, [which] accounts for the novel's peculiar kind of narration" (Vice 11), and Amis utilizes this quirky machinery to distinctly reveal the differences evident between the Nazi doctors who blatantly defied the Hippocratic Oath and moral physicians who solemnly kept the Oath and regarded all life as sacred. The narrator maintains distance from Odilo, claiming himself a separate entity stating, "I have no access to his thoughts—but I am awash with his emotions" (Amis 7). The narrator also continually makes a point of stressing "me" and "I" apart from "he" or "they" in referring to Odilo and his other medical contemporaries, both in the extermination camps, and then again during his tenure in American hospitals. Furthermore, since time moves backward for the narrator, his perception also becomes twisted, so although the narrator relates Odilo's story in reverse, he never shares this understanding, and so perpetually recounts events as forward-

moving. Such quirky machinery allows for ingenious descriptions of normal activities functioning in the reverse as when Odilo places his offering in the collection plate at church. The narrator comments upon Odilo's "shamelessness" as he "always *takes* a really big bill from the bowl" (emphasis added, 15). Soul even misconstrues Odilo's generosity toward children, such as when Odilo *gives* a child a toy; because Soul witnesses the gesture with his "skewed" forward moving perception, and also because Soul sees Odilo "[head] for the store, to cash [the gift] in," he indignantly claims that Odilo will "take candy from a baby, if there's fifty cents in it for him" (15). These less significant instances lead to more harrowing moments as pertaining to the medical profession. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the unusual narrative style lies in how it affects the portrayal of the Holocaust doctors' ministrations, where rather than entering the gas chambers to endure an unprecedented extermination, "the weak and young and old [are] brought *from* the Sprinkleroom to the railway station, as good as new" by the medical staff, effectively summoning the grisly reality of the extermination chambers (emphasis added, 123). Because "the narrative world of *Time's Arrow* is caught in a postmodern apocalypse" (Taylor 8), the narrator "consistently misinterprets Odilo's actions" (Vice 11), and according to him, Odilo's "tender mercies" amount to nothing as he "[rubs] dirt in [his patient's] wounds" (31).

Dialectically, the antithesis of Odilo's cruelty to his American patients occurs during Odilo's time spent at Schloss Hartheim and Auschwitz. As Odilo viciously murders innocent people, the narrator gradually begins to view Odilo as a savior rather than a tormentor, a man single-handedly resurrecting and creating an entire people group by personally "remov[ing] the pellets of Zyklon B" (121), which miraculously gives birth to people who appear all "raw from their genesis" (122). As the narrator comes to admire Odilo because of his benevolent creations, he lapses from referring to Odilo as a separate being to gradually referring to himself and Odilo as "I" (61, 67). If time itself could change direction, any evils committed would theoretically reverse. Ironically, Odilo's very profession as a doctor speaks loudest to this, and Amis seems to take the Hippocratic Oath's exclamation, "may the reverse be my lot!" to a completely new level of meaning in



his backward portrayal of Odilo's life. Odilo indeed desecrates his physician's vows, somehow causing "time's arrow" to become reversed, catapulting him back through time, possibly in an endless oscillation between past and present—a sort of postmodern purgatory, possibly even an apropos punishment for violating the Hippocratic Oath. Taylor more fully explains this curiosity:

These schisms within the narrative parallel and invoke two major historical ruptures of the twentieth century: the Holocaust that happened, and the nuclear holocaust that looked likely to occur. *Time's Arrow*, set within this historical framework, suggests these holocausts jointly destabilized the directionality and flow of time, trapping the post-World War Two generations in a perpetual postmodern apocalyptic condition. (Taylor 1)

So, the masterful combination of the unfortunate historical realities of the Holocaust juxtaposed with the tenets of the Hippocratic Oath are utilized to great effect in the novel, and neatly tie together the threads of Odilo's life, especially as it pertains to the medical profession.

Likewise, the novel's destabilization of binaries depicting the medical profession as both a blessing and a curse critique the "work" completed within the death camp "hospitals" during the Holocaust, given that the established power structures of the time completely justified their "mercy killings," invoking a distinct irony regarding these institutions. Jean Baudrillard's work speaks to the idea of reality versus simulation, the belief that everything is a simulation. While this assertion may be left open for debate, it is particularly resonant with regard to the Holocaust in Germany where many things were not what they seemed, primarily the Nazi "hospitals." These institutions, in all likelihood, indeed resembled real hospitals: they were filled with doctors, nurses, and orderlies, and one could find "instrument bowls [...] bloody cotton, [...] and hypodermic[s] with [...] foot-long needle[s]" (Amis 127) on the premises. However, these hospitals directly opposed their apparent function. In fact, "Outpatient centers' were a 'place for selections'; and hospital areas, 'waiting rooms' before death" (qtd. in Finney, Amis's Use of Irony section). The

narrator acknowledges the artificiality of jocular designations such as “sprinklerooms”—although admittedly the narrator’s skewed perception sees these infamous rooms as places meant “merely to reassure and not, alas, to cleanse” the people coming in, rather than as places meant for killing these same people (Amis 121). Furthermore, the disturbingly hypocritical designations given to the more gruesome areas in the concentration camps add to the frightful façade. With historical accuracy, the narrator observes that the “main Ovenroom is called *Heavenblock*, its main approach road *Heavenstreet*. Chamber and Sprinkleroom are known [...] as *the central hospital*” (Amis 124). Although the backward trajectory of the narrative structure muddles the purpose these rooms held in reality, the fact remains that even backwards, the entire operation behind the exterminations was an elaborate simulation designed to conceal the horror of the alarming atrocities which were exponentially occurring in these “medical facilities.” Baudrillard cleverly uses the analogy of Disneyland to further clarify this concept, and the analogy can also extend to encompass and explain the perversions of the Holocaust “hospitals.” As Baudrillard maintains, “It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real” (172). In the case of the extermination camps, many of them were indeed originally “real” hospitals prior to the Third Reich’s insistence on racial purity, which instigated the notion of ordering the deaths of all “inferior” peoples, regardless of the nature of the inferiority—whether blood, disability or other imagined imperfection. The “real” simulation began once doctors’ primary concern became death rather than life.

Without a doubt, the medically-based simulations indeed warp the concepts of many of the binaries occurring simultaneously such as creation and destruction, healing and wounding, and trauma and recovery, which all undergo drastic perversions during the course of the narrative. Certainly, the intriguing manner in which the focus of the novel always circles back to Odilo’s profession as a doctor reinforces the “savior-worship” attitude many hold for those in the medical field, which in turn serves to upset many deep seated assumptions and expectations regarding physicians and their healing power. This reverence society feels for doctors doubtless originates from the belief that doctors stand

between themselves and the unknown, possessing the ability to prevent death and infirmity in themselves and loved ones. Put succinctly, this trust may be understood to stem directly from a promise in the Hippocratic Oath itself which “reaffirms a sacred trust between doctors and patients, reminding doctors to use their power wisely” (Antoniou 3078). The assurance that doctors take this solemn Oath, which holds them to such impeccable standards of trustworthiness, gives most patients a sense of well-being and assurance. As Antinou clarifies, “Euthanasia conflicts with basic principles of good medical practice. Human life is a fundamental basic good. The knowledge that a doctor could kill [a] patient [is] thought to undermine the trust that is at the heart of the doctor–patient relationship” (3078–3079).

However, sometimes a reversal occurs between the opposing concepts such as trauma and recovery, and the ideologies become twisted and perverted in the process. In *Time’s Arrow*, the narrative structure plays a huge role in these aberrations, and the narrative voice also contributes to the confusion. For example, the narrator describes the state-of-affairs at the hospital where Odilo works—years after the Holocaust, but early on in the narrative structure: “If you want to get fucked up, you’ve got to come on over to our place.” (Amis 45). Indeed, the first “two-thirds of Amis’s novel are devoted to establishing this irony: viewed backwards, doctors destroy, but doctors *at Auschwitz* create” (Vice 14). Therefore, in the beginning of the novel—which takes place during the last half of Odilo’s life during his incarnations as Tod Friendly and John Young—Odilo’s healing, as seen by the ever-inaccurate narrator, reads as wounding such as when Odilo “spoon[s] tumor into the human body” (87), or “wedge[s] shards of brown glass into [a] boy’s crown” (83). In direct contrast, this distortion of healing being interpreted as wounding causes the medical practices of the Nazi extermination camps to be understood as creation, rather than destruction. Society as a whole usually views doctors as above reproach, knowledgeable beyond measure, and without flaw. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the rampant spurning of the Hippocratic Oath prevailing among physicians in the death camps, it becomes frightfully evident that doctors too can become susceptible to temptations. While some doctors participated in the exterminations “because they were already members of the

Nazi party, [...] it is important to state that most of the doctors got involved for career reasons, idealism for racial hygiene, or obedience to authority, whereas financial incentives were what induced the other personnel to collaborate [in the murders]" (Fiedl 32). Even the narrator of the novel eventually concludes: "I've come to the conclusion that Odilo Unverdorben, as a moral being, is absolutely unexceptional, liable to do what everybody else does, good or bad, with no limit, once under the cover of numbers" (Amis 157).

This precariously placed reverence of doctors—indeed, "doctoring" as an institution—ostensibly began a downward turn due to the events of the Holocaust, an event which signaled the "emergence of the postmodern" (qtd. in Taylor 2), and upset the blind trust most people tended to extend to physicians. For instance, the T4 Program originating at the Graz Feldof Hospital, which was an institution designed to treat psychiatric patients and patients suffering from various other maladies, employed many physicians who eventually became the patients' murderers, and Amis himself, in discussing the novel *The Nazi Doctors*, asserts: "A doctor at Auschwitz was the absolute example of the inverted world . . . German doctors went, almost overnight, from healing to killing" (qtd. in Vice 11). Odilo's profession, combined with the text's narrative placement amidst the Holocaust and a possible Nuclear Holocaust—and the narrative structure itself—not only highlight the postmodernity of the novel's literary style, but also how "in the novel's reversed temporality, creation and destruction are confused and combined. Through this confusion, the destabilization of time, and the imagery of war and violence, *Time's Arrow* entwines postmodernity and genocide as causes and effects of the perpetual apocalyptic condition" (Taylor 5).

Invoking a distinct perversion of Odilo's profession, Amis underscores many of the powerful tropes found in Nazi ideology as a means of exposing the tragically lacking social mores and morals of the Nazi regime. The Nazi party highly revered science, and in their determination to create a "perfect" Aryan race, they lost sight of many rules of common decency, and they seemed to lose all contact with basic moral behavior. Amis's perversion of doctoring in *Time's Arrow*, handily reveals the complete absence of a moral conscious within the Nazi party by referencing the

justifications which abounded among the physicians and other participants of the exterminations. The novel “invert[s] the morality of Auschwitz [...] thereby [bringing] a new angle to ponder on the awfulness of it all. [...] After all, the Nazis saw their extermination programme as altruistic when it was the right way round” (qtd. in Vice 13). Intriguingly, the persistence of the narrative structure in exposing the “destructive doctoring” references the cultural fallacies regarding racial purity which abounded during the reign of the Third Reich in Germany. Indeed, the narrator views the Nazis as “creators” engaged in “dream[ing] [rather than destroying] a race” (Amis 120). In a tangle of confusion, the Nazis of Holocaust Germany believed their actions just—even warranted. Amis utilizes this perversion in *Time’s Arrow* by revealing the only way in which this irony could occur. Although doctors possess the capability of assuming many different personas—that of scientist, technician, healer, or savior—the reality remains that at the end of the day, physicians are indeed only human, and are every bit as susceptible to err as anyone else. The Nazis’ cruel and unlikely attempt at “racial purification,” awful as it was, speaks to this unfortunate truth.

The perversion of the natural order of events in *Time’s Arrow*—aside from addressing the wider social implications involved in the Holocaust, as well as addressing the postmodern condition—neatly compounds and illustrates the remarkably “unnaturalness” of the events which occurred during the Holocaust. Certainly, the role of “doctor” undergoes a drastic inversion, which lends a disturbing quality to already unsettling occurrences. Furthermore, the manner in which Amis defamiliarizes the familiar speaks volumes about the utter lack of humanity exhibited by the infamous Nazi doctors. Intriguingly, the narrative structure and voice displayed in the text expose the dialectical nature of the binaries Amis transposes, ultimately creating a torturous cycle in which events never really end, but only repeat themselves ad nauseum, possibly forever. In destabilizing the concepts of “right” and “wrong,” Amis effectively insinuates that the Holocaust indeed changed the world, and in Amis’s castigation of doctors—those instigators of the traumas inflicted during the Holocaust—he neatly acknowledges humankind’s imperfection, while still

maintaining their accountability in the horrible affairs of the mid-twentieth century, as they relate to the medical profession.

### Notes

1. Although Odilo uses four aliases during the course of the novel: Tod Friendly—ironically “Tod” meaning “death” in German—John Young, Hamilton de Souza, and Odilo Unverdorben, in the interest of simplicity, for the duration of this study he shall be referred to as “Odilo.”

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# “In Pigeon-Holes Partly<sup>1</sup>”: George Eliot’s Feminist Interrogation of the *Femme Fatale* Trope in *Middlemarch*

BY  
Jenny Jacobs

Virginia Woolf called *Middlemarch* a “magnificent book” and described it as “one of the few English novels written for grown-up people” (Woolf 165). Many feminist literary critics, however, have been less enthusiastic. They criticize George Eliot for being an “uncertain feminist” or “ambivalent” in her depiction of women in her most famous novel. This argument usually focuses on the main female character, Dorothea Brooke, and the fact that she cannot make a career for herself or live unmarried and independently—which Eliot herself did in her personal life (Ringler 56). But what of Rosamond Vincy, the beautiful but narcissistic character traditionally viewed as Dorothea’s foil in the novel or, at one extreme, a *femme fatale* who uses her beauty to manipulate men and spoils the medical career of her husband Tertius Lydgate? Why not shift our focus away from Dorothea and make a feminist argument about Rosamond?

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s landmark 1979 book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* reevaluates female characters in nineteenth-century fiction written by women. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, female characters in male-authored books in this period typically reflect an “angel/monster” dichotomy (16-17). In contrast, female-authored books, such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, reject this dichotomy; their female characters possess qualities of both and call such binaries into question (337-339). George Eliot, as an inheritor of this female tradition—but as an avowedly realistic novelist—similarly rejects such dichotomies; instead, her focus shifts to the “domestic woman/*femme fatale*” dichotomy. Gilbert and Gubar’s work allows literary critics to reassess and reevaluate female characters who possess traits associated with negative stereotypes of women, from Bertha Mason—the literal “madwoman in the attic” in *Jane Eyre*—to Rosamond Vincy.

This essay will examine how Eliot acknowledges, appropriates and critiques stereotypes of women that operate in the socially constructed gender system of her era, including that of the “domestic woman” and, particularly, Eliot’s portrayal of Rosamond in relation to the stereotype of the *femme fatale*. This trope began as a misogynistic construct but evolved as the nineteenth century progressed. It came to include women who use their sexual power to seek agency and status and thus—ironically—free themselves from certain gendered constraints. Eliot, aware of the conventional stereotypes of women, deliberately chooses not to portray Rosamond as a clearly defined *femme fatale* even while she emphasizes the power of this trope to influence the behavior and perceptions of others. Rosamond seeks agency and social status throughout the novel, and Eliot’s narrative strategies invite the reader to critically analyze Rosamond’s behavior, including the ways in which it evokes the *femme fatale* trope. Eliot makes a feminist argument in encouraging her readers to look at women beyond the stereotypical lenses provided by her society’s gender system.

### **Victorian Ideas of Womanhood and their Representations in *Middlemarch***

In the nineteenth century, scientific modes of inquiry and explanation came to dominate cultural discourse. Scientists worked under the assumption that human nature was not unitary, but separate and diverse, and the differences between man and woman were at the forefront of scientific inquiry. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution became the foundation of theory and research for numerous branches of the natural and social sciences (Russett 3-4). Claims about differences between the sexes were rooted in biology, and ideas surrounding the “nature” of women and men—femininity versus masculinity—followed. As Cynthia Russett observes in *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*:

The overwhelming consensus was that women were inherently different from men in their anatomy, physiology, temperament and intellect. In the evolutionary development of the race women had lagged behind men. . . . Even as adults, they remained childlike in body and mind, never developing



traits, such as beards, that distinguished the men from the boys. The reason for woman's arrested development was the need to preserve her energies for reproduction [...] Women could never expect to match the intellectual and artistic achievements of men, nor could they expect an equal share of power and authority. Nature had decreed a secondary role for women. The great principal division of labor was here brought to bear: men produced, women reproduced. (11-12)

Within Victorian middle class ideology, the domestic woman embodied these ideas. The Victorian poet Coventry Patmore enshrined this ideology in his 1854 poem the "Angel of the House." This woman, considered the epitome of femininity—what every woman should aspire to be and what every man should want in a wife—ought to be subservient, docile, fragile and to devote her energies to her children and matters concerning the household (Gilbert 24).

Eliot acknowledges and represents this stereotype of the domestic woman through Celia Brooke, Dorothea's younger sister in *Middlemarch*. Celia is an "amiable," "innocent-looking" girl with more "common sense" than her sister (8-9). Celia chooses the life of a domestic woman: she marries Sir James Chettam, has children, and devotes her life to her family. Although Celia remains a minor character in the novel, Eliot does not portray her harshly. Celia knows and procures her place in Middlemarch society early on in the novel. Eliot chooses, however, to focus on other female characters in more depth—women who do not conform to society's norm of the domestic woman.

Rosamond Vincy is a candidate for the "angel in the house" or domestic woman status. Physically, she embodies the Victorian ideal of beauty: she has a nymph-like figure, infantine blondness and self-possessed grace (89, 149). In *Beautiful Boredom: Idleness and Feminine Self-Realization in the Victorian Novel*, Lee Anna Maynard explores the ways in which Rosamond's beauty helps her manipulate others:

Despite her projection of child-like innocence and simplicity, Rosamond is adult enough to hide any less-than angelic signs in her "eyes of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings as ingenious behavior

could put them, and deep enough to hide meanings of the owner if these should happen to be less exquisite.” (102)

Her outwardly child-like and meek appearance embodies qualities associated with the domestic woman. In her thoughts and actions, however--and in the way certain male characters perceive her—Rosamond evokes the *femme fatale* trope.

To explore and interrogate this trope, Eliot employs a third-person narrator and free indirect discourse. Free indirect discourse combines the direct representation of a character’s thoughts with the narrator’s representation of or commentary on those thoughts. This method of narration serves to interrogate and evaluate a character’s thought processes; it represents both speech acts and preverbal or nonverbal mental acts (Oltean 691). In this way, the narrator can give the reader microscopic insight into an individual character’s thinking and telescopic insight into the overarching societal stereotypes that may be influencing the way in which a character, consciously or subconsciously, thinks. Free indirect speech occurs frequently in *Middlemarch*; it establishes bonds of familiarity and sympathy between reader and character but also encourages critical analysis of a character’s motives (McSweeney 86). The narrator’s free-ranging consciousness can reproduce the way Rosamond thinks of and views herself in relation to the *femme fatale* trope as well as reproduce the way in which other characters, such as Lydgate, think of and view her.

The term *femme fatale* has only recently been included in English language dictionaries: *The Random House Dictionary* in 1966, the *American Heritage Dictionary* in 1969 and, finally, the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1972 (Allen *preface*). Helen Hanson and Catherine O’Rawe edited a compellation of essays which explore the *femme fatale* as an icon through history in *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*. In it, they discuss how the concept of a *femme fatale* is a specific formulation of a misogynistic construct that is “as old as Eve or indeed as old as Lilith, Adam’s wife, turned demon and succubus...[and] only formulated as a clear and recognizable type in the nineteenth century” (Hanson 3). Jess Sully’s essay “Challenging the Stereotype: The Femme Fatale in the Fin-de-Siecle Art and Early Cinema,” lists male anxiety regarding the lower classes, foreign invasion, and feminism as

factors that greatly influenced nineteenth century depictions of this trope, and helped it gain predominance. The *femme fatale*, in short, was an “amalgam of cultural fears and preoccupations” regarding women during the time period (46-47).

Jennifer Hedgecock’s book *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and Sexual Threat* specifically traces the way in which this female stereotype changes throughout the nineteenth century. Early *femme fatales* were sexually aggressive, highly dangerous women. They began appearing as the main characters in sensation fiction. They were portrayed as women who were sophisticated and charming, but who were capable of villainous acts such as murder and bigamy (Hedgecock 87). In contrast to early *femme fatales*, later *femme fatales* are less sexually aggressive, but rather transgressed social boundaries and exploited others, mostly men, in pursuit of power and wealth. As Hedgecock describes it, this later *femme fatale* figure “...actively challenges traditional representations of women as domestic or fallen by rejecting bourgeois moral imperatives meant to restrict women [...] In fiction, she suggests that disaffected middle class women, marginalized from other privileged bourgeois women, will risk everything to gain power” (5, 11). Hedgecock argues that aspects of this stereotype ultimately contribute to a new nineteenth century female type—the “New Woman”—that began to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century. The New Woman embodied the spirit of the nascent feminists who attempted to change the social order and gain more socioeconomic freedoms and rights for women (193). Critics of the New Woman attributed to her many of the same qualities *femme fatales* were previously given. Representations of New Women by their critics portrayed them as “mannish maidens” or “wild women” who were aggressive, violent and who posed a danger to society (Farmer 12).

Eliot, aware of how women were portrayed in popular fiction, including sensation fiction, embeds a mini-sensation story within *Middlemarch* involving Tertius Lydgate (who becomes Rosamond’s husband) and a *femme fatale* character. Before coming to Middlemarch and meeting Rosamond, Lydgate lived in Paris and felt deeply attracted to an actress named Laure. During a play, Laure’s husband falls to his death while on stage with her. Laure reports it as an accident, claiming her foot slipped, and Lydgate

helps to clear her of the charges. She later confesses to him that she meant to do it—because her husband was not “agreeable” to her and that she “does not like husbands.” Three days after Laure tells him this, he leaves Paris, “believing that illusions were at the end for him,” and resolves to avoid romantic entanglements for a long while (141-144).

If Celia embodies the domestic woman more fully than Rosamond, does Rosamond possess characteristics that identify her as a *femme fatale*? In what ways does she conform to and deviate from this trope? Does Rosamond deploy *femme fatale* strategies? How do those closest to her—specifically her husband Lydgate—view her in relation to this trope? How do the narrative strategies Eliot uses, which invite the reader to critically analyze Rosamond’s behavior as well as the ways in which others view her, say about using this trope as a way in which to view Rosamond?

### **Rosamond Vincy and the *Femme Fatale* Trope**

Jennifer Hedgecock notes that *femme fatale* narratives often represent women in economically and socially difficult and vulnerable situations. They desire to escape these situations by attempting to obtain power and wealth, normally through the exploitation of a man. They are not content to be relegated to second-class status; they desire the luxury afforded by bourgeois life, an ambition that drives them to put their schemes into action (Hedgecock 5, 29). Like a *femme fatale*, Rosamond desires to increase her social status and gain wealth, but that desire does not stem from a dire economic situation as defined by Hedgecock. Her middle class family does not face financial hardships: the Vincys are manufacturers, having kept a good house for three generations. Also, “a cheering sense of money” envelopes her, since she and her brother Fred are likely to inherit money from their childless and rich Uncle, Mr. Featherstone (89). In Rosamond’s mind, however, her desire to rise above her middle class status has an emotional intensity that she expresses in terms of romance novel tropes, rather than the realistic novel she is actually part of. In describing her dawning feelings of love for Lydgate, the third-person narrator tells us that her attraction to Lydgate,

[...] which she took to be a mutual impression, called falling in love, was just what Rosamond had contemplated beforehand. Ever since that important new arrival in Middlemarch she had woven a little future, of which something like this scene was the necessary beginning. Strangers, whether wrecked and clinging to a raft, or duly escorted and accompanied by portmanteaus, have always had a circumstantial fascination for the virgin mind, against which native merit has urged itself in vain. And a stranger was absolutely necessary to Rosamond's social romance. (109)

Rosamond, greatly influenced by conventional romance novels, conjures a shipwreck image in her fantasy. She believes it is imperative that she be in, or create for herself, a similar narrative in order to experience love and meet a man that will "save" her. The domestic romance she believes will come from her marrying a stranger with potential for upward social mobility will lead her to her middle class heaven and let her become a domestic woman/angel in the house. That is as far as her romantic notions take her. She does not realize that with the domestic woman status come restraints and limitations. As Eliot will later show, however, marriage is not always like a romance novel, and entering into marriage with these misconstrued ideals can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction for both parties.

Rosamond becomes fixated on the idea that Lydgate, the doctor who has just arrived in Middlemarch, can give her the life she wants through marriage. Eliot's third person narrator describes Rosamond in such a way that subtly evokes the *femme fatale* trope, but also makes the reader question her status as a *femme fatale*:

[Rosamond]...was rather used to being fallen in love with; but she, for her part, had remained indifferent and fastidiously critical towards both fresh sprig and faded bachelor. And here was Mr. Lydgate suddenly corresponding to her ideal, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections which offered vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank: a man of talent, also, whom it would be especially delightful to enslave: in fact, a man

who had touched her nature quite newly, and brought a vivid interest into her life which was better than any fancied “might-be” such as she was in the habit of opposing to the actual. (110)

It is important to analyze Eliot’s narrative strategy here, which employs free indirect discourse to render Rosamond’s thought processes, including her evasions of moral responsibility. First, the third-person narrator uses the passive voice in representing the way Rosamond thinks about herself. She is described as “rather used to being fallen in love with,” which suggests that she does not hold herself accountable for the effects of her actions on others. She thinks of herself as the object of desire, instead of an active agent partially responsible for making men fall in love with her. Then the narrator shifts to reporting on Rosamond’s active ideas about Lydgate, writing from inside her mind. Lydgate corresponds to Rosamond’s “ideal,” “touched her nature quite newly” and offers the potential to give her the “middle-class heaven” she desires. In this way, the narrative voice suggests that Rosamond, unlike a *femme fatale*, does not unfeelingly exploit a man, but simply seeks a match that she believes best suits her. At least until the following sentence: “A man of talent, also, whom it would be especially delightful to enslave.” This literally evokes the *femme fatale* trope. In this statement, given by the narrator but from inside Rosamond’s mind, Rosamond does think of herself in *femme fatale* terms. This trope will follow her throughout the novel, and each time this trope surfaces, the narrator asks the reader to critically assess to what extent Rosamond’s actions and motivations are those of a *femme fatale*: to what extent Rosamond is conscious of these motivations and to what extent other characters choose to see her in these terms.

A *femme fatale*, according to Hedgecock, is single-minded in her goal, unencumbered by conventional moral considerations and usually recovers quickly from poor judgment and social blunders (45). Rosamond’s goals, to be wealthy and obtain a high social standing, is similar to those of a *femme fatale*. Rosamond believes Sir Godwin, Lydgate’s wealthy uncle, can help to facilitate her goals. When Sir Godwin comes to visit, she wishes to impress him and goes horseback riding with him. Lydgate protests, due

to her pregnancy, but she ignores him, goes horseback riding and she subsequently has a miscarriage. “In all future conversations about the subject, Rosamond was mildly certain that the ride had made no difference, and that if she had stayed home the same symptoms would have come on and would have ended in the same way” (549). That Rosamond is only “mildly” certain her decision to put herself at risk in order to impress Sir Godwin had no effect on her miscarriage is telling. Unlike a *femme fatale*, she is not shown to be quick in recovering from her poor judgment; she remains unsure of the causal relationship between her actions and the miscarriage and is unable to definitively absolve herself of responsibility. However, this characterization of her thinking by the narrator nudges Rosamond toward a *femme fatale* model.

Rosamond continues to be single-minded in her endeavors to gain wealth and high social standing. When her goals are threatened, she fights, using deception and manipulation in her attempts to keep her dreams afloat. When Rosamond and Lydgate find themselves in a great deal of debt, Lydgate suggests selling some of their belongings and moving into a smaller house to alleviate some of their debt. Rosamond, wanting to maintain the pretense that they are wealthy, tries to find ways to keep their house and belongings. When she learns they have a potential buyer for their house, she goes behind Lydgate’s back and takes it off the market. Furthermore, she writes to Sir Godwin, without Lydgate’s knowledge, asking him for money. She receives a harsh letter in return, denying her request. She sees she will be unable to exploit this man and prevent the seizure of their possessions. She complains to Lydgate using extremely emotional language, “It is so very hard to be disgraced here among all the people we know, and to live in such a miserable way. I wished I had died with the baby” (627). In this statement she expresses feeling a connection between her and her unborn baby. Her baby did not mature and live to reach its potential. This is true for Rosamond as well: although she possesses the child-like look of innocence, her mind is that of an adult and she craves to have agency like a male adult. Female adults did not have a much agency because Victorian society encouraged people to believe that women were childlike physically *and* mentally. On one hand, the narrator sheds light on Rosamond’s situation, one of constrained and limited

opportunity, and the audience can feel sympathy towards her. At the same time, the audience can view her dialogue with Lydgate, in which she uses emotional extremism to manipulate him, as consistent with that of a *femme fatale*.

As Rosamond and Lydgate's belongings begin to be taken away, Rosamond becomes increasingly frustrated that her married life is not as she hoped or imagined it would be. She believed marriage would entail endless parties with well-connected people who, charmed by her manners, would advance her social standing. "She cared about what were considered refinements, and not about the money that was to pay for them" (110). She realizes that wealth, which she perceives to be the key to her ideal life, is out of her reach and that all her attempts to obtain wealth thus far have been in vain. She shifts her focus away from money for the time being and to another man, Will Ladislaw, who returns to Middlemarch. Rosamond had previously enjoyed the company of Will. Even after Rosamond marries Lydgate, she continues to entertain the idea of enslaving men, particularly Will because she is jealous of his admiration for Dorothea. The narrator once again reproduces Rosamond's way of thinking:

How delightful to make captives from the throne of the marriage with a husband as a crown-prince by your side—himself a subject—while the captives look up for ever hopeless, losing their rest probably, and if their appetite too, so much the better! (410)

Will's return, during Rosamond's time of distress, becomes the "one point of hope and interest" in her life. She sends him a letter "written with charming discretion, but intended to hasten his arrival by a hint of trouble" (724-725). While exploiting Will offers no financial gain, as her appeal to Sir Godwin did, she still evokes the *femme fatale* in her attempt to make Will a "captive." Rosamond, aware of Will's feelings for Dorothea, still "secretly cherishes" the belief that he had, or will come to have, more admiration for her. Rosamond views Will as an object of desire: she wishes to enslave him the way she once enslaved Lydgate. Her desire to enslave Will is her attempt to restore a sense of power and control in her life. If she succeeds, she perceives she



will gain power over Will and achieve a victory over Dorothea, who loves Will.

At her invitation, Will goes to Rosamond's house to see her, Dorothea catches them in what appears to be a compromising embrace, and Dorothea flees. Will becomes furious with Rosamond, believing she has ruined any chance he had with Dorothea. He lets Rosamond know where she stands in relation to him: "I never had a *preference* for her [Dorothea], any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman's living" (732). Will shatters Rosamond's notion that she possesses any kind of power over him, and the third-person narrator renders her consciousness in terms that recall the "shipwreck" imagery used earlier in the novel:

The poor thing had no force to fling out any passion in return; the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her: her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness. (734)

In her quest for agency, she deploys strategies of the *femme fatale*, but finds them unsuccessful in achieving her goals of obtaining wealth and raising her social class. She realizes her powerless status as a woman and feels that she is alone.

The next day, when Dorothea goes to Rosamond's house, an important shift in Rosamond's thinking occurs. Dorothea comes to talk and confide in Rosamond; she talks of the hardships of marriage they, as women, must endure and the possibility of loving a man other than your husband. Dorothea helps Rosamond to see that she is not alone in her feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability—Dorothea feels this way as well. After Dorothea says to Rosamond "I am weak, we are weak," the narrator reports that:

Rosamond, taken hold of by an emotion stronger than her own...could find no words, but involuntarily she put her lips to Dorothea's forehead which was very near her, and

then for a minute the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck. (749)

Eliot once again employs the shipwreck image, but this time in an emotionally authentic, rather than ironic, way. Previously used to represent Rosamond's melodramatic vision of romance, here it is used to intensify a moment of genuine feeling: the women feel actual, not second-hand, emotional intensity and desperation, and match their emotional connection with physical contact. At this moment Rosamond chooses to explain to Dorothea what really transpired the previous day: that the embrace was not as it appeared to be and Will had declared his love for Dorothea and not her. Here, Rosamond is in a dire situation—her reputation is at stake—but does not deploy *femme fatale* strategies. Rosamond does not try to exploit a man in hopes that it will get her out of her present situation; instead, she reaches out to a woman, and depends on her for emotional support to help her through this difficult time.

### Assessments of Rosamond

The narrative voice in *Middlemarch* asks the reader to be both critical of and understanding of Rosamond's deployment of *femme fatale* strategies, to look at them in the context of the society she inhabits. Eliot's treatment of Rosamond is fundamentally feminist because she challenges other character's views of Rosamond and encourages her readers to look at Rosamond beyond the stereotypical lenses provided by society's gender system. Lydgate clearly labels Rosamond a *femme fatale*. Embittered about the choices he has made, he labels her a *femme fatale* later on in his life. In the finale, the narrator notes that Lydgate "always considered himself a failure" and never did "what he once meant to do" and that he blamed Rosamond (781). He became a doctor to the wealthy to appease Rosamond. Lydgate reflects upon the fact that Rosamond has not been the Victorian ideal of a domestic woman—she has not been a docile and submissive wife throughout their marriage—and that she pushed him into a career that offered financial stability rather than satisfying his intellectual and moral aspirations. In Lydgate's opinion, Rosa-

mond has been like a *femme fatale*: “He once called her his basil plant[...]which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains” (782). Lydgate engages in self-deception; he projects the *femme fatale* trope onto Rosamond and in doing so, fails to take any responsibility for the marriage’s shortcomings.

Lydgate, then, unfairly characterizes Rosamond as a *femme fatale*; he pigeon-holes her into this stereotype without any reflection on himself or greater reflection on their marriage. Lydgate, like many other characters in *Middlemarch*, suffers from “spots of commonness,” most notably his inability to understand himself. After the incident involving Laure—a physically dangerous woman—he believes that he has learned from the experience, confident that he will be able to henceforth, “take a strictly scientific view of women” (144). Upon arriving in Middlemarch, he decides he wants to concentrate on building his career and resolves not take a wife for several years. When he realizes his flirtation with Rosamond may have gone too far, he resolves to stop it. But not long after Lydgate’s self-proclaimed resolution—the very next time he sees Rosamond—“he left the house an engaged man, whose soul was not his own, but to the woman’s to whom he had bound himself” (283). It is clear to the reader that although Rosamond manipulated him, he also allowed himself to be manipulated. The last thing the reader hears of Lydgate before the brief report in the finale was that “he had accepted his narrowed lot with sad resignation. He had chosen this fragile creature, and he had taken the burthen of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could, carrying that burthen pitifully” (752).

If the reader assesses their marriage in its entirety, the root of Rosamond and Lydgate’s dissatisfaction and frustration lies in their inability to understand one another, which begins before they marry. They enter into the marriage with preconceived notions of what they thought marriage and their spouses ought to be, based on middle-class stereotypes about romantic love. Rosamond equates her attraction to Lydgate’s social capital—his name and money—to love but does not take the time to consider if she loves Lydgate himself: “In Rosamond’s romance, it was not necessary to worry much about the inward life of a hero, or of his serious business to the world” (Mitchell 127).

Lydgate also has expectations of Rosamond that are directly counter to her actual nature. He believes she will be a domestic woman, hopes that she will “create order in the home and accounts with still magic...transform his life into romance at any moment” and believes her to be “instructed on the true womanly limits and not a hair’s breadth beyond—docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit” (331). When Rosamond shows herself to be nothing like the “angel of the house” Lydgate believed her to be, he viewing her more in term of a *femme fatale*. Through Rosamond and Lydgate’s mismatched marriage, Eliot shows how preconceptions and stereotypes are barriers to mutual understanding and meaningful relationships.

Eliot extends this logic to highlight the way in which stereotypes of women are insufficient and impractical tools in which to assess women. Eliot’s third person narrator presents the reader with the *femme fatale* trope as a way in which to view Rosamond but also asks that the reader question to what extent this trope actually helps to understand Rosamond. Rosamond deploys strategies that evoke the *femme fatale* trope as a way in which to seek agency and status in a society that, at that time, offered limited options to women. It is clear that Rosamond does not want to be a domestic woman like Celia. She desires to be a “fine lady” and sees marriage as a way in which to achieve that goal (Maynard 81). At the same time, because of her reductively “feminine” education, Rosamond has no interest in a life outside the domestic realm, of a life in the public sphere like Dorothea desires.

Rosamond desires wealth, which she believes will help her gain admiration and acceptance from her social betters. Rosamond’s goal of wealth is jeopardized when Lydgate informs her they are in massive debt. She resorts to strategies that again evoke the *femme fatale* model—deception and manipulation—as a way of achieving some sort of power and control in her life. John Stuart Mill’s essay “The Subjection of Women,” published two years before *Middlemarch*, provides a way in which to understand Rosamond’s behavior:

An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek for power: refused the command of itself, it will assert its personality by attempting to control others[...]Where

liberty cannot be hoped for, power becomes the grand object of human desire; those whom others will not leave the undisturbed management of their own affairs, will compensate themselves, if they can, by the meddling for their own purposes with the affairs of others. (Mill 691)

Unbeknownst to Rosamond, what she really desires, more than wealth, is power. She secretly meddles in other men's lives, uses deception and manipulation in her efforts to exploit them, because they possess access and resources she, as a woman, does not. She had limited agency as a middle-class Victorian woman. Her will to master others stems from the fact that she has no real character of her own (McSweeney 97). Her actions, which often evoke the *femme fatale* stereotype, are her attempt to gain a sense of power and autonomy in her life which Middlemarch society denies her.

Eliot does not portray Rosamond as a clearly defined *femme fatale*. She has Rosamond resist both the domestic woman and the *femme fatale* stereotype. Both are shown to be insufficient and inadequate ways in which to represent women and to understand women's experiences of oppression. Rejecting these models helps Eliot's overall goal of producing a realistic novel. Eliot uses free indirect discourse, which gives microscopic insight into a character's thinking as well as telescopic insight into the overall cultural forces influencing the way other characters think, to interrogate the gendered stereotypes operating in the novel and to show how they never fully encompass the complex realities of the characters. In doing so, Eliot trains the reader to be wary of stereotypes; pigeon-holing characters into gendered stereotypes will not suffice if the reader hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the characters.

### Looking Forward

In the reconciliation scene between Dorothea and Rosamond, Eliot virtually foreshadows the New Woman literature that would begin to emerge shortly after the publication of *Middlemarch*. The term "New Woman" first appeared in Sarah Grand's 1894 article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" and became quickly adopted by the British periodical press thereafter. To the Victorians, the New Woman was "a feminist activist, a so-

cial reformer[...]she was also a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women's movement" (Farmer 10-11).

Dorothea can be seen as a nascent New Woman. She wants to be a part of public life, not just associated with the domestic sphere. She pushes for reform and change: she thinks of ways to redesign local farmers' cottages and gives money for a new hospital. Additionally, in a small way, Dorothea defies the social order. Dorothea's first husband, Mr. Casaubon, made a clause in his will that she would be disinherited if she were to ever marry Will Ladislaw, his cousin and the man she happens to love. Ultimately, she decides that being with Will is more important than financial security and marries him, giving up Mr. Casaubon's will. In this way, she asserts her right to choose her life independent of her previous husband's restrictions and societal pressures (Thomas 409).

Although Rosamond's actions are subject to criticism, the determination with which she fights to establish agency and autonomy is impressive, even admirable. Dorothea, a nascent New Woman, and Rosamond, a partial *femme fatale*, can together be seen as a preview of the New Woman, who would emerge in the decade after the publication of *Middlemarch*. The New Woman has a determined attitude like Rosamond and *femme fatales* but her actions are backed by a desire for social and moral autonomy (such as making a career for oneself and obtaining financial independence) that are similar to Dorothea's.

Dorothea and Rosamond's reconciliation scene also anticipates the emphasis on female solidarity in New Women literature. The call for female solidarity is striking in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*, for instance:

Promise me that you will never, never do anything to hurt another woman...I don't suppose for an instant that you ever would. But there come times in our lives when we can do a great deal of good, or an incalculable amount of harm. If women only used their power in the right way! If we were only united we could lead the world! (164)

Rosamond has the potential to do harm, to thwart Dorothea and Will's relationship, but instead she transcends her egotisti-

cal desires and tells Dorothea the truth. When Dorothea shares with Rosamond the difficult experiences she faces as a woman, Rosamond no longer feels like a “lonely bewildered consciousness”—an isolated, powerless woman alone in society. Similar to the women’s movement that gathered force after *Middlemarch*’s publication, Rosamond draws strength by recognizing her solidarity with other women, and derives comfort from the strength of other women. The *femme fatale* trope, with which Rosamond is associated, can thus be seen as a positive: it is the beginning of a modern, feminist approach of challenging women’s oppression and society’s gender system.

### Notes

1. “In pigeon-holes partly” is the phrase used by Mr. Casaubon to describe how he organizes the files for his “Key to All Mythologies” and is Eliot’s way of describing a reductive way of organizing knowledge in general.

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# The Broken Mirror

BY  
Rebecca Jones

In 2009, Gregory Doran and the Royal Shakespeare Company produced a new film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Doran's set design, particularly the mirrored walls and reflective floor, places the audience in the middle of the stage. Security cameras, or Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTVs), perch on the walls of each room, and a two-way mirror obscures a hidden room. This performance area captures not only physical mirrors, but also character mirrorings, such as the doubling of Claudius and King Hamlet. Although these mirrored surfaces complicate the filming process by displaying mikes, cameras, and the crew, they allow Doran to create an atmosphere of surveillance. Throughout the film, the viewer observes the impact of this surveillance on various characters. Doran thus uses literal, physical, and metaphorical mirrors to explore the theme of surveillance, while also complicating stable conceptions of character and identity.

Doran interrogates the concepts of surveillance and identity from the very beginning of the film. Both Shakespeare's play and Doran's film begin with the question "Who's there?," which immediately calls attention to the presence of surveillance (Act 1.1, line1). When the film begins, the audience observes Bernardo on his watch through the black-and-white lens of the CCTV. The camera captures stonewalls, windows that overflow with light, and a reflective tile floor. Yet, Doran complicates the audience's initial impressions when he abruptly switches to a standard camera lens: the black-and-white cinematography fades into soft, blue hues, and the forceful lighting from the windows and reflective surfaces dissolves into faint flashlight beams. This monochromatic cinematography characterizes Denmark as an oppressive political entity that precludes individuality.

Observation is a natural aspect of performance: without an audience, a play ceases to serve its performative function. The audience's role as an observer allows them to "eavesdrop, [and become] invisible witnesses, snooping into the private drama

of strangers” (Kamm 55). Doran increases the audience’s participation by creating an Elsinore where both the characters and audience are “watching one another, forming theories about one another, listening, contriving, [and] full of anxiety” (Knights 44). He bombards his characters with the audience’s gaze both on and off screen; the CCTV robs the characters of their privacy and thus institutes a sense of oppression. In fact, the camera allows both the audience and other characters to watch other characters deliver soliloquies. Doran’s film technique thus creates an circle of observation: the viewer watches characters that observe other characters.

This overwhelming sense of surveillance shapes the characters’ self-perception and relationship with the audience. David Tennant, for example, portrays a mercurial Hamlet who, aware of the audience and other actors’ gaze, alternates between hiding his true feelings with the appearance of madness and revealing them during soliloquies. Jay Kamn notes, “the dramatist relies on the voices and gestures of people to reveal not only themselves, but also the nature of suspense and conflict;” likewise, Doran utilizes Tennant’s acting skills as well as the alteration between CCTV and standard film techniques to convey the film’s emotional tone (55). Indeed, Doran highlights the sense of voyeurism that pervades the play during Hamlet’s first soliloquy. When the scene begins, Hamlet stands with his back to the audience, gazes at the ceiling, and descends to the floor in rhythm with each line of his soliloquy. After he says, “resolved itself into a dew,” he curls into an upward fetal position and rocks on his feet (Act 1.2, line 134). However, when he curses, “fie on’t,” he changes positions and crawls on his hands and knees (Act 1.2, line 139). During this scene, the camera retreats in order to make the audience feel as if they have entered the room and intruded upon a private moment. Hamlet waits to reveal his face until he says “but two months” (Act 1.2, line 142). In this moment, the audience watches Hamlet violently alternate between depression and anger as he describes his mother and uncle. Hamlet “must hold [his] tongue,” despite suffering from grief and depression.

Although this scene ostensibly reveals Hamlet’s tumultuous psychological condition to the audience, Doran also preserves Hamlet’s privacy by preventing the audience and CCTV cameras

from completely entering the stage. Although Doran preserves the theatrical tradition of soliloquies, and thus allows the audience to hear Hamlet's internal frustrations, he also prevents the audience from witnessing physical expressions of such inner pain. In doing so, he combines the soliloquy tradition with a kind of cinematic voyeurism, in which the viewer invisibly witnesses the character's expressions. For example, Hamlet, aware of the audience and other characters' gaze, usurps the power of Doran's camera by filming *The Mousetrap* with an old-fashioned camera. He restricts the audience's vision by reducing the scope of the camera's lens, and places Claudius under the same surveillance that he had experienced after his father's death. As Hamlet observes Claudius through the camera, the film cycles through images of Hamlet, Claudius observing Hamlet, and Horatio watching the King. After Lucianus finishes his speech and Hamlet summarizes the play's conclusion, Claudius silently stands to stop the play, walks towards Hamlet and says, "give me some light" (Act 3.2, line 295). With lantern in hand, he stares at Hamlet, grabs the camera, and shakes his head, as if scolding a child. When Claudius walks off stage, Hamlet continues to film Claudius as the other characters bustle around him and leave the room. For Hamlet, such actions constitute power: prior to this scene, the camera and other characters record and scrutinize his actions; in order to protect his sanity, he ironically performs madness. Hamlet turns *The Mousetrap* into another "arranged scene," which reflects "[his] habitual tendency to make everything, even what he deeply feels, into a matter of play-acting" (Knights 66).

Hamlet similarly rebels against surveillance in earlier scenes. After the players' arrival and subsequent dismissal, Hamlet runs towards the CCTV, rips it from the wall, stares into the camera and announces, "now I am alone" (Act 2.2, line 575). This moment exemplifies his attitude towards his "prison" as well as his awareness of the surveillance that surrounds him (Act 2.2, line 260). Though free to "unpack [his] heart with words," he reproaches himself for doing so (Act 2.2, line 614). Like his other self-deprecating soliloquies, Hamlet observes and criticizes himself for his inaction and "lack [of] gall" (Act 2.2, line 604). Doran's film technique changes the context of Hamlet's words: they not only reference the deceased, but also the damaged CCTV. In the next

scene, Claudius notices the damaged camera, gazes into Doran's camera lens and says, "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (Act 3.2, line 202). As in the first example, Doran's film style transforms the original meaning of this phrase; in this context, the line refers to both the viewer and the security cameras.

Doran utilizes mirrors to build upon this motif of observation. Consider, for example, the mirrored floor that the actors stand on during their soliloquies, and the two-way mirror that Polonius and Claudius hide behind during Hamlet's reproach of Ophelia. In both cases, Hamlet violently reacts when he realizes that other characters are spying on him. In the nunnery scene, Doran replaces line 184 of Act 2.2 with line 30 of Act 3.1. Interestingly, this alteration allows Claudius and Polonius to hide behind the mirror without being noticed, and watch Hamlet deliver his "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3.1, line 640). When Polonius leaves, Claudius continues to observe Hamlet's interaction with Polonius, Guildenstern, and Rosencrantz; and listens to Hamlet's "Now I am alone" soliloquy (Act 2.2, line 575).

In addition to these literal mirrors, Doran represents the Ghost and Claudius as doubles, or metaphorical mirrors. Although various stage productions have employed this technique, Doran serves as the first director to apply it to a film adaptation. According to Ralph Berry, this physical doubling also serves as a conceptual doubling: "In conceptual doublings, the director looks beyond numbers, and beyond the physical characteristics of the acting corps, to couplings which have an underground linkage" (Berry 208). In the case of Doran's technique, this connection symbolizes brotherhood, as well as an additional explanation for Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. When Claudius first appears, the audience becomes aware of his violent nature. In fact, "even before we know that [he] is a murderer, it is clear that on his first appearance we are intended to register something [wrong]" (Knights 41). Initially, Doran shows the audience a figure dressed in armor that haunts the battlements of Elsinore. Yet, when the audience notices Claudius in the throne room, they begin to notice connections between the two characters. This doubling alters the audience's perception of Hamlet's glorification of his father and vilification of his uncle: since the same actor plays both men, the audience does not believe Hamlet's assertions

about a god-crafted father, nor his description of his uncle as “a mildewed ear... [a] moor” (Act 3.4, lines 65-72; Act 3.4, lines 74,76). As a result, the audience attributes Hamlet’s praise of his father to his familial devotion or his idolization of the dead. Thus, this doubling emphasizes the contrast between the two brothers, highlights their personalities, and provides an additional context for Gertrude’s hasty marriage and Hamlet’s words.

Likewise, Doran utilizes Laertes and Fortinbras as metaphorical mirrors for Hamlet. For example, he cuts out the Fortinbras mirror in order to “[emphasize] the personal or domestic element of Hamlet’s tragedy” (Lopez 356-57). By contrast, he utilizes Laertes to parallel and exemplify Hamlet’s desires. In fact, throughout the play, Hamlet grows to see “...himself in Laertes” (Prosser 228). He states, for example, “by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his” (Act 5.2, lines 87-88). Yet, the play complicates this relationship in Hamlet’s “moment of insight,” when “Shakespeare underlines the parallel established in Act IV—but at the same time ends it” (Prosser 228). Although Hamlet connects to Laertes because he similarly lost his father, Hamlet also murdered Laertes’ father; as a result, Hamlet and Laertes’ strongest point of connection is also the one that encourages them to murder each other.

In many ways, Laertes exemplifies the active and resolute man that Hamlet aspires to become. While Hamlet ponders revenge for three acts, Laertes immediately takes action following his vow for revenge. Throughout the play, Hamlet, “with his supreme self-awareness, constantly sees in others images of himself” (Berry 204). Indeed, he berates himself for his cowardice and inaction as he witnesses other characters enacting revenge. Ironically, however, Laertes’ impulsive and blind fury merely allows the king to manipulate him, and eventually results in his death. Indeed, Laertes becomes “mere putty in the King’s hands,” and “determined to act on his own initiative in the name of honor [...] is so blinded by rage that he becomes a mere pawn in another man’s plot [with] Claudius appeal[ing] to him as did the Ghost to Hamlet” (Prosser 214).

In addition to these metaphorical mirrors, Doran often employs mirrors to reflect the characters’ psychological conditions. In the last two acts, for example, Hamlet breaks a mirror when

he shoots the spying Polonius in his mother's closet. Following Polonius' death, his ghost enters the room from the broken mirror. This shattered mirror reappears throughout the film and symbolizes the characters' broken psychological state. For example, when Ophelia calls for Gertrude after Hamlet leaves for England, the broken mirror splits her reflection into small parts, which captures her fractured mental condition. Likewise, Gertrude also shows signs of psychological brokenness. Although she was once a lavish queen who sported elegant gowns and fashionable hairstyles, she wears plain clothing after Hamlet shows her "the inmost part of [herself]" (Shakespeare 3.4.24-25). When she stands in front of the broken mirror, her reflection, like that of Ophelia reveals a woman in the midst of mental decay.

Mirrors particularly reveal Hamlet's psychology. In Act Five, Hamlet stands before the broken mirror, and says, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (Act 5.2, lines 11-12). This scene captures the ways in which Hamlet remains "constantly aware of his own mental processes" (Davis 631). As he looks at his image in the mirror, he remains "in the position of the professional philosopher who criticizes his thoughts while [...] thinking them" (Davis 631). Yet, he gradually accepts his situation, including his propensity for inaction. Indeed, he appears like an entirely different character. In the first half of the film, he sported blue jeans and a red t-shirt that contrasted from the monochromatic tone of the rest of the film. This initial appearance thus set him apart and enhanced his appearance of madness. In this scene, however, he wears a button-up shirt, jeans, and shoes, which symbolizes the conclusion of his performed madness. Although he was initially "on the defensive against a world conceived as entirely hostile" Hamlet breaks the mirror, or his previous self-image, and thus achieves freedom from his previous constraints to enact revenge (Knights 54).

Doran's film presents a unique and modern interpretation of *Hamlet*. In doing so, he partakes in the "evolving stage tradition [that] is reflected not only in the increasing cuts but also in the changing acting conventions" (Prosser 242). His film consists "of close visual focus and small gestures... small acting, or perhaps life-sized acting, at its best" (Lopez 354-55). His camera direction "made the production feel direct and immediate in its contact

with the audience, and that made its mode of representation and the persons represented seem naturalistic and transparent” (357). Doran thus transforms the original *Hamlet* into his own work. He presents the audience with a world that holds “as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature” and thus offers the audience a new way of understanding the play (Act 3.2, line 23). Indeed, Doran uses mirrors to demonstrate how individuals often deceive both others and themselves. Furthermore, he creates a “prison” in which each character’s spirit and identity are examined and judged. As a result, his production successfully communicates the play’s complex and seemingly archaic themes to a modern audience. Indeed, he creates a world that reflects the prominence of surveillance in the modern era.

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# **“The Poorer Silence:” Bridging the Gap between Author and Reader in Billy Collins’ Poetry**

BY  
Kristen Matus

Jeredith Merrin describes Billy Collins as “A best-selling poet who sports blue jeans, likes jazz, and is clearly at home in the neighborhood bar as well as in the poetry workshop; an Irishman with the gift o’ gab who can make audiences laugh aloud and whose all-American, boyish name is Billy, Charmin’ Billy” (203). Now, with a description such as this, it remains unclear why this relaxed poet should be the topic of study for an essay exploring the complex nature of writing, but Billy Collins’ unique viewpoint on the role of authorship within his poetry comes across just as strongly as the jokes at his readings. Collins frequently engages with Roland Barthes, author of “The Death of the Author,” who presented radical new assertions on the author/reader dynamic. Both Barthes and Foucault, a fellow scholar on the subject, position the author in a direct binary with the reader, where both author and reader are distinctly separated by a gap that remains uncrossed by any scholarly theory. According to Barthes, the author no longer assigns meaning, but rather a reader interprets a strategically compiled collection of signs. Barthes describes this idea by stating that “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (3). Thus, the language that an author chooses allows for various sign interpretations by the reader, but never establishes a singular way of reading the text. The malleability of language allows the function of the author itself to become malleable. This means that no singular, powerful author could exist because an ever-changing sign system removes and replaces all of his or her functions. Barthes flips the traditional author model and, in doing so, creates a new distinct binary between the author and the reader. Billy Collins knows

of Barthes' ideas and systematically toys with them throughout his poetic works.

However, instead of flipping the binary, Collins situates an argument in the negative area between these two spheres. Barthes writes that "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (1). Instead of simply arguing against Barthes' statement, Collins establishes himself in a new ground that embraces both the author's and reader's power. As a former Poet Laureate for the United States, Billy Collins has attained great authorial power, especially for a poet. Merrin states, "The Collins success story, though, is more than a matter of strenuous self-promotion and easygoing *Prairie Home Companion* appeal. This is a bona fide literary phenomenon, backed, as past book blurbs make clear, by big guns" (202). Due to his power as an author, Collins' poetry frequently questions the nature of both authors and readers, whether in reference to poetry or literature in general. By questioning that relationship, Collins responds to debates that have already been argued amongst scholars. In knowing the previous criticisms of the function of the author, Collins creates a new concept of the author-reader model and also mocks previous leading ideas. His poetry frequently engages in a direct dialogical tension between these domains as he seeks to generate his own answer to the distinct question of "What is an author?"

Obviously, the inherent specificity in Billy Collins' poetry enables a connection to build between author and reader. Collins begins his poem "A Portrait of the Reader with a Bowl of Cereal" by stating that "Every morning I sit across from you / at the same small table, / the sun all over the breakfast things—" (1-3). In this poem, the specificity of the breakfast table shared between author and reader allows Collins' authorial genius to shine through, and, with this simple beginning, Collins already establishes both presences in this poem. Even though the title solely references the reader, the poem also paints the portrait of the author himself. At one point Collins says "and I can hide behind the paper, / rotate in its drum of calamitous news" (17-18). This poem's descriptions remain responsible for its atypical nature. Both author and reader are presented on the same plane, even in the midst of some sort of

conversation. Collins ends the poem by stating that he will have something to tell the readers, and then describes their reaction (25-29). As he describes the reader's reaction, he states: "and you will look up, as always, / your spoon dripping milk, ready to listen" (Collins 28-29). The author ensnares the reader, and this poem represents just one portrait of their interactions. Jeredith Merrin explains, "Billy Collins has a reputation as an unusually reader-friendly poet; and that's certainly the case, in the way a joker/charmer strikes everyone as a friendly sort of fellow..." (210). Merrin does not regard Collins' reader-friendly texts as helpful to his authorial power, but a closer analysis of the function of both author and reader within the text itself sheds more light on the relationship.

Billy Collins highlights the differences between mediums of writing by emphasizing the greater connection that an author attains with a reader in the poetic channel. Throughout the text of "The Great American Poem," Collins makes an overarching comparison to a novel and a poem, beginning with the line "If this were a novel," (1). The use of the subjunctive mood in this opening line begins the poem on a wishful note of possibility, which becomes even more evident as the first five stanzas describe the stereotypical novel structure and why the action and adventure of a novel allures most readers more than a poem. Collins uniquely displays this point by engaging in direct dialogue with the reader, referenced as "you" throughout. He culminates this dialogue in the sixth stanza as he exclaims: "But this is a poem, not a novel, and the only characters here are you and I," (21-22). He engages with the traditional novel structure by assigning the reader and himself, the author, distinct roles and thus establishes that the author and reader of poetry forge as strong of a relationship as characters that reside in the same novel. Furthermore, Collins establishes that these two new "characters" become so connected over a poetic work that both parties can hear the same sound at the conclusion of the poem. As he states, "We have something better than all this turbulence / lurching toward some ruinous conclusion. / I mean the sound that we will hear / as soon as I stop writing and put down this pen." (29-32). The author and reader become dependent on each other and the poem itself in

order to hear this sound that establishes poetry as the superior means of expression.

This interdependence directly contradicts Barthes' established findings that the author relinquishes all power of interpretation once the text leaves his hands. Collins not only asserts that both author and reader contain the means to interpret a work, but takes this argument further by explaining that the tangible relationship between the two makes poetry better than any other medium. The fact that this connection is directly felt makes Collins' argument so revolutionary. As his last stanza describes, "I once heard someone compare it / to the sound of crickets in a field of wheat / or, more faintly, just the wind / over that field stirring things that we will never see." (33-36). To anyone who has ever seen a field of wheat, this image intensifies the described sound to an intriguing proportion because a wheat field, like most crops, appears boundless because of the sheer vastness of it. As such, Collins describes this connective sound as one of infinite size, alluded to by the final phrase "we will never see." Collins creates a solid tie between author and reader, but then destabilizes the terms of their interactions by using images and feelings that can never be fully comprehended. This only partially debunks Barthes' viewpoint because, even though the author and reader converse, the two characters in this story rely on each other and the text to do so. Collins' notion of the author then becomes only partially dead, still capable of communication and semiotic interpretation, yet not capable of independently achieving the dialogical goals.

Further dialogue occurs when, by annotating the poem, the reader becomes an amateur author, which undermines the traditional distinction between the spheres, further bridging the gap between the two. These annotations present themselves as the reader's interjectional musings in Collins' "Marginalia." Collins not only includes examples of these comments, but also explains the possible motivations of the various readers that left them. He gives the scribbling a voice as he states: "If I could just get my hands on you, / Kierkegaard, or Conor Cruise O'Brien, / they seem to say, / I would bolt the door and beat some logic into your head" (5-8). Collins attempts to explain the marginalia by adopting the viewpoint of the reader who resides in direct discourse with the author of the texts containing the annotation. The

number of possible readers and authors in this scenario becomes confusing, as “reader” and “author” interchange with each shift in perspective. The original reader converses with the original book’s author and then the new reader, Collins, takes the interpretations and makes them authorial comments in a poem, simultaneously adopting the original reader’s eyes and current authorial power in order to explain these instances to the current reader of the poem. No distinct roles exist in this portrayal because all of the authors and readers past and present assume both functions in the multiple texts. This duplicity completely confuses the binary that Barthes clings to, and Collins further expounds upon the relationship later in the poem.

Some might contend that Collins encourages the author/reader duplicity in order to confuse and perhaps completely disvalue the importance of the author/reader distinction. Collins notes in “Marginalia” the historical occurrence of annotations when he relates, “Even Irish monks in their cold scriptoria / jotted along the borders of the Gospels / brief asides about the pains of copying,” (39-41). While this historical note seems insignificant on the page, Collins uses it to emphasize the lasting effect of writing, even if the writing manifests as small jots on the sides of the pages. He admits that not all readers who leave their words behind share this same overarching view by stating that “We have all seized the white perimeter as our own / and reached for a pen if only to show / we did not just laze in an armchair turning pages;” (34-36). Thus, while the casual reader may try to project a certain image unto future readers, this concern does not include narcissistically ensuring that their words remain alive somewhere. Refuting the Barthesian hypothesis, the author could never die in this scenario because all readers become amateur authors in their own right due to the marginalia on the page. Now, these new authors do not hold the same importance and esteem of established authors that have published many volumes of text, such as Collins himself, but they do prove that a reader does not always remain in his or her fixed role. Returning to the description of the monks, Collins describes “anonymous men catching a ride into the future / on a vessel more lasting than themselves” (44-45). These readers-turned-authors will never be known by name or merit in the future, but the writing will still last forever.

While Barthes would argue that the duplicitous nature of authorship would eliminate the author, Collins shows that blurring the distinct separation between author and reader strengthens the author's function. Barthes asserts, "succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions..." (3). Within his argument, he insists that the modern writer contains no feeling. In his view, the author functions merely as a collector of signs that have already been established, so the author loses all individuality (Barthes 3). While Collins' poem "Marginalia" may seem to support this Barthesian hypothesis because the multitude of comments could represent a collection of signs that the author (Collins) compiled, the inherent duplicity of the author/reader functions within the poem to alleviate the singular authorial strain while simultaneously highlighting Collins' humor throughout. For instance, Collins describes at one point, "trying to imagine what the person must look like / who wrote 'Don't be a ninny' / alongside a paragraph in *The Life of Emily Dickinson*" (14-16). Collins asserts his own authorial power by remarking with humor about the comments that the reader left. In doing so, he establishes that the author can indeed exist, even within a collection of signs, or, in this case, marginalia, compiled by previous authors. Collins' humor comes across because of the interaction between his authorial comments and the pseudo-authorial comments of readers past, thus disproving Barthes' hypothesis that this interaction eliminates the author function.

It could additionally be argued that the dialogical tension becomes cyclical in Billy Collins' poetry, which makes the author's function temporarily laughable because of the witticisms created by adopting the response of the reader. In "The Trouble with Poetry," Collins assumes both voices within the poem as he describes the author's and the reader's function in relation to poetry. He generates the reader's hypothetical responses, but also details the authorial responsibility to continue producing work. Referring to the endless nature of poetry, Collins asks "and how will it ever end? / unless the day finally arrives / when we have compared everything in the world / to everything else in the world," (10-13). The cycle of poetry never ends which troubles the notion that the author as an individual ever possesses any power over the created work. While this poetic cycle may seem to focus solely

on the author, Collins also brings the reader into the discussion by hypothesizing generalized responses to poetry. As he states, "Poetry fills me with joy / and I rise like a feather in the wind. / Poetry fills me with sorrow / and I sink like a chain flung from a bridge" (17-20). Since Collins usually hyper-infuses his poetry with specificity, these vague similes function ironically to chastise the stereotypical reader who misses the higher interpretations of poetry and only perceives elementary emotional input.

In addition, by describing the reader in this manner, Collins completely discredits the Barthesian argument that the reader possesses the ability and power to fully interpret the text and presents a new concept of authorship and readership within the cyclical nature of poetry. Arguing that only the educated reader can completely understand a text, Collins insists that the majority of readers require the assistance of the author in order to process what the author has written. This contributes to his description of the cyclical nature of poetry because, while the reader relies on the author for understanding, the author too depends on the reader to give value to the written word by interpreting it. In addition, all readers contribute to the cycle of poetry because all authors were once solely readers. Barthes argues that "...the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them" (3). As Collins describes poets, he states: "And what an unmerry band of thieves we are," (28). Thus, while Collins and Barthes agree that authors commit thievery from previous authors to create their work, Collins asserts that the author must help the reader understand the text. Thievery makes the art of creating poetry continue, and the coexistence of the author and reader within the cycle of stealing allows a singular reader-turned-author to create "new" work.

The divide between authorship and readership often exists in the form of a metaphysical barrier, such as silence, that must be broken in order to reach the other plane of understanding. Collins illuminates this in his poem "Silence" as he describes the many different occasions on which silence ensues, and even personifies objects and nature. The first lines state: "There is a sudden silence of the crowd / above a motionless player on the field, / and the silence of the orchid" (Collins 1-3). These begin-

ning lines establish a somber and reflective tone for the poem, which continues throughout as Collins transforms the response of silence into a barrier between the realms. While the first half of the poem concerns itself with images to familiarize the reader with silence, the second half engages in conversation with the reader and transposes the silence into an area where both author and reader can exist. As Collins elaborates, “The silence when I hold you to my chest, / the silence of the window above us, / and the silence when you rise and turn away” (10-12). “Silence” repeats in almost every line of the poem, but its meaning shifts constantly. In this segment, silence seems to represent a literal space where both author and reader can have the same window above them, or the author can perceive the reader leaving the work. Anis Shivani asserts, “Collins’s exercises in metaphysical reconceptualisation don’t really refresh ordinary experience, lacking the mystical glow” (225). Shivani lessens the importance of the element of “silence” throughout Collins’ poems, probably because he fails to analyze the silence within the author/reader dynamic. Shivani continues that “...Collins still leaves the reader with the impression that his field of observation is not broad and expansive” (225). However, silence, a sound of nothing, becomes the thread that ties unrelated experiences together, and this allows both author and reader to exist in the same location where they can actually perceive each other as well.

In his poetry, Collins seems to emphasize the authorial impact on readers in order to contradict Barthes’ insistence that the author has died. The poem “Silence” continues throughout with multiple descriptors and personifications of silence. As Collins begins to discuss the reader in reference to the silence, he entrusts both reader and author with more power than they inherently possess. Thus, when the poem concludes with “the silence before I wrote a word / and the poorer silence now,” the paradigm of author/reader switches (17-18). While Barthes argues that linguistic expression gives all power to the reader for interpretation, Collins exhibits within these final lines the linguistic power that an author still maintains (2). Referring to himself as “I” directly foregrounds the author and takes agency away from the reader. Merrin unpacks this phenomena when he states that “Granted, not a few poets favor the ‘I,’ but none with quite the complacency



of Collins, who proceeds with confidence that his reader, like the doting mother of an only child, will remain enthralled by his every passing observation” (204). Merrin suggests that Collins’ repetitive use of “I” phrases lessens the quality of his poetry, but Collins’ unique author/reader dynamic would not exist without the repetition. The reader is not responsible for the words created on the page. The author firmly stamped those words into history, and, as such, contains the power to mediate the silence that exists between the middle ground of author and reader. Barthes states that “...linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors” (2). However, if the author epitomizes the mastery of language, this language should support, and not deny, the author’s direct presence in the text. Collins makes this clear by directly referring to himself, which removes the power of the reader from having any impact on the text.

One could speculate that the suspended state between author and reader can only be momentarily crossed by an author that hastens to describe it. In “A Portrait of the Reader with a Bowl of Cereal,” Collins establishes a connection between author and reader over the simple setting of the breakfast table. Referring to both, he states “Most days, we are suspended / over a deep pool of silence” (8-9). The state of suspension enables the transcending of the divide. While author and reader are not sitting in the same room at the same breakfast table, they still remain connected through what Collins refers to as “silence.” He uses the term “silence” because direct interaction remains impossible, but through the connection that a poem provides, the contact can still be felt. However, Collins emphasizes in this line that this connection sometimes remains elusive. Many variables affect the suspension, including the author and the text. If the author remains unknowledgeable about the connection that can exist, then this bond may never be established through his or her texts. Thus, while the “silence” between author and reader remains subjective to most authors, it exists within the works of Billy Collins and he uses and explains it within his poems.

Also, while narrowing the gap between author and reader, Collins emphasizes the importance of the newly-created middle ground. This space represents the dialogical interactions between the two. However, it must be distinguished that this area is not the text itself, but rather a metaphysical space where both author and reader share power. The key distinction between Collins' poetry and other scholarship about authorship lies in the heart of this middle ground where author and reader converse. Barthes and Foucault do not think that this gap exists, but rather, either the author or the reader contains sole power. Collins declines to fully support either argument and establishes this key locale where the true dialogic conversation between the powerful entities can occur. However, Collins does not always give complete power to author or reader. If he did, he would make the same argument as either Barthes or Foucault. The tension between author and reader manifests in the neutral area that Collins frequently writes about in his poetry. Thus, when Collins ends "Silence" by emphasizing the new "poorer silence," he exerts authorial power not only over what the reader has just read, but also over the realm of authorship and readership as a whole (18). Collins rectifies the relationship between author and reader by creating a shared space for both to coexist within his poetry.

Collins situates himself into the discussion of authorship within Barthes' previous arguments, but it remains unclear whether other contemporary American authors of Collins' generation will do the same. As Anis Shivani describes, "Readers of serious literature, as recent surveys have shown, are rapidly disappearing in America. Collins knows it and accepts it" (228). Collins' discussion of the connection between author and reader operates on this basic grain of knowledge. If, as Barthes asserts, the author died and then as studies show readership is fading, a new relationship between the two needs to be formed to save both from extinction. If both author and reader disappear, who will remain to appreciate the poetry? As such, Collins emphasizes the importance of the duality of both author and reader to suggest their codependence. Revitalizing this relationship allows for the revitalization of poetry, and this revitalization explains Collins' huge success on the dwindling market. Other poets should seek to incorporate similar author/reader relations within their poems,

not only to encourage more readership, but also to encourage more writing in general. Analyzing the function of authorship within other leading American poets' works could constitute a very interesting study and could also signal whether or not a certain viewpoint results in higher sales. Collins' unique viewpoint about the function of the author within the Barthesian context has established new ground for all other American poets as they explore the relationship between author and reader within their works, and how this relationship helps or hinders their success.

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# Gender, Identity, and Rock 'n' Roll: How *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* Redefines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

BY  
Ashley Miner

Many critics date the birth of the modern science fiction story to Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. The tale brings forth previously unmentionable concerns and magnifies the fears of the era, especially fears of medical technology and homosexuality. Her novel receives substantial praise not only for its articulation of and subtle commentaries on the dominating influence of mainstream society, race, religion, and gender, but also, according to Jane Donawerth's study of women and science fiction, for "making a science that does not exclude women, creating an identity for women [...] and finding a voice in a male world" (xviii). Shelley's masterful plot weaving allows for a male to figuratively and literally bestow life, give birth, to another living being. Donawerth declares that "some women, like Shelley, detail the story of science as illicit intercourse" (xxi). A transfer of power occurs; men seem inherently to adopt actions culturally coded as feminine, and women assert themselves as strong leaders in a male driven society. One of many adaptations of Shelly's novel, the 1975 film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, takes the fear of undefined gender barriers and turns it into a literal performance. In this film, just as in Shelly's novel, codified gender roles dissipate, leaving multifaceted views on sexuality and maternity. Dr. Frank-N-Furter, the modern Frankenstein, gives voice to the females of science fiction by acting female himself and eliminating the boundaries of gender. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* acts as an accurate retelling of Shelley's novel by retaining its birth myth and magnifying, as well as redefining, the relationship between creator and creature. It shamelessly modernizes and exploits the internal desires that Frankenstein restrains himself from bestowing upon his own creation.

Unlike the sickly and seemingly possessed Victor Frankenstein, for whom the reader often immediately acquires sympathy, Dr. Frank-N-Furter enters his first scene as a flamboyant, yet

dangerous, being (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*<sup>1</sup>). Similar to the function of many characters in horror-comedy films, his appearance “enable[s] characters who are normally coded as ‘monstrous,’ by virtue of their aging or bizarrely costumed bodies within the conventional horror genre to command the narrative,” insists Caroline Joan S. Picart (193). The distortion of gender signifiers, combined with the use of theatrical techniques, works to undo the idea of homosexuality as a secret danger and allows it to be viewed through a comedic lens as a laughable, if unattractive, quality. Through his costume and mannerisms, Dr. Frank-N-Furter creates an environment where many cultural boundaries do not exist. This ranges from the incestuous housekeepers to his own unfixed romantic preferences. His glamorously glittery costumes announce an air of absurdity. The other characters in the scene immediately respond to his presence, and his position as a dominant force within the narrative becomes apparent.

Victor Frankenstein attempts to conceal his sexual orientation, yet it emerges in increments through his words and actions. When preparing for his departure to the university, Frankenstein and his longtime friend Clerval share a moment during which they cannot “tear [them]selves away from each other, nor persuade [them]selves to say the word ‘Farewell!’” (Shelley 44). Clerval often cares for Frankenstein and refers to him with an extraordinary amount of affection by titling him “my dear Frankenstein” (Shelley 59). These exchanges feminize Frankenstein as does the description of him before the creation scene with his “cheek grown pale [from] study, and his person [...] emaciated with confinement,” phrases that suggest stereotypical female literary characters and prepare the reader for Victor’s next female role, his maternal performance (Shelley 53).

Before the viewer is exposed to the maternal image of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, the text establishes his identity as an ambiguously coded entity. He dresses only in feminine-coded attire, adorns himself with a substantial amount of cosmetics, and expresses an extensive amount of sexually charged attention to both male and female characters. Also, the object of desire Dr. Frank-N-Furter designs for his amusement is a well-defined, young, and attractive man. By erasing the ideals surrounding masculinity, the film simultaneously deconstructs femininity.

When Dr. Frank-N-Furter “plays” a woman, he dissipates the line separating men and women physically and, therefore, socially. Acting female, as well as rejecting the elements of the persona that allows one to identify him as a male, he mimics the women of the film, such as the domestic Magenta, who demonstrate the same sexual indistinctness.

While Frankenstein lacks the flamboyant attire of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, the reader primarily questions his sexual identity due to his obsession with the female art of creation or childbearing. Richard K. Sanderson, in his article “Glutting the Maw of Death: Suicide and Procreation in *Frankenstein*,” says that in conjunction with his feminine qualities, “[Frankenstein]’s creation of the monster is seen as displacing woman’s natural childbearing role, and upon this resonant image of male monstrosity, critics have built a wide variety of gender related interpretations” (49). While the novel subtly critiques the idea of gender as a fixed identity analogous to biological sex, the film works to exploit the notion that gender is a mere performance. In an environment where nothing seems out of place, regardless of the absurdity, the idea of a man “birthing” another human seems quite ordinary.

By taking a man and placing him in a woman’s role, the role of a mother as well as a feminine lover, and clothing him in feminine attire, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* reflects the gender anxiety shown throughout *Frankenstein*. This occurs particularly through the character Brad and his discomfort with Dr. Frank-N-Furter’s lifestyle, and erases such. The film unravels ideas of what makes one masculine and of how society expects a man to act. The way the film constructs the theatrics of the characters, magnifying their personalities through song and dance, works toward proving to the audience that gender is, in fact, a performance<sup>2</sup>. Careful attention to color, texture, and the use of glitter, all of which enhance the feminized physical features, aids in creating the feeling of a play. None of the costumes, excluding Brad and Janet’s upon their arrival, reflect culturally acceptable formal or even, arguably, casual attire. The supporting characters also assist in this portrayal, for they do not dress in a particular manner according to their sex. Both men and women adorn themselves in suits swathed with glitter and nontraditional colors. Dr. Frank-N-Furter appears both masculine and feminine in his voice inflections and physi-

cal actions; however, just as Frankenstein does, he does tend to identify predominately with the role of the female.

Both texts also comment on the cultural norm of marriage. Frankenstein never appears interested in marriage, even a marriage to the “beautiful and adored companion of all [his] occupations and [his] pleasures,” Elizabeth (Shelley 35). This would have been deemed unusual for the time period. In Shelley’s era, marriage functioned as an important economic arrangement. In fact, one of the most peculiar scenes consists of a dream Frankenstein experiences in which he kisses his fiancé, who becomes his dead mother; from that moment Frankenstein finds the idea of marriage incomprehensible as the dream equates heterosexual marriage with death. While Frankenstein’s dream acts as a turning point in his perception of women and creation, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is framed by a wedding and diverts the plans of the two protagonists, Brad and Janet. Although men and women still find themselves expected to marry in the present day, society now views marriages as harmonious partnerships, not business agreements. When asked if Dr. Frank-N-Furter possesses a wife, a servant within the house responds: “The master is not yet married, nor do I think he ever will be” (*RHPS*). The servant’s comment not only alludes to the doctor’s sexual ambiguity, but also to the sexual freedoms represented within the twentieth-century contexts of the film. This newly recognized freedom additionally transcends into the realm of bringing forth a child.

Although they closely follow each other and work toward the same cultural purpose, the primary difference between the film and novel lies in how each represents its respective creature. Both Dr. Frank-N-Furter and Frankenstein find themselves fascinated with creating the perfect man; Frankenstein consistently describes the creature, as it is intended to appear, as beautiful, which contrasts heavily with the grotesque description of the creation he develops: “his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness” (Shelley 56). Frankenstein undermines this image when he completes his description by observing that “these luxuries only formed a more horrid contrast with his [dun] watery eyes” and that “[the creature’s] yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (Shelley 56). Frankenstein anticipates that his finished product will revere him as a child respects



its parents. He states: “No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserves theirs” (Shelley 52-53). It initially sounds as though Shelley wishes for Frankenstein to become a nurturing figure to his ideal creation. Yet, Frankenstein’s relationship with his creature includes a subtle use of sexualized language, implying his own femininity as well as eroticizing his creation. Often, when encountering his creature, including the night of the birth, Frankenstein finds that “[his] pulse beat[s] so quickly and hardly that [he feels] the palpitation of every artery” (Shelley 57). Also, as Michael Eberle-Sinatra notes:

the language used to describe the making of the Creature by Victor in the novel suggests masturbation. [...] Victor describes how he uses his ‘profane fingers’ in a ‘solitary chamber’ where he keeps his ‘workshop of filthy creation.’ [...] These [...] suggest homosexual fantasies. (187)

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* shamelessly and exuberantly portrays the conflict of the maternal and sexual presence of Frankenstein that Shelly constructs in her novel. Despite his unconventional appearance before his creation Rocky’s birth, Dr. Frank-N-Furter poorly, but consciously, attempts to portray a maternal image. He enters the scene dressed in a floor length set of surgical scrubs that resemble a modest dress and are accentuated by a woman’s signature accessory, pearls. This classic housewife adornment is completed as he puts on a pair of rubber dishwashing gloves that mock the idea of a perfect, sterile, environment. The hyper-masculine figure, Brad, completes the image of a domestic space. On the other hand, viewers also see his sexually charged corset and underneath his scrubs, revealing that Dr. Frank-N-Furter continues to perform his role. In place of creating a female, Dr. Frank-N-Furter designs a man, and that continues to erase the notion of gender by allowing him to maintain the role of a mother and, later, a lover to a male figure.

Another constant between the two gender-bending creators is the statement each recounts about his own experiment. Before the actual births of their creatures, Frankenstein and Dr. Frank-N-Furter each deliver an impassioned speech to their audiences. Although each of their passionate confessions describe how their

discovery of the regeneration of matter came to them by accident, the audiences' reception of the information varies drastically. Several similarities exist within each recollection; both doctors allude to the discovery of life as an accident and as a spark. However, Frankenstein's description radiates fear and concern, magnifying the fears that the people of the Romantic era felt in regards to the advancement of medical technology. He speaks with disgust as he describes his greed and his irresponsible application of knowledge: "An accident again changed the current of my ideas. All that had so long engaged my attention suddenly grew despicable. Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction" (Shelley 40-1). The disgust and horror that Frankenstein feels toward his creation once again alerts readers to his anxieties about gender-bending. Due to the ambiguity of his gender identity, Frankenstein struggles with the idea of being part female<sup>3</sup>. The fear Frankenstein feels coincides with his guilt of bringing forth a child and knowing that his desires for male intimacy transcend traditional norms.

When delivering his speech to the Transylvania Transvestites, Dr. Frank-N-Furter speaks with demonic delight of his discovery of the creation of life:

All the pieces seem to fit into place. What a sucker you've been, what a fool. The answer was there all the time. It took a small accident to make it happen...And that's how I discovered the secret. That illusive ingredient, that spark that is the breath of life...I have that knowledge. I hold the secret...to life itself! (*RHPS*)

Dr. Frank-N-Furter feels physically and emotionally complete despite his own lack of a defined gender role. His seamless transitions between the male and female archetypes allow him to confidently transition between the roles of a nurturer and lover. When introducing Rocky "to the assembled crowd," he proudly affirms, in the words of Eberle-Sinatra, that Rocky is "a creation intended for his own personal sexual pleasure" (187). In contrast to Frankenstein, who represses his desires, Dr. Frank-N-Furter's ability to embrace the female's newly discovered sense

of sexual autonomy allows him to embrace his creation, Rocky, as he intends.

As Frankenstein's "breathless horror" comes to life, the deranged creator succumbs to fear and refuses to acknowledge his desire for male intimacy (Shelley 56). The description of the creature morphs him into what seems like a manifestation of Frankenstein's fear: "His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful [...] [h]is yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (Shelley 56). He "rush[es] out of the room, and continue[s] a long time traversing [his] bed chamber" alone (Shelley 56). Returning to his room, a place of intimacy, without the company of his creation shows the magnitude of Frankenstein's fear. When Frankenstein returns to his room, Dr. Frank-N-Furter enters the marriage chamber made for him and Rocky, and he immediately assumes an undefined identity once more. This scene acts as a representation of what "Victor had in mind when he created his creature" (Eberle-Sinatra 194). The union with, as opposed to the rejection of, the creature and creator determines the fate of the characters.

Frankenstein's sexual repression ultimately results in his demise. His creature seeks and obsesses over the idea of affection. The creature attempts to satisfy his need for human contact and love by witnessing other human beings, but he cannot satisfy the need for love he requires from his father figure or, indeed, his desired lover. Because Frankenstein feels shame and terror about his intentions, he refuses his creation the affection they both crave. His rejection drives his creature to severe aggression and resentment. Seeking retribution, Frankenstein's creature wreaks havoc upon his life by taking the lives of friends and loved ones, and in doing so, he destroys Frankenstein himself. This destruction seems to represent the devastating effects of sexual desire repression.

While it appears that Dr. Frank-N-Furter suffers the same fate, his death is completely unrelated to his sexual identity. Although his servants murder him out of feelings of spite and jealousy, they do not possess the same feelings of abandonment that Frankenstein's creature embodies; their feelings stem from a series of incidents unrelated to Dr. Frank-N-Furter's sexuality, gender identity, or scientific experimentation. Even though both deaths result from conflicted emotions, Dr. Frank-N-Furter's

death does not stem from his creature's actions. Rocky dies alongside his creator, an act that reinforces the extent of their union. Therefore, the gap between Dr. Frank-N-Furter's sexuality and his death arguably represents the emerging acceptance of homosexuality and science.

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* serves as a culturally applicable commentary on the art of performing a gender. Simultaneously, it filters its story through a retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The film follows the novel closely, but allows for a modern view of perceptions of gender and homosexuality. While Shelley's novel serves to comment on the fears surrounding same-sex desire and technological advancement, the film modernizes the portrayal of these concerns. By relating the concept of gender as a performance, to the viewer, it "aims to resist and critique dominant sexual paradigms" (Hollinger 25). Shelley's *Frankenstein* initially creates a voice for women in her era; however, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* eliminates the fear associated with her portrayal of a man who embodies feminine attributes.

## Notes

1. Hereafter referred to as *RHPS*

2. According to Judith Butler, "Performativity is a matter of repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of *a priori* norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are forged" (22-23).

3. It is important to note that homosexuality as an identity category was not recognized until 1869.

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# Women in Transition in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

BY  
Malcolm Tariq

English writer Virginia Woolf, having been born in the Victorian age, was very much so reared a Victorian by her parents. Victorian principles dictated that it was not considered acceptable or regal if Woolf, as a woman, decided to smoke or vote. Moreover, the most sought-after profession for a woman of Woolf's status was to be married. These principles were upheld by women who were thought to be "privileged" (Kelley 1). By the time Woolf took her own life in 1941, the Victorian era as she had known it had died. During her lifetime, Woolf's works of art reflected her opposition to the principles upheld by Victorian society and reflected a more feminist point of view. *To the Lighthouse* is no exception to Woolf's outspoken resistance to the Victorian lifestyle in which she was raised. Woolf's portrayal of the female characters in the novel and their roles as mothers, daughters, and wives explicitly illustrates her opposition to Victorian values. More importantly, the roles that these characters play indicate that the values and principles of the Victorian age that were once regarded highly by women were beginning to change. Woolf uses her female characters to represent the fading of the Victorian age and the installation of a new set of values that would come to define the modernist age of which Woolf saw herself a part.

Mrs. Ramsay, the mother, is easily seen as the most important character in *To the Lighthouse* because of the central position that she has in relation to the other characters. Her keen insights on the other characters and, vice-versa, their many different perceptions of her place her as the novel's central character. Woolf, moreover, emphasizes this fact as Mrs. Ramsay's stream of consciousness narrates most of the first part of the novel. As the leading character, most of the novel's scenes have some depiction of her in them, even if it is just a thought of her. This is no surprise considering that as both a mother and wife of the Victorian age, Mrs. Ramsay is seen as the nurturer of her family. Furthermore,

her positions as a mother and a wife are so important in her life that they comprise its entirety; nothing else is meant to take priority. Nevertheless, Mrs. Ramsay is the only woman in the novel to hold such firm Victorian beliefs concerning marriage and motherhood. Her idea of what a woman should stand for within these two areas contrasts with what the younger women in her life believe. Her daily life in her marriage and motherhood show this.

Jane Lilienfeld argues that the Ramsay marriage is based on the marriage of Woolf's parents, the Stephens. She moreover calls the Ramsay marriage a "mature, sharp critical examination [...] of the destruction wreaked by the Victorian social arrangement on human capacities for freedom and growth" (Lilianfeld 149). This thesis presents the idea of enclosure. Lilienfeld illustrates that Mrs. Ramsay is trapped inside her role as a Victorian wife and cannot transcend those boundaries to concentrate on other things that she may wish to. Such boundaries insist that her primary and only focus be on her children and husband. Thus, although Mrs. Ramsay upholds her Victorian role, she feels trapped in that persona and cannot become more than a mother and a wife. She wants to go beyond the private life that she has and take on a more public role in society. The culture of her day, however, does not permit her to leave her home to explore things in the world. Instead, Mrs. Ramsay maintains her Victorian role, which she cannot help but to do, while simultaneously making small revolutions against the culture that identifies her as solely a mother and wife.

Mrs. Ramsay's resistance is mildly shown in the way that she sometimes responds to her husband. At the end of the first section of the novel, Mr. Ramsay's stream of consciousness tells the reader that he wants his wife to tell him that she loves him. Mrs. Ramsay somehow knows what her husband wants, and yet "that, no, she could not do" (Woolf 136). In fact, she remarks that "she never told him that she loved him" (Woolf 137). Lilienfeld cites this way of Mrs. Ramsay withholding herself as a method of manipulating Mr. Ramsay (158). Silence is one way that Mrs. Ramsay can assert the little control that she has and the power to control the small part of herself that she can. If she were to tell her husband that she loved him at the moment she knew that he wanted her to do so,



Mrs. Ramsay would be in some ways making herself vulnerable. She would be stating that she would make available everything that Mr. Ramsay wished. By not supplying him with his request, Mrs. Ramsay is maintaining a small wall of resistance. But, even though she doesn't say it, Mrs. Ramsay—Woolf tells us—loves Mr. Ramsay (137).

Still, despite this miniscule example of Mrs. Ramsay rejecting her role as a Victorian wife that Lilienfeld points out, Mrs. Ramsay still maintains her place in the culture in which she lives by endorsing Victorian values. One way in which she keeps this traditional role is her ability to not portray her intelligence. Alice van Buren Kelley says that Mrs. Ramsay is “superficially the representation of the Victorian—she is a woman who devotes herself to her children and husband and leaves matters of thinking to men (78). This idea is meant to convey that Mrs. Ramsay is not supposed to be thought of as thinking about things such as philosophy as her husband does. According to Kelley, Mrs. Ramsay does not like to appear that she is in anyway thinking about things that her husband thinks about. We can see an example of Mrs. Ramsay wanting to hide the fact that she may have been thinking one evening when Mr. Ramsay sees her reading a book. The narrator says that Mr. Ramsay “wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learnt at all” (Woolf 134). Before long, Mrs. Ramsay puts down her book and takes up a knitting project. In this instance, Mr. Ramsay’s consciousness dictates that he believes his wife to not be as smart as he is. Woolf uses words such as “ignorance” and “simplicity” to display that Mr. Ramsay thinks that his wife is not able to think complexly. Mrs. Ramsay’s acceptance of this is seen when she sees him watching her. She stops reading the book and continues knitting a stocking. This act may be interpreted as Mrs. Ramsay hiding her intelligence with domestic activity, such as knitting.

Mrs. Ramsay’s method of hiding her intelligence is part of her role as a Victorian woman. She doesn’t want her husband to see her reading. Nevertheless, as Kelley points out, the narrator’s statement that Mrs. Ramsay “knew without having learnt” may suggest that Mrs. Ramsay possesses an intelligence that her husband does not (Woolf 32). This method is another way in

which Mrs. Ramsay manipulates her husband. Her job as a wife is to support her husband in his endeavors. If Mr. Ramsay were to think that his wife is smarter than he is, it would probably interfere with the way that he sees himself. He would no longer be confident and as sure of himself as the patriarch of the family. For this reason, Mrs. Ramsay conforms to nurturing not only her children, but also her husband. She must also ensure that he is comfortable with himself, even if it means taking away from her own satisfaction and self-assurance.

Thus, the essential principle of a Victorian woman is giving up herself and dedicating all of her energy to the care and development of her children and husband. Mrs. Ramsay embodies the idea of a homemaker in the way that she takes care of her family. In this aspect, Shannon Forbes compares Mrs. Ramsay to Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen. Forbes says that Mrs. Ramsay may be considered to represent the idea of the "Angel in the House," which Woolf said of her own mother (465). For a woman to assume this role of the Angel in the House requires her to "relinquish her independence" (Forbes 465). Mrs. Ramsay most definitely fulfills this requirement by the things she does in her everyday life. She has no job other than to take care of her family and entertain guests. As a Victorian mother, Mrs. Ramsay tries to rear her children into upholding the principles that she represents. This is an exact replica of Woolf's interpretation of the "Angel in the House." Still, regardless of Mrs. Ramsey's efforts, her children do not give the impression that they would like to take on the roles that their mother does and the values that she maintains. Of her children, Mrs. Ramsay's youngest daughter Cam seems the most resistant to her mother's attempts to place her into the role of a Victorian woman.

During the first part of the book, the narrator describes Cam as a "wild villain [...] dashing past" and calls her "Cam the Wicked" (Woolf 60, 24). Cam may be thought of as a mystery child in some aspects and is depicted as a rebel in some of her actions. Her character represents a definite resistance to the Victorian values that her mother is trying to rear her into accepting. Cam does not want to fit into the "Angel" role into which her mother wants her to fit. She, as a freethinker who desires to create a plan for herself, symbolizes the forthcoming Modernist period.

In the scene in which Cam is seen “dashing past,” she almost knocks over an easel. When her mother calls her, Cam ignores her and continues toward her destination. She only answers to Mrs. Ramsay’s second call. When Cam finally comes to her mother, Mrs. Ramsay is wondering what Cam must be thinking that would cause the girl to ignore the calls. From Mrs. Ramsay’s consciousness, the reader is told that at the same time Cam “has some thought of her own” and that Mrs. Ramsay’s words are “dropped into a well” (Woolf 60). This phrase indicates that Cam is not giving her full attention to her mother; she has her own agenda. In this same scene, furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay asks Cam to go into the kitchen to inquire about the return of some people. Upon her return, Cam gives her mother the account of an old woman with red cheeks in the kitchen. She eventually gives her mother the information that she was initially sent to obtain after Mrs. Ramsay prompts her to do so. Mrs. Ramsay doesn’t want Cam’s interpretation of the situation. Forbes cites Cam’s interpretation of the situation in the kitchen as a creative and unique response and Mrs. Ramsay as trying to suppress this creativity and free-thinking. The reader sees this form of what Forbes cites as “submission” when Cam gives up her unique interpretation and answers her mother using the exact words the person in the kitchen asked her to tell her mother (472). In this small way, Mrs. Ramsay is forcing Cam to do what she wants her to do. By this manner of “submission,” moreover, Mrs. Ramsay is trying to make Cam into who she wants her to be. She wants her to use the words she is given and not think of her own words or interpretations.

Cam is shown a little earlier in the novel protesting against Victorian values that are being pressed on her. In one instance, the nursemaid tells Cam to give a flower to Mr. Banks, a family friend who is visiting. Cam refuses: “No! No! No! she would not! She clenched her fist. She stamped” (Woolf 24). After she refuses him, Mr. Banks is saddened as he had always wanted a daughter and Cam had not shown him any sympathy for not having one. Because she refuses Mr. Banks a flower, then, she is called “wild and fierce” (Woolf 24). The nursemaid’s insistence that Mr. Banks be given a flower is exemplifies the extent to which other women attempt to put Cam in the traditional role of a Victorian woman.

The nursemaid is attempting to teach Cam to be submissive and otherwise pleasing for the men in her life, even if doing so is at the expense of what she herself wants to do. This situation may also be seen as other people aiming to impose the role of “Angel” on Cam. As the Angel, Cam is supposed to appease Mr. Banks’ yearning for a daughter by giving him a flower. She is supposed to make him forget about his sadness.

But, as Forbes observes, Cam rejects this role completely. Throughout the novel Cam is seen again being trained, in some sense, to give up what she wants in order to appease the men in her life. In one scene Mrs. Ramsay finds Cam and Cam’s brother James quarreling over a pig’s skull when they are supposed to be sleeping. Cam cannot go to sleep with the skull in the room, but James screams if his sister tries to move it from her sight. When Mrs. Ramsay learns about the situation, she favors James’ argument. She says that Cam “must go to sleep and dream of lovely palaces” (Woolf 127). Mrs. Ramsay never considers acting in Cam’s favor and taking the skull from the room; it is James who must be pleased. Although both of them are her children, James is her son and, therefore, the more important one. She is basically telling Cam to stop quarrelling, as if the dispute was all her fault and James is the innocent one. Cam, as she was with Mr. Banks, is being coerced into subduing herself in order to please someone simply because he is a male.

Despite Mrs. Ramsay’s attempt to force Victorian values into Cam’s agenda, Cam protests. One major indication that Cam does not want to live by the values that her mother does is through her persistence in thinking for herself and in forming her own opinions after she analyzes a situation. Mrs. Ramsay does not like to tell her husband what she thinks about certain things—such as philosophy and her general opinion—with which she believes only he should concern himself. She doesn’t even want him to see her reading. In contrast to her mother, Cam publicly gives her opinion on matters as much as she can. Moreover, she voluntarily makes herself a part of spaces in which men are conversing. In the last section of the novel, Cam recalls a time ten years earlier when she entered her father’s study during a meeting he was having with an older gentleman. When Cam comes into the study, she takes a book from the shelf “just to please herself” (Woolf 214).

Mrs. Ramsay rarely, if ever, does anything in front of her husband that is especially meant to please herself. Nevertheless, the narrator says of the study that “one could let whatever one thought expand here like a leaf in water” (Woolf 214). Forbes notes that this phrase indicates that Cam does not accept the ideas about which she hears the men in the study talking (476). Following Forbes interpretation, the “water” represents the process of Cam making her own opinions about what she hears her father and his friend discussing. Like the previous situation, in which Mrs. Ramsay sent her into the kitchen, Cam interprets what she hears in a manner that suits her.

If one were to compare Cam’s character to another in the novel, Lily Briscoe would be an obvious parallel. Lily’s character perhaps best supports the thesis that the values used to define womanhood in Woolf’s novel were transferring from a Victorian mindset to a more Modernist view. In juxtaposition to Mrs. Ramsay, the novel’s ideal Victorian woman, Lily has almost completely different ideas of womanhood. Nevertheless, Lily understands Mrs. Ramsay and the Angel role that the other woman has assumed for herself. She knows that there was something that always had to be done, “something that Mrs. Ramsay had decided for reasons of her own to do instantly” (Woolf 124). As a part of her Angel role, Mrs. Ramsay is always doing something that she feels is necessary for the betterment of her family. Even though Lily doesn’t agree with the values prescribing these domestic duties, however, she has nothing against Mrs. Ramsay following them. Lily, however, does not want to adopt Mrs. Ramsay’s “Angel” role, nor does she wish to adopt anything similar to it.

One major difference between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily is that Lily has an actual profession—she is an artist. As a woman who represents Victorian values, Mrs. Ramsay certainly does not have a profession. One could say that being a mother and wife is an equivalent to her having a profession because it is the closest she will ever come to having one. Moreover, with this idea of professions, is the concept of leading a public or private life. Because Lily has a profession, she is out in the world, making a living as an artist. In this sense, she has a public life. Mrs. Ramsay’s life is quite the opposite. Her primary concerns are matters that pertain to her home, her children, and her husband. The only way that

Mrs. Ramsay interacts with people in the outside world is through affairs that involve her family and through the guests that visit her home. Since she limits herself to these select circles, Mrs. Ramsay lives an almost entirely private life.

When comparing Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, it is important to note that, in addition to Lily's understanding of Mrs. Ramsay's position, Mrs. Ramsay has a special admiration for Lily. Mrs. Ramsay thinks that Lily has a "thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own" that she very much admires. This admiration of Lily's "something" could be associated with the fact that Lily leads a public life. Lily is a painter, a bold profession for a woman in the Victorian age. She may be thought of as a new kind of woman who is not afraid to take the chance and pursue such a profession as an artist. Women artists in Mrs. Ramsay's age were not highly regarded by men if they were even regarded at all. In the novel, Charles Tansley says repeatedly that women cannot paint or write. Lily's "something" is her persistence in practicing her art despite the disapproval of the men in the novel. Mrs. Ramsay would never take on the task of painting if Mr. Ramsay should not be fond of it. She would probably feel that it would distract her from fulfilling her motherly and wifely duties. She knows this and refrains from directly producing any sort of visual art. Instead, she makes art in the way that she maintains her family and entertains her guest, which she sees as her only things she is supposed to do. Mrs. Ramsay notes that, even though she herself likes Lily's profession as an artist, "no man would" (Woolf 115). Because she practices what Victorian culture considers a "male" profession and transgresses what the same culture considers proper "female" behavior, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, Lucy will never marry.

Indeed, Lily never gets married in the novel. She says that she "need not marry" and that, from her perspective, marriage is a sort of "degradation" (Woolf 113). Like Cam, Lily does not want to embody the "Angel" role in which marriage would result. Once married, Lily would have to begin a family and take care of them. Getting married would also mean relinquishing her public life for a private one and, more importantly, giving up her profession. While Mrs. Ramsay sees her role as nurturer to her family as an essential responsibility, Lily sees it as a lifestyle choice that

she chooses not to adopt. This is one distinct difference between the Victorian values by which Mrs. Ramsay lives and those that the younger generation of women are beginning to adopt—the “Angel” role as a choice. For Mrs. Ramsay, marriage and the consequent motherhood are what are expected of a woman; these roles are not really choices. Lily does not agree with Mrs. Ramsay’s views on this subject. She sees it as a responsibility that she may choose to take on if she wants. What Mrs. Ramsay sees an obligation; Lily sees an option.

Ann Ronchetti, comparing Lily and Mrs. Ramsay, mentions that Mrs. Ramsay does not engage in producing visual art, but that her artistry is found in her daily activities. Ronchetti goes on to explain that with Mrs. Ramsay, “Woolf expands her portrait of the traditional wife and mother as social artist and engineer of relationships as well as creator of enduring moments of community and order in the face of life’s arbitrariness and nature’s indifference to mankind” (65). Ronchetti takes this description into account when encompassing everything that Mrs. Ramsay becomes associated with in the novel. By “social artist” Ronchetti means that Mrs. Ramsay tries to move the members of her family into certain life paths of marriage and identity. Several times throughout the novel, Mrs. Ramsay is seen matching couples together. She says that Lily will marry no one and later says that she will marry Williams. Part of her artistry is paying close attention to those around her and noting changes in their activity, so she may make different inferences about their lives. This is in some sense how she creates “enduring moments of community”—by continuously bringing people together, so that they remain in close contact with each other. She is trying to mold their lives. It is as if the people in her lives are the paints and she is the painter. Because she cannot have a direct influence on the public sector, Mrs. Ramsay instead must influence the people that are a part of her private sector. By acknowledging this form of Mrs. Ramsay’s artistry, as well as Lily’s profession as a painter, Woolf brings together the Victorian and modern views of women and unites them within individual persons (Kelley 75). She is bringing together how two different characters who uphold different values see art. For Mrs. Ramsay it is by arranging the lives of family members, and to Lily it is actually painting. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay

maintains a Victorian view on art as it applies to woman while Lily steps out of a traditional role to produce actual paintings.

According to John Mepham, *To the Lighthouse* illustrates varieties of womanhood that demonstrate how “one can be a woman without being like Mrs. Ramsay” (80). Mrs. Ramsay’s character is seen as outdated, and she is the only person in the novel to continuously sacrifice herself to satisfy the other people in her life. She embodies the feminine ideals of her culture in the manner in which she upholds the Victorian standards that so rightly define her. In her novel, then, Virginia Woolf offers other female characters who counter the values that Mrs. Ramsay believes to be important. Although Mrs. Ramsay resists her role in very small ways, she still upholds what she considers to be true Victorian values. She does not shy away from her roles as a mother and a wife and attempts to mold others into the Victorian woman that she represents. Her efforts to discipline her daughter Cam into this Victorian role and to enact her own role as “Angel in the House,” however, are unsuccessful. Cam is basically a free spirit, who will not become the “Angel” that her mother expects of her. She instead makes strides to best formulate her own opinions on and to publicly offer her own interpretation of situations. Lily is very similar to Cam in that she continues to work on her artwork even though the men in the novel discourage it. While Lily understands what Mrs. Ramsay considers to be important for a woman, she disagrees with her mother and instead lives her life as an independent artist. These women without a doubt represent the dawning of a new era—the Modernist age. Cam and Lily consistently oppose Victorian values that suppress their independence and institute personal preferences that will satisfy themselves instead. For Cam, this independence lives in her habit of thinking for herself and offering her opinions. Likewise, Lily holds onto her independence by remaining true to her profession as an artist and refusing to marry. These character traits are important because they not only define new modes of womanhood through cultural values, but also indicate that times are changing. Woolf is using her female characters to note how ideas about the woman in society are changing and also to draw attention to the ways in which society itself is changing. With the idea of new values to define women is the idea of a changing culture as a whole.



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