

Impost

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Impost

Impost: A Journal of Creative and Critical Work

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Impost: A Journal of Critical and Creative Work, a peer-reviewed journal published by the English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities, welcomes submissions of scholarly essays in all fields of English studies. In addition, we welcome creative writing, including fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and literary journalism. Current and previous editions of the journal, which in the spring of 2016 changed its name from *EAPSU Online*, can be found on this page.

Please submit critical essays via email to timothy.ruppert@sru.edu and creative work via email to astuart@bloomu.edu, with your name and the title of the work in the subject line. Attach the submission as one file in .doc or .docx format. In the body of the message, include a brief bio: your name, address, phone number, email address, institutional affiliation (if you have one), the genre and title(s) of your work, and any other relevant information. In the attached document, please do not include any identifying information. Scholarly work should follow current MLA guidelines. Creative prose should be double-spaced, and poems should be single-spaced.

Creative work can be simultaneously submitted; however, we expect to be notified immediately when a work must be withdrawn from consideration. Scholarly work should not be simultaneously submitted.

Contributors will be notified of acceptance status via email at the completion of the review process. Usually, the review process is completed six months after submissions are received. You may contact the editors if you haven't received notification of the status of your manuscript within six months.

While our submission deadline is rolling, submissions received by August 31 will be guaranteed consideration for the upcoming issue of *Impost*. Submissions

received after this date will be considered for the following year. By submitting your work, you agree that *Impost* acquires first serial rights. In addition, *Impost* may reserve non-exclusive rights to reprint a piece.

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Contents

Introduction	Editor's Note Tim Ruppert 7
Fiction	To Everything Its Season Lisa Graley 9 Bits Stolen (excerpts from The Woman of the House) Catherine Dent 23
Poetry	Ash Wednesday Jerry Wemple 26 Away Jerry Wemple 27 Hearts of Stone Jerry Wemple 28 For you, my bones Sarah M. Goulet 29 Moving Day Kaitlynn Keiper 30 Stone Street Wyatt Inlow 32 Pennsylvania's Jonathan Dubow 34
Criticism	Text-to-Text Interaction: Transformation and Resistance in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea, a Text in Perpetual Emergence Henda Ammar Guirat 36 "True Love Conquers All": The Changing Tropes of Disney's Fairytale Prince Brennan Thomas 50
Pedagogy & The Profession	Journals Revisited: A Fresh Look at Daily Writing James Strickland 59 Yearning to Belong: Navigating Identity in the Academy Elizabeth Yomantas 65
Book Review	Mary Paniccia Carden's Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality Mark A. Noon 69 Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieck's Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition Randy Koch 72

Introduction

Timothy Ruppert

Editor

The invitation to write this introductory essay for our current issue of *Impost* came as a pleasant surprise to me, presenting an opportunity to imagine some connections between this issue and the 2019 EAPSU conference, entitled *Hope is the Thing with Pages*, which took place in late October at Mansfield University. With the conference's themes of healing and fellowship, of responsibility and responsiveness, of human nature and humans and Nature in mind, I revisited the proofs of this issue with a fresh sense of the reasons why, many years ago, I became fascinated with—and in the end deeply committed to—the humanities in general and professional literary scholarship in particular. While the contributions in this year's *Impost* show varied critical and imaginative interests, I believe that, taken together, these pieces emblemize a special sort of intellectual alacrity, that is to say, the passion for understanding that in no small way informs and energizes empathy, commiseration, conscientiousness. As in the case of the many fine presentations at Mansfield, the selections in this issue invite us, in their respective fashions, to consider the ways in which pages (even when digital) have a real relationship to hope, or, rather, to the frame of mind that contests cynicism and apathy as ineluctable outcomes of our contemporary milieu. To be sure, hope may seem naïve, perhaps chimerical, in the face of today's climate of anti-intel-

lectualism and anachronistic belief systems. At the same time, the level of inquiry and the scope of imagination one finds in the critical and creative entries to this year's issue of *Impost*, authored by colleagues from across the country and around the world, serve as reassurances that thoughtful scholarship continues to teach us, beyond texts and topics, about hopefulness. In this way companionate with the excellent offerings at EAPSU 2019, our newest issue of *Impost* reminds us of that too-often neglected relationship between the page and those values that foster renewal and renovation.

I wish at this point to offer a note of congratulation to AD Stuart, who will be moving from reviews editor to creative editor. I want as well to thank Brent House, our general editor, for his terrific performance over the last few years. As he prepares to step away from this role, I think it important to acknowledge not simply his able guidance but his kindness and spirit too. As this issue of *Impost* shows, Brent is a talented leader whose insightful editorship we shall surely miss. And, naturally, all appreciation to the editorial staff, peer reviewers, and all who contribute to making our journal successful, challenging, and generative.

Fiction

To everything its season

From the porch swing, Cedric and his father watch the crows shift from one branch to another in the maple. Big, hefty birds, they test the limbs for the sturdy ones, but the tree trembles with them anyway. Up and down, they bob, as if buoyed on water. Every year they've come closer, almost daily now picking through the compost pile at the chicken house. Twice they've landed on the driveway to sort through table scraps for Old Blue. Rosetta saw one carry off a piece of toast, and another, the white of a fried egg. They have no reverence for the old boundaries.

"They're counting the days," Cedric's father says. His shotgun lies across his lap, barrel toward the banister. Cedric knows he'll take a notion to lift it again.

"They're not the only ones," Rosetta says. She looks up from the beans she's stringing and smiles at her husband. Cedric thinks of their slow morning together, the tender way she held him, sure of hand. There's hardly room in her lap now for the newspaper she's piling curly strings on.

"They're gonna take over the place," Cedric's daddy says. "Wait and see."

Cedric looks back to the crows, imagines them plotting as they do in TV commercials. But these crows aren't interested in clean windows. They have their sights on the corn he and his father put out in the bottom, what came to tassel a week ago.

"In biblical times," his daddy says, "people would have taken them for a sign."

What they're a sign of, Cedric knows, is an ever-shrinking woods to live in. But still, you don't want to lose your crop to them. Or to the deer either, for that matter. Which is why you keep an electric fence on 24/7.

The corn is ambrosia—a hybrid and what some folks claim isn't real corn, but what is not real about it, Cedric would like to know, since you can freeze it or can it and best of all, eat it off the cob without butter or salt. It's gold and white, the best of the gold and best

Lisa
Graley

of the white and so sweet you don't need sugar when you cream it. People who fancy honey cream or golden bantam are always hushed by their first mouthful of it. Only thing separating ambrosia from the heirlooms pushed by the West Virginia Ag Commissioner is it can't re-seed its sweetness. But what generation is it can pass everything on to the next anyway?

Besides the taste, Cedric and his daddy like the high yield, at least one big ear and then a medium one or two per stalk. A cause of that, you can drop off several dozen ears on the doorsteps of your neighbors and kin and the ones who've been bringing you tomatoes and beans and cucumbers all summer. There's no hoarding it. The corn has to be worked up fast before it loses its sugar. Which is why you set out from the beginning getting it into the hands of the women who will steam it or can it or freeze it. And they, knowing what they know, will, in the middle of winter, during the dimmest and shortest days, especially the ones leading up to Christmas, bring out the corn in jars or freezer bags and put it in soups to dazzle you with brightness and cheer you with sweetness.

But the crows seem to know of the corn's near ripeness, too, Cedric thinks. Maybe they understand about the pollen falling to the silks, deep into the silks, and taking up lodging there, what he took Rosetta down to see a few evenings ago, gently pulling back the shucks to reveal tiny rows of kernel-teeth just coming in. Or maybe the crows just see the ears fattening on the stalks. Whatever it is, they mock Cedric and his daddy openly—at least that's how his daddy takes it. They sit in trees around, caw-caw-cawing, sometimes sounding like monkeys in a jungle. They aren't phased by the aluminum pie pans Rosetta strung out to wave in the breeze. They aren't phased by the passing of cars on the hard road, or even by Old Blue when he comes bounding through.

One thing, though, that rattles them is the booming retort of his daddy's gun. Which his daddy raises now, taking aim.

"The crows have to eat, too," Rosetta says, this time looking up and frowning.

Cedric makes apology with his eyes and motions her to cover her ears, which she does, the parry knife still clutched in one hand. She closes her eyes, too, Cedric knows, afraid of marking the baby.

"Let them eat somebody else's corn," Cedric's daddy says quietly, the gun still at his shoulder, his finger lightly on the trigger.

He fires, and the crows lift up out of the maple. The shot rocks the porch floor, and Cedric's heart involuntarily speeds up with the sudden shock of it. Old Blue, who's hard of hearing, raises his head and looks at them, then drops his head back down.

The crows soar up and away, but one crow, lagging behind, limps midair, then plummets.

"Got him," his daddy says. "We'll string him up for the others to see."

Cedric follows him off the porch. Then feels Rosetta standing behind him.

"Can't we just bury it?" he asks.

"It'll make a good example," his father says, with an authority that questions why he's being questioned.

"I don't want to see it," Rosetta says. "It'll mark our baby."

Cedric notes how she says our. He's sure he knows the week the baby was conceived though not which time. It was early December, the week they started building fires in the fireplace. Was the scent of firewood on the nights.

"I forgot," his daddy says, looking back at Rosetta. "I'll rig it where no one but the crows can see—and you mind and stay out of the cornfield."

Cedric wonders what kind of mark they think the baby might get from a dead crow. He pictures the ballooning head from the sonogram with the shape of a crow's beak on its forehead, then he blinks to erase the image. He's spent near-on eight months trying not to get tangled up in their nonsense.

Rosetta, he thinks, takes it from her mother who tells of a pregnant woman on a rainy day passing by a car wreck and seeing blood on the windshield. When her baby was born, its eyes were crossed. Cedric's daddy has similar tales. Babies born blind or deaf, buck-toothed or flat-footed, with odd birthmarks, missing fingers or toes, all because their mothers witnessed something horrifying. His daddy won't even abide Rosetta watching TV for all the killing and dying that goes on. Not so hard in the summer, Cedric figures, when there's plenty to see in the passing cars, lightning bugs raising up, the occasional rabbit that's caught on to Old Blue's failing senses. But why you have to shelter babies from suffering and death is beyond him—since the earlier you faced it, the better chance you might stand of accepting it.

He follows his father out to the yard in the direction of the crow, now a shiny blue-black mound on the grass. His father drags along one foot on account of a stroke that crippled him some years back, and Cedric slows himself so as not to overtake him. He

feels Rosetta's eyes, making him feel guilty over the crow even though he isn't the one shot it. On a farm, there are things you have to do, he's tried to make her see. You are always culling, thinning. It's what on TV trauma shows they call triage. Losing one crop, you work on the next. You might have to kill a coon or a muskrat, maybe a deer, to save the crop—which feeds you in winter.

But Rosetta doesn't like him to kill even snakes or mice or bugs. Says she can't stand to see things suffer. The only exception is ticks found clinging to Old Blue. But even then, she doesn't stand for them being set on fire with a match and makes him squash them lickety-split under a flat rock to cover the blood.

"Must've gone through his eye," his daddy says. "Don't see no other hole."

He watches his father, spread-eagling the crow on the ground, his father who helped him hold onto the farm when he nearly lost it, days he was growing weed for cash. And he thinks of Rosetta back on the porch who, at a critical moment, called him to fix her mother's Ford when there was really nothing wrong with it. And now she carries the round mound that shelters the child they've given life to. He considers the baby from the ultrasound with its big head and lizard-like limbs. He pictures it a newborn, with a scrunched-up face and milk-daubed lips, what Rosetta has told him to expect. There's not much he wouldn't do to save them all. He'd wrestle bobcats or bears or coyotes, the kind of attacks you see on TV or read about in Reader's Digest. He imagines himself having to strangle the life out of some fanged predator, bare-handed.

"Reckon I should screw him 'stead of nailing him?" his daddy asks.

The black beak of the crow is parted as if it's panting for breath.

"You sure it's dead?" Cedric asks.

"It's dead."

"Whatever you do, just don't let her see it. I'll never hear the end of it."

His father dangles the crow by its feet like a dead chicken and leads the way to the barn. There, he gets down the electric screwdriver and pulls out a scrap of plywood from the kindling. Cedric watches his father search out the big bones of the wings. He stretches the bird on the plywood like he's crucifying it, then says, "You hold him."

What can Cedric say? Don't want to get my hands dirty? He steps forward and presses the wings of the crow to the plywood. The wings want to fold back in, the way windshield wipers will snap back toward the glass when you lift them. He hopes the bird is good and dead, that there's no lingering sense keen to what's about to happen.

His father places a screw on the right wing and tries to fit the driver bit in the screw head. He nudges Cedric. "Move out of my light, will you?"

Though he's not blocking light, Cedric scoots over. His father fiddles with the bit and screw—as much by feeling as by sight—until connection is made. It's a wonder, Cedric thinks, he could see to shoot a crow. His father sets the driver going. His hands tremble, whether on account of the deed or because of a general failing, Cedric doesn't know, and he tries not to think about it. His daddy turns the screw as tight as he can without breaking bones, and the crow's wing draws

up flat to the plywood. After he secures the other wing, he bolts the plywood to a wooden stake.

When they leave the barn, his daddy is breathing hard, but he's determined to drive the stake in the middle of the cornfield. Cedric totes the sledgehammer, while his father carries the stake with the crow over his shoulder like a picket sign. Already, the other crows are looping back, in ones and pairs, testing the quiet air around the maple.

That evening Cedric leaves off watching TV with his father and goes to sit with Rosetta on the porch swing. All through dinner, she's given them both the silent treatment, and Cedric wants to make up before bed. They creak back and forth together, swinging, Cedric trying to read her and wondering what it will take this time. He's still new to it, how much to give and how much to keep. Though they've been married two years, his daddy still refers to it as the honeymoon stage.

Finally, Cedric says, "Listen here, Rosetta." He takes her hand, unfolds her fingers. "He's crazy about his corn. It's his great love, you know. Been that way ever since my mother died. And maybe some before that."

"Since when does love make you want to go around killing?" Rosetta asks. She doesn't take her hand back, but neither does she grip his.

"Since whenever what you love is threatened." It sounds rehearsed. As it is. He studies Rosetta silhouetted against the evening sky, her gaze turned to the tree of crows. He tries to see them as she might, a family of mothers, fathers, and babies. But what he sees are big, bouncing birds, biding their time, planning to thief for dinner.

"He won't be right till it's all brought in," Cedric says. "It's this way every year."

"He's like a daddy to me, too," Rosetta says. "I guess that's why we can't see eye to eye sometimes."

Cedric puts his arm around her neck, his hand lightly brushing her breast. He wants to rest it there but doesn't. Her hand is still flat in his, impassive.

"I just don't like killing things." She stops the swing suddenly and turns to him. "And what if the gun should backfire and hurt him? Or hurt you?" she asks. "I couldn't stand it." At this, she grips his hand, looks back to the yard, then sets them swinging again.

"Guns don't backfire," he says. "It's tractors and trucks that backfire, and that doesn't make them dangerous so much as noisy."

She holds his hand tight, then lifts it, places it in her lap, the cradle where Cedric has lain snug in the fold of her, near her belly where the baby now lies snug in the fold of her. There's not much in the world to put stock in, but Cedric believes Rosetta loves him. And if he really wanted, he thinks he could bring her around to see things his way.

On Monday Cedric and his daddy meet in the bottom to pick the corn. The crows are early in the maple with spying eyes. His father carts out all the brown paper bags he's collected—which aren't, don't you know, as easy to come by as they used to be. And of course, you can't put corn in plastic bags, as that would be the death of it.

His daddy has consulted the Almanac, weather forecasts, leaves on the maple, woolly worms and who knows what all. And because this is the last day of the

moon's waxing, it's the one day, the only day to pick corn. Cedric watches his daddy lift the plastic bucket from over the transformer, then unplug and unhook the electric fence. He steps awkwardly over the bottom strand, nearly losing his balance.

"When I'm gone, like as not," his daddy says, "you'll let this field go back."

Whether Cedric protests or not, his daddy believes what he believes. No doubt it's a constant battle between man and nature. Though he and his father hoed twice, slicing out weeds and building mounds up around the stalks, they didn't hoe the middle where you walk, so now the paths between rows have grown knee-high. The weeds with their tiny daisy-like blossoms and the dew heavy on them give off a sour odor as Cedric stirs through them behind his father.

But it's the corn, what they turn their eyes to, and it's the corn that looks good, and since when was there ever so much of it? Most of the stalks carry four ears a piece—some carry five. A boon, Cedric's daddy calls it. A gift from God, he says. But Cedric thinks of the fertilizer, an extra helping they put on it.

A few silks have brown wilt, but some are still shiny and gold—blonde instead of brunette. "Shouldn't we pick an ear or two to make sure it's ready?" he suggests.

"I done picked an ear or two," his daddy says. "On Saturday."

"Maybe we ought to pick another," Cedric says. "A lot of the silks haven't turned." Before his father can reply, Cedric tears one over, twists and yanks until it breaks free. Then he pulls back the shucks.

“Look,” he says, “it’s not all the way full.”

“Ain’t going to get no fuller,” his father says.

“Well, maybe in a day or two.”

They can agree on most particulars, the day to sow, how much to fertilize, the ten-inch space between hills, what to thin out, when to hoe. They can agree when to hook up a sump pump in the creek to irrigate, when to take their chances on rain. His daddy follows the signs religiously, the loins, the neck, the breasts, all that. It’s a kind of malarkey people gave up believing years ago since anybody now can just read the directions on the seed packages. Still, Cedric goes along with him because most of the time it doesn’t matter.

But the harvest is different. You’ve put so much work into it, you want to get it right. Week after week, you watch the corn grow. You inspect the fence for weeds that might short it out. You try to scare the crows away. But in a day or two, a week tops, the harvest is over. If you time it wrong, you’ve wasted effort. You can’t go back. You want the corn at its peak, full as it can get, but—and this is the catch—still yet tender. You want it at its sweetest, the top of its ascent, and just before the kernels start loosening in their sockets and hardening for seed. The blink of an eye, you can miss the fine line.

Cedric’s daddy fishes in his pocket and brings out his pocketknife. He springs it open, takes the cob from Cedric, and with the tip of the blade, pricks one of the kernels. The juice squirts, and before Cedric can turn his head, it’s on his face. He smudges it off with his finger and tastes. Raw corn.

“Look here,” his father says, pointing to the bubble atop the kernel. “Milk sap.”

“Yeah, I see.” Cedric reminds himself it’s his father’s corn and he’s here just to help. Still, he argues once more, “But there’s an inch of cob, no kernels at all.”

“Ain’t going to be if it’s not here by now,” his daddy says. “Just bob it off at the end. Ain’t going to be in no beauty pageant.”

Cedric gives in. Though he’s been around the farm all his life, his father is seventy-nine, after all, and in a month will be eighty. They start picking, side by side, moving down the first two rows, each filling a paper sack. There are good ears, full and solid and heavy. But in no time, his father is complaining that some ears aren’t ready. You simply can’t make a case for them. It’s your hands tell you this mainly, tell you the cob is too skinny, the kernels have hardly come in at all. Give them a few days, they’re bound to fill out. As his father comes to see it, Cedric respectfully agrees. And so, for every ear they pick, they leave another, lesser one.

Even with the ripest, you have to pull or push hard, twist and jerk, break and twist again. Sometimes what it takes is a working back and forth like with a tooth. And then you remember the trick of bending it over, not straight forward but to one side or other. It squeaks loudly as you pull it down, the way of wet rubber soles squeegling on a floor. And then it’s accompanied by a whine, reminds you of wood breaking, a limb falling, tree cut down, the wailing during the fall, that kind of tearing.

At first, you swat flies and gnats and sweat bees, you wipe the spider webs from your face. You marvel at the thin cuts on your knuckles from the blades. You pull off the silks that stick to your fingers. But once you’re in the rhythm of the work, you don’t notice so much the inconveniences. Your hands just reach, sometimes

one reaching one direction, the other reaching the other. You read the cobs with your fingers. Is it full, full enough, likely to fill more? When the silks stick to you, you leave them. Spider webs, too. Corn sap, running from the stalk-end of each ear, coats your hands, burns the cuts, but it doesn’t matter. The brown paper pokes fill up quickly. You leave them at the ends of the rows. The harvest, by all accounts, is good.

In the middle of the eighth row, when he is deep in the work and deep in the love of the work, Cedric comes face to face with the dead crow. He has forgotten, has been working downwind, and he turns and is reaching, and when he looks up, the crow hovers about a foot from his face. He jumps back and steadies himself, then has to pull his shirt collar up over his nose for a clean breath.

“Jiminy,” he says. It’s the kind of thing bound to give you nightmares, he admits, whether or not you’re carrying a baby. Something has been picking the meat from its sides, pecking into its head. He wonders what the other crows think, one of their own, decomposing in plain sight. He’s seen them scavenging for roadkill, mainly snakes and terrapins. Do they cannibalize, too?

The crow’s mouth, now bleached by the sun, hangs open wider as if it were in mid-call. Flies fly out of it, then loop around, fly back in.

“You gotta get this thing outta here,” Cedric says, when his father comes closer. “I can’t stand to be around it.”

“I expect the crows feel the same way,” his daddy says. He takes out his handkerchief, wipes his face.

“Can’t you smell it?”

His daddy shakes his head. “No, I don’t smell it.”

“It’s drawing green flies. We don’t want green flies in the corn.”

“You can bury it if’n you want,” his daddy says. “If’n you want to give the crows the rest of the crop.”

Cedric tries a different vein. “What if Rosetta comes down here, bringing us water or something?”

“You keep her outta here, all I can say. You know your mother stayed away from funerals—even her own grandmother’s funeral—to keep from marking you.”

“I still got a birthmark,” Cedric says. “Right here on my arm.” He unbuttons his shirt, pulls it loose over his shoulder. “It’s the shape of a starfish, one leg bent over.”

“That’s from when I nearly cut off my finger on a broken bottle,” his daddy says. “Didn’t have the sense to keep it hid from her.”

Cedric stares at his daddy. Does he really believe? He waits to see if his father will smile, tell him he’s joking. But his daddy turns to the nearest stalk, breaks off an ear. Once he’s out of sight, working further down the row, Cedric starts out twice to get his shovel then turns back again. Should he trust his father? He hasn’t noticed bird peckings atop any of the ears. But how can you tell the crows won’t come? Maybe they’re plucking the meat from the dead crow’s sides. Maybe it’s drawing them to the field. Even after Cedric moves away, picking through the rows further and further from it, he can’t erase the image of the sagging crow. Worse, the scent of it clings inside his nostrils. With every breath, he smells it.

When they finish the last two rows, they carry all the bags to the edge of the field. While his daddy re-hooks the fence, Cedric backs the pickup down to the corn.

“Mind, you count the bags,” his daddy says. “There’s about two dozen per bag.”

They fill the truck bed, counting as they go.

“Fifty-two,” Cedric finally says.

“That’s a hundred and four dozen.” His daddy gazes wide-eyed at all the bags.

“And more to come in a couple of days,” Cedric says.

“If the crows don’t get it.”

“Climb in the truck,” Cedric says. “We’ll take it around before I go to work.”

And then it’s just like Christmas. They drop off corn for Elsie Keeton, taking care of her husband after his heart attack; Cornelius and Evie, just back from seeing their grandkids in Arizona; Lorine and her daughter Mae; Dulcie, thanking them with tears; Essie whose daughter is pregnant by the Napier boy though no one knows yet; Douglas and Jewell laid up after a car wreck, without a garden of any kind this year; Curtis Jones who lost his wife; Dartie; and Skeeter, Mitchell, and the Egnor sisters.

Cedric waits in the truck while his daddy gets out, goes around, lifts out the bags. These are his father’s shining moments.

“Much obliged, John,” Brady says.

“What do we owe you?” Arlene asks.

“I’d talk about it,” his daddy says, climbing back into the truck, a little winded from the excitement. “Just don’t let none go to waste, that’s what you owe.”

And as it turns out, his daddy is right, Cedric has to agree, eating his first two roast’n’ears for supper. This corn couldn’t have gone another day. It’s tender, just the way you dream of it. Your teeth sink right in, lift out the hot, spouting kernels. And it’s sweet, sweeter than you can imagine corn being—anything being. Maybe it’s because it’s been so long since he’s had it fresh off the cob—not since last summer—that it tastes so good, but Cedric thinks it’s the best corn they’ve ever raised. Hearing this pleases his father who sits at the table, watching their faces while they gnaw it off.

“T’ll give that little fella something to grow on,” his daddy says.

“It sure will,” Rosetta says, grinning at him and reaching for her third ear.

It’s all good, Cedric thinks, eating. The kitchen is cooling, the breeze blowing the curtains through the window. All good. He cuts the kernels off his third ear to mix with the mashed potatoes and pinto beans and macaroni salad on his plate. The corn gives to everything whatever sweetness there might otherwise be lacking.

Then out of the blue, his daddy asks for butter and salt. Cedric puts down his fork, looks at Rosetta, then back at his father. Rosetta passes down the butter, the salt.

“Since when do you doctor it with butter and salt?” Cedric asks. He reads the gaze Rosetta gives when she means to quiet him.

“Just to bring out the flavor,” his daddy says, shaking

the salt over his cob.

Cedric feels Rosetta looking at him. He picks up his fork, fills his mouth with food and doesn’t speak. In the silence he can’t help but hear his father’s words from years gone by, *If it was popcorn we wanted, it’s popcorn we’d be growing!*

When dinner’s over, his daddy goes to the porch to scare the crows, and Cedric scoots his chair back, sticks his legs out straight under the table. Rosetta scrapes the plates, fixes up scraps for Old Blue.

“He’s been adding a lot of salt,” she says. “And butter. And sugar, too. His taste buds must be fading. But we shouldn’t make him feel bad about it.”

“Nah,” Cedric says. “He’s just got a sweet tooth.”

“And a salt tooth?” Rosetta asks, raising her eyebrows.

“And a butter tooth,” Cedric says, taking hold of her wrist and gently pulling her. She lowers her face toward his, and he closes his eyes, tastes the corn on her lips. He feels the tenderness and sweetness wash over him again.

On the porch that evening, his daddy is happy enough to whistle Good Night, Irene. There’s so much corn and it’s so good that if it were all the crop, it’d be a good crop. Some of the pressure of harvest is off, with the best of the corn picked and sitting in Evie’s kitchen, Lorine’s sink, Dulcie’s refrigerator, Elsie’s freezer, May’s freezer, and some, as yet unshucked, in a brown sack in Essie’s cellar. They can rest easy for a day or so. Cedric stretches out and takes a deep breath, relaxing, but recognizes suddenly, riding the wind, the scent of the dead crow. He sits up and lights a citronella candle, hopes Rosetta won’t notice the crow. It’s

like the proverbial fly in the buttermilk. Takes a bit of shine off the harvest. Still, it’s only what it is: a health hazard, and a stinking one at that. He makes up his mind, he’ll go down tomorrow before work and bury it.

But the next morning it rains, and the rain doesn’t let up. It rains the day after, too, and keeps them from picking corn. The second batch won’t be as good as the first, there are no illusions. It’ll consist of some ears too hard, some not full, half ears, and probably a ton more worms. It’ll take longer to shuck and cull and clean. But they’ll save what they can because this is what you do. The misfit corn will be mainly for family and folks close—people who won’t think less of you for giving them a mixed bag. It’ll make no difference to them, eating half-ears and nubs, and they can cut the hard corn off, cream it. It’ll be fine as long as they don’t cut too close and get the husk.

When it rains the third day, Cedric’s daddy grows irritable. But at least, Cedric reasons with him, the crows aren’t braving the rain either. Still, they can see them, from the windows, bouncing up and down, sheltering in the maple, waiting for fair weather.

Rosetta has been to the doctor. “He’s giving me two more weeks,” she tells Cedric and his daddy.

“When’s the new moon coming in?” Cedric’s daddy asks.

“Middle of August,” Rosetta says. “That’s when Mother says it’s coming, too.”

She stays busy cutting off corn, scraping the knife down the cobs for the cream inside like she’s playing a washboard. Cedric kisses the back of her neck each time he passes. It takes fifty ears to make seven quarts, she tells him. A lot of corn. A lot of cream.

A lot of cutting. A long time canning. But he's never seen her happier than when she's sitting on the porch, her ears tuned through the screen door, listening for the popsuckling of the jar lids sealing.

"That's six," she says.

"It can't wait another day," his daddy says, staring through the rain at the cornfield. "The crows know it, too."

It rains the fourth day. Cedric comes home from work to find his daddy lying on the couch, hands folded across his belly, an unusual sight. Cedric tiptoes by, thinking him asleep, but his daddy says, "It will ruin if'n we can't get to it this week."

On Saturday morning, the rain slackens—though the forecaster on TV calls for more. The sun will shine, Cedric's daddy counters, on the basis of last night's pink sunset. With this assurance, Rosetta announces she's driving to Kroger's for more canning lids. Would she pick up brown paper bags, Cedric's daddy wants to know, since they've run without?

Meanwhile, they'll have to start with plastic and keep the corn in the shade, emptying the bags as soon as they can. As the moon is waxing, his father doesn't put much faith in the harvest, but they commence picking anyway. They'll pick everything, all that's of value. Whatever's not worth picking will be for the crows, the deer, rabbits, whatever comes through once the stalks are cut and rigged for fodder shocks. That the corn is done with growing is evident with the first ear picked. Cedric can tell by the way it breaks off the stalk—easy—like brittle—when you bend it over. The stalk offers no resistance, not much squeegling, no tearing whine. It's ready to give it up. Pulling it is like changing a gear with the gear shift coming off in

your hand. No need to twist or pull. Hard to believe five days make such a difference.

What he expects, then, is the kernels to be hard and loose, sharply defined like teeth set in on the skulls of Halloween skeletons. But when he shucks it and pricks a kernel with his knife, he sees the same milky whiteness, though the ear still lacks an inch of fullness at the tip.

The earth's sopping wet. The mud cakes to their boots, makes their boots heavy. It's hot, too, and sure is humid. They sweat something fierce. Cedric keeps hitching up his pants heavy with sweat. The corn blades cut them, making crisscrosses on their wrists. The salty sweat in the cuts burns.

"Don't set the corn in the sun," his daddy keeps saying. "The plastic will kill it."

"What sun, Dad?" Cedric asks.

"It will peek through," his daddy says.

Though he likes to pick slowly, today Cedric rushes to beat the rain. Then when he sees his father struggling in the heat and taking rest breaks, he picks even faster to cover more territory. He thinks over who they've given corn to and who they've left out. They skipped Mary Turley Monday because she was trying to get fourteen quarts of beans canned—but they'll need to give her some of their best today. And Jewel has called to say how much it perked Douglas up, so they'll take more to them.

Today's crop has more worms but they're only at the top. Seeing the rustmush of worms, you can bob it off right there in the field. Lots of times, though, there's no visible trail, and it's only later when you're shucking

that you come to find a big fat worm making headway. Of course, what Rosetta will say is that worms need to eat, too.

Cedric moves deep into the work, his hands finding the corn as fast as his eyes.

When they meet in the fifth row, Cedric's daddy says, "I just remembered we need to give some to Mary Turley."

"I remembered, too," Cedric says.

"Be a shame for any of it to spoil."

"We won't let it spoil."

Cedric smells on his father the sweat of someone who doesn't drink enough water, the scent of a pencil eraser, rubber gone stiff. They move on down the rows, then start again, opposite ends.

They're making their way toward each other when Cedric hears his father yell out. It's a strange wordless cry. Cedric looks up to see his father go down. Some stalks bend over, breaking his fall. Cedric drops his bag and runs, the wet weeds slapping his boots and pants legs.

His father is on his knees, white in the face. Cedric looks around for what brought him down. He's sure it's a snake, maybe a copperhead at that. But seeing none, he follows his father's gaze and turns to find the crow, with worms crawling out. It's just like a TV horror movie, Cedric thinks. Worse, because you can smell it. "It's just the crow," Cedric says, steadying himself, turning his head from it. "Just your dead crow." He kneels beside his father and feels the warm, wet earth give under his knees. By the way his father holds his

chest, Cedric imagines a heart attack. He thinks of the aspirin commercials on TV but doesn't know if they're fact or fiction.

His father tips on back like he wants to lie down and Cedric bends back the corn stalks into a kind of recliner. His father sucks in a loud mouthy breath and commences a kind of panting.

"Dad, I gotta go to the house and get you some aspirin, okay? Don't get up."

As Cedric runs through the yard, the crows scatter from the maple—and momentarily he thinks, why, this—this—the running through the yard is all it would have taken to make them fly. I'll have to tell him and Rosetta. When he hits the enamel paint of the porch floor with his first muddy boot, he slips and goes down hard. Old Blue jumps up barking.

"Stay calm," Cedric says. "Stay calm."

But Old Blue sets in to howling like something's chasing him.

Cedric swings open the door, wishing for all the world Rosetta were here to help. He runs upstairs to the medicine cabinet, knowing, even as he goes, he's shedding clods of mud from his boots.

He pulls out the bottles. There's aspirin here, he knows, but his fingers won't take hold. He fumbles with the bottles till the bottles all come spilling out in the sink. He sorts through them till he finds the aspirin, then runs back out of the house, past Old Blue still howling. As he goes, he looks into the cornfield, tries to decipher his father from among the plastic bags of corn. Not finding him, he prepares to fuss at him for getting up, not following instructions. But once he has

plunged into the corn, he sees him where he left him, still reclining in the corn, the rotten crow above him. He's managed to unbutton his shirt at the throat and chest. Drawing closer, Cedric hears him panting.

"Look, here, can you take one of these?" Cedric holds the aspirin bottle.

"Withinout water?" his father asks.

"Without water," Cedric says.

His father shakes his head.

Cedric's eyes dart around. "Will you drink from the creek?"

His daddy shakes his head. "Too muddy," he mumbles.

Cedric grabs the bucket that's been sheltering the fence transformer and runs to the creek. Dunks the rim and the bucket sucks in water. Since when has mud hurt anyone? Rosetta has told him there are even pregnant women who eat it.

"Now, look, Daddy. Here's this water," Cedric says.

He kneels in the soft soil again.

"Look here." He twist-push-pulls the cap off, pours out an aspirin, puts it in his father's mouth. He parts his lips, places it inside. He knows the bitter taste will gag him. If only Rosetta were here to help coax him to swallow.

"Dad, look."

His father's eyes follow his movements. A good sign. "I'm going to cup my hands full of water. You drink, okay?"

"Give Mary five dozen," his daddy says, his words mashed by the aspirin.

"I know," Cedric says. "Here." He cups his hands in the water, lifts it dripping across his father's chest. His father flinches, feeling the drops. At his father's mouth, Cedric parts the lips with the back of his hand, sees the little cake of aspirin melting on his tongue. He tips some of the water inside. It stays there, dissolving the aspirin more.

"Can you swallow, Dad?" Cedric asks. "It's on your tongue."

His father's eyes fall downward as if he wants to see it. He takes a deep breath and sucks water down and gets strangled and coughs out the water.

Why didn't he call 911 at the house? If only Rosetta would come. Cedric glances over his shoulder, listens for the car, but can't hear anything over Old Blue's howling.

"I'll be right back," Cedric says. He runs to his truck, and in the instant he feels the latch of the door unhitch, he knows he's losing his father. He grabs the cell phone and rushes back to help him fight.

"Nine-one-one operator. Do you have an emergency?"

"My father's having a heart attack." The sound of his voice, the meaning behind the words, surprises him. He's sorry his father has to hear him.

"Where are you?"

"In the cornfield." He gives their address. "We're sending someone. I'll need you to stay and give me information. Is he conscious?"

"Yeah. His eyes are moving."

His father groans. Cedric looks at the scant white hair on his father's chest, the place where the fisted muscle beats rapidly.

"I can't talk now," he says. "I've got to see to him. Tell them to hurry."

His father is reclining still, his head back. Cedric takes hold of his hand. The strength of the grip that grips back surprises him. He studies his father's mouth, the aspirin still on his tongue. Maybe it will dissolve. Maybe it will trickle down. If Rosetta would come, he could ask her to bring some juice.

The sun is out, the clouds having momentarily parted. Cedric thinks of the corn in plastic bags. They've already picked as much today as they did Monday, and it's good and solid, better than what they expected. His father looks up, rolls his head from side to side, groans.

"Stay with me, Dad. We're only half through with picking."

Cedric keeps his eye on the quivering heart. He listens for cars, but all he hears is Old Blue. Surely it's time for Rosetta. If only his father can hang on, he's sure the two of them together will know what to do. He glances down the road for the car.

His father grimaces. It's torture, Cedric thinks, torture inside him. His father's hand clutches his tightly, and Cedric suspects maybe it's all that's keeping him alive.

As the sun brightens, the shadow of the plywood holding the crow appears on the ground in front of

them. Cedric follows the shade of the stake to the stake itself, then on up to the rotten crow at top.

"I'm getting that thing outta here," he says. He knows Rosetta won't want to see it. With his free hand, he reaches over and yanks the stake. He wiggles it back and forth till it comes loose in the soft ground. The contraption is heavy, the plywood water-sogged. Cedric tosses it one-handed, hard as he can, into the rows they've already picked, the rows furthest from the house. The crow corpse rolls off when the plywood strikes the ground.

His father closes his eyes, draws his knees up.

"Dad, it's a bumper crop this year." Cedric's eyes blur. His throat tightens. "It's like something out of the Bible." He digs far back. "Like the bread and fishes." His father opens his eyes, nods, and swallows, but doesn't swallow the white runny aspirin stuck to his tongue.

Suddenly, over his father's breathing, over Old Blue's howling, Cedric thinks he hears a voice. He holds his breath and concentrates. "Cedric?"

It's Rosetta yelling from the porch.

"Cedric, where are you? Cedric." Rosetta's voice is louder now. She's moved out to the yard.

Cedric yells back, "I'm in the corn." He wants to tell her he's done away with the crow but can't think of a short way to shout it.

"Cedric." She hasn't heard him. "Cedric." There's a jagged note of fear in her voice. Maybe she's seen the mud in the house, the medicine bottles in the sink. She doesn't know why Old Blue is howling.

“Cedric.” She draws his name out in a high-pitched cry, “Ce-dric!”

The crows scatter out of the maple tree and branch out over the cornfield, calling to one another. “I’m here,” Cedric yells back louder, “out in the field.” He looks at his father’s chest where the throbbing has slackened considerably. He squeezes his hand and finds his squeezing returned. “Hang on,” he tells him. “Just hang on.”

“Cedric! What is it? Answer me. Cedric! Where are you?” Rosetta is crying, he hears it now. She’s coming through the yard toward the field. Does his father hear her, too? He looks at him for some sign of recognition, then feels his father’s grip loosen in his hand.

“You hang on,” he says, squeezing his father’s hand harder. “I’m not letting go.”

His father’s face is twisted, his tongue pasty white. Because of his altered expression, Cedric can make out the very shape of his father’s skull, the sockets where his eyes are set, the way his teeth fit in, the slack jaw, all the bone he will be once his flesh is gone. He turns his head quickly, tries to shake off the vision as he might a spider web, but it sticks. The horror of the bare skull is what he sees with his eyes closed.

“Cedric, honey.” Rosetta’s voice, at the edge of the cornfield, falters.

Cedric imagines her hesitation, the forbidden perimeter, the cradle of refuge she preserves. He lets go of his father’s hand. “I’ll be right back,” he says. “You wait.” But his father’s eyes do not follow. “You wait for me,” Cedric says again, putting his forehead close against his father’s head, holding his eyes tight against tears. “I’ll be right back.”

Rosetta is coming, is starting to run. He hears corn stalks crashing down. He thinks of how the blades will cut her, and he takes off in her direction. He walks fast, he doesn’t run. With his shirt sleeve, he wipes his eyes, firms his mouth into a smile. He walks steadily, mud clumping on his boots. His feet grow heavier and heavier. Another mournful strain takes up the chorus with Old Blue. It’s the wail of the ambulance, still far off but making its way. All around them, the plastic bags of corn sweat in the sun. He can hear his father telling him to hurry and move them to the shade. But Cedric is walking towards Rosetta. He is walking and trying to smile. He will calm her. He will walk her back to the house. He will calm her and keep her from the cornfield.

Bits Stolen (excerpts from The Woman and the White House)

Faux Pas

The woman of the house wore the wrong clothes to the party. She drank too much wine. She could get over those behaviors—what grossed her out was how often she’d put her foot in her mouth.

Getting a Present

The woman of the house got out of bed every day to stand in the present. She knew yesterday no longer existed, but her memories of it made her stand.

Relatable

The woman of the house loved the story of “The Princess and the Pea.” She related to that pea.

Painful Words

Ever since Hilary Clinton lost the election, the word pantsuits had become too painful. It had always been an uncomfortable word, but now, just say suits or pants.

Work Clothes

The woman of the house preferred working in jeans, which she romanticized. Jeans, a lovechild of work and play.

Exception

Except for her daughter, she allowed no one to slap her butt. No ands, ifs, or buts, except for her daughter, who thought it great fun to whack her mother.

Acronymbat

She was a teacher, and a writer, too, but at one point, she started to think of herself simply as the woman of the house. The woth. She was a woth. Which made her wonder. What is a wombat, really?

Choices

Did she have them? Did anyone?

Privilege

The woman of the house was both free and enslaved. It was messy. Even her language, English, was both powerhouse and colony.

Be a Good Citizen

What a terrible responsibility, she thought, a home-made paperweight, a cracked millstone, a decorative manacle, a jaundiced baby, a lifelong, ungrammatical sentence that despite your instincts you must keep trying to read...

Heofen and Hel

My god, she thought, they don't make new terms like they used to.


America

She was a mix of things. A mother, a mutt. A hybrid, a home. Prophetic as an idiot's dream.

Wombat

Did you know? A wombat has a very strong butt. A group of wombats is called a wisdom. Wombats poop neat cubes.

Catherine
Zobal Dent
Bits Stolen
(*excerpts*
from The
Woman and
the White
House)



Poetry

Ash Wednesday

The day before, hefty old ladies in the basement parish hall kitchen ladled fasnachts

out of the deep fat fryers for most of the morning from just after early Mass until nearly noon,

rolling some in powdered sugar, leaving others plain. The scent of burnt, stale oil drifted up to the school's

classrooms while we, in silence, read our books, did our math sheets, and now and then answered

a question from Sister when addressed. At lunch, after grace, we ate our sandwiches,

at our desks like always, spoke to nearby kids in low tones that became lower when Sister

looked up from her own simple meal and the Catholic Digest. The glance enough

for us. After permission, we went outside, huddled in small groups on the blacktop play yard

shivering a bit as the sun went behind clouds on a day that was not nearly yet spring.

After recess, we filed down the steps, room by room, grade by grade, and the ladies gave us

our greasy treat. We boys ate them like starved, shipwrecked sailors who'd chanced upon a bounty,

leaving our shirts and ties riddled with crumbs, our dress pants with the powdered sugar.

At Mass before school the next morning, the old priest, either out of forgetfulness or stubbornness, smeared our heads

with ashes and told us in Latin what Sister translated for us in religion class later that day:

Remember, O man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.

Away

Ark walks tall and alert, head swiveling at regular intervals - left - then right - then left again. Next time the reverse. He walks all the way up the street, past the unused tracks at the east end of town, just before the hill, then back down the other side. Twice people wave to him. Twice he nods back, keeps moving.

It is too early. He does not want to talk to anyone, but by now shops are either closing or putting their lights on. Ark turns sharp down Third Street, walks along the tracks for half a block, then pulls open to the scarred oak door to Tony's Tavern. He walks to the far side of the empty u-shaped bar, sits down.

She comes out from the back-room kitchen, grabs a bottle from the cooler, uncaps it, and places it in front of Ark.

Where the hell you been, says she. *Away*, he replies, and looks her up and down. From the Sublime to the Uncanny

Jerry Wemple

Jerry Wemple

Hearts of stone

And you cry because things get so strange so fast
And you cry because nothing good ever lasts

There are few things worse than a crying drunk.
Ark had only been one once. It was a year

and a month later. He was in some dirt
bar in a harbor town somewhere south of

where he wanted to be. And he knew for
certain that now he was away. It was

his choice to escape, a choice that once made,
was irreversible. Now in pity and

shame, Ark stares at the dank floor, a mix
of uneven wood and patches of busted

linoleum. He knows this kind of place
harbors no type of sympathy, still he

wanders over to the unplugged jukebox
and reads the choices while rubbing a lone coin

in his pocket. Tomorrow, he thinks,
I'll still be away. I'll still be away.

Jerry
Wemple

For you, my bones

Sarah M. Goulet, Bloomsburg University, EAPSU Undergraduate Poetry Contest Winner

Launch () that mythic round
Once again, and here i say:
Here i lie, penelope i,
And the eye of the sun beams down;
Here am i, sleeves torn,
That sky still is not big enough for us all

Gift my grief, (), Odysseus,
Have i not given my eyes for you
Blind, have i not granted my voice
Stricken, have i not raked nails to my heart

My ten and ten and five suitors wait
To my hands they lay hold and peel away
Odysseus, () whether to you i could penelope
Tell me that round, my mythic quench
Tell me again of the stories of my mothers
Tell me again how i struck the earth

My heart is but an animal
And still
It remembers your ship in the harbor

Take (), Odysseus, but give me back
My (), again!

Sarah M.
Goulet

Moving Day

Kaitlynn Keiper, East Stroudsburg University, EAPSU Undergraduate Poetry Contest Winner

1. Address Unknown

A glimpse of eggshell walls
 And an ivory dresser accented with
 Amaranth scrolls. My first
 Bedroom a place that exists now
 Only in sunlit memory and
 A now abandoned trailer buried
 Deep in the Appalachian forests.
 There exists a picture of me, still so small,
 Bundled up in a polyester-stuffed suit and sitting
 On top of a car with snow up to its windows,
 My dad grinning as he leans against the frozen
 metal panels, trying to build a house on land
 he bought with the promise of a loan
 from grandfather to build a house for his young family.
 The money never came, and neither did the house.

2. Ranchlands

Moving boxes burst and the smell of paint
 Stings my nose, hands stained by neon pink
 Paint and ivory sponges, stamping patterns
 Onto walls that I remember being nearly
 Fluorescent. The smell of sheet rock and new carpet

Overpowers the hum of the Sawzall my dad took
 To the basement walls building the master suite.
 That summer I ran away, shoving dozens of stuffed
 Bunnies and cats into a blue plastic
 garbage bag. I made it all of one house over,
 Where my neighbor housed me for a few hours
 Before returning me home with stifled laughter.

3. Meadow Lakes

When the moving boxes had their way again,
 My sister and I, never close, set our beds
 On opposite sides of an attic room.
 The house on the lake we called ours for
 Eighteen months, flooded every time it rained -
 The rushing waters carrying away heirlooms
 And photographs and records
 And the last scraps of my father's patience
 Before he called the moving trucks again.

4. Howard Street

The house with purple walls and see-through
 Bamboo curtains, the first time I was introduced
 to real crime when the local good 'ole boys

stole the neighbor's car and my mother's wallet
 to prove a point. Her wallet was found
 abandoned in some slum in Newark, sent
 on an expedition to places I could not follow.
 That summer I put a kid in the hospital,
 An introduction to bone crushing guilt
 Before fear for his two young daughters
 Had my father calling the trucks again.

5. Fourth on the left, Greenview Drive

Boxes and the now familiar rattle of the bright
 Orange U-Hauls. The last house, last in
 An ever-growing line of four walls and a roof
 But never homes, with the wood stove and massive lawn -
 With the promise of staying in one place at least
 Until high school graduation, a promise nearly broken
 When the first round of lay-offs and pink slips
 Came through. But now, these grey walls,
 Painted by hands once stained pink in a house
 Long since abandoned -
 Are mine.

Kaitlynn
Keiper

Kaitlynn
Keiper

Stone Street

Wyatt Inlow, Clarion University, 2018 EAPSU Undergraduate Poetry Contest Winner

Along the bend,
contagious brambles.
Pines in a line like beggars.
The soapy bricks of the Methodist church,
its braggart tower,
its brown birds.
A set of oars
propped on a chipping banister.
Satellite dishes like three-legged mosquitoes on roofs.

*

Wyatt
Inlow

A gangly boy eats strawberries by the plastic fence of the apartments,
eclipsed for a moment by a tractor trailer zigging
down Stone Street like a reluctant curtain along a rusty rod.
Leaves bound after it like jacks.

*

Long necked mannequins in wedding gowns,
the fossilized storefront, the slovenly laundromat
quietly full of love.

*

Glyphs of woodgrain wind up the planks of a tall fence.
Snags reach through missing boards.
The man from Finland on his porch
behind endless mounds of firewood.
Midnights pumping from his chimney.

Wyatt
Inlow

Pennsylvania's

white pipes,
multi-purpose

(as they say)
forest.

Hemlock
has hemlock

woolly
adelgid,

abscises
over gregarious

orange spindle corals.
Little milk eyes

in holiday
water,

tongues of yellow
leaves.

It lacks nothing
and exceeds in no way,

like
two tastes of a melon.

Jonathon
Dubrow



Text-to-text interaction: Transformation and resistance in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a text in perpetual emergence

Henda
Ammar
Guirat

In his "To Close or Not to Close," John Gerlach briefly addresses "the urge to prequels, sequels, and rewritings," and takes Jean Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre* as an example that "demonstrates how much we crave to extend our most significant narratives. We want the resolution of closure, but we also want to open everything up all over again; the more significant the story is the more it's never really over" (156). Here, Gerlach points both to the novel's project of resisting closure and to its use of open ending as the means through which it attempts to accomplish this objective. This article argues that the story is never really over not simply because its ending is open but because that openness paradoxically turns out to be a point of entry of closural forces from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. This creates, in Rhys's narrative, a never-ending clash between two opposite drives of closure and anti-closure. This clash, once explored and addressed, would paradoxically highlight the novel's underlying characteristic of resisting the totalitarian and hegemonic discourses that inform the precursor text and challenging the realistic notion of stable meanings and fixed truths. The closural forces which enter the parodic text through the open ending take the

function of residual forces that haunt it and turn it into a text-in-process, undoing again and again the notion of definite and definitive interpretation or meaning. Offering itself as a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* both installs and challenges the precursor text, resulting in a self-undermining, self-contradictory stance that locks the later text in a continuous process of productivity or in a state of perpetual emergence. Rhys's text turns it into a site of ongoing debate between two discourses that dialogise each other in the Bakhtinian sense, the first imposes resolution and completion to the story of the female cultural other and the second resists that closural endeavour pointing to its constructed nature.

Rhys's novel uses anti-closural strategies that aim both to challenge the closure the Brontëan text imposes on Bertha's story and to turn openness into an essential part of a narrative whose story is one of imprisonment and confinement. While it is an acknowledgement of the modernist text's own dependency on its nineteenth-century canonical precursor, the open ending is an attempt to extend beyond its own textual space in order to colonise the colonialist

text. However, the anti-closural force of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s ending both undermines and is undermined by the closural force of *Jane Eyre*. In this sense, read in the context of its intertextual relation with *Jane Eyre*, the open ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* turns the novel into a site for two conflicting forces: a shaping force or an anti-closural one and a resisting one or closural one. Such a reading locates the two texts in the context of an ongoing battle for the status of the dominant text and, therefore, suggests defining this clash of forces in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in terms of Raymond Williams's cultural categories of the emergent and residual, categories which throw into sharp relief the ideological and discursive nature of this clash.

"The dominant," "the residual," and "the emergent" are the terms Williams uses in Marxism and literature to discuss the cultural process as they function to "recognise not only 'stages' and 'variations' but the internal dynamic relations of any actual process" (121). He foregrounds the role of the "residual" and the "emergent" because "they are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal about the 'dominant'" whose motive of self-preservation informs its constant control of their subversive energies. He defines the residual as a part of the past dominant, a version of that which

has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue - cultural as well as social - of some previous social and cultural institution and formation. (122)

The emergent, according to Williams, is more subversive than the residual as it creates "new meanings, and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship" (123). Both these categories are inspiring and of use in my discussion of the relationship between Rhys's text and its intertext; their employment is justified by the nature of the residual's link to the past dominant and the emergent's subversion of the present one. In proposing to read Rhys's modernist text as an unfinished product or as a text-in-process, the present article rethinks Williams's cultural categories from the vantage point of literary criticism with the aim of capturing how the intertextual debate with the canonical work that informs *Wide Sargasso Sea* sustains discourses in a permanent state of clash and de-stabilises meaning. It transfers these categories to a literary context in which the centre or the dominant no longer holds as it takes the status of the residual which attempts to regain its former status. *Jane Eyre* is the dominant text whose closural impulses find their way in through the act of rewriting and linger there as residual forces in conflict with the narrative project of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It is this continuous clash and constant resistance that ensure the modernist novel's status as the emergent.

1. Open Ending with Closed Future

Rhys's text is motivated by the project of challenging the closure imposed on the story of Bertha Mason who is, in the words of Kristy Butler, "merely a tool of a nineteenth-century plot, and a foil whose fate is apparently irrelevant in itself" (111). This means that this closure takes three aspects:

- a. a formal aspect that takes Bertha as a narrative device rather than a fully-fledged character, as a dark secret and an obstacle Charlotte Brontë disposes of to pave the way to Jane's happiness.

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b. an interpretative one as the reader asserts and accepts the existence of the mad woman as a narrative device. In this sense, it is the reader who produces closure.

c. an ideological closure which dismisses the cultural other as marginal and insignificant, as the one that does not matter.

In offering itself as the prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* seems to compromise its narrative and formal choice of an open ending that resists closure. In fact, this modernist novel binds itself to the same ending although the novelist chooses to end the narrative before her protagonist's death/suicide. In re-appropriating Bertha and her story, *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes the project of freeing the cultural other from the confines of the main narrative by allowing her to have a voice and a story of her own. ¹ However, in choosing to write a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, Rhys attaches *Wide Sargasso Sea* to the same ending and, therefore, the future that it points to, in its open ending, is part of the precursor narrative. In an important foreshadowing moment in the narrative, Antoinette looks at her red dress and tells us "I let the dress fall on the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and from the dress to the fire" (121). She continues, "I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the

¹ In studying Rhys's novel as a revision or rewriting of Bertha Mason's story in *Jane Eyre*, many critics pay attention to its different revisionist moves in relation to narrative point of view, voice, mode, and perspective. Sylvie Maurel, for instance, defines the novel as a revision in which "she fleshes out the 'paper tiger lunatic' (Rhys, 1985, p.262), allowing her to outgrow her predecessor's stereotyped construction of otherness, and promotes the raving monster who shrieks, grovels and laughs horribly to the status of an articulate 'I' who speaks from 'the other side' of the colonial divide" ("Across the 'Wide Sargasso Sea': Jean Rhys's Revision of Charlotte Brontë's Eurocentric Gothic").

fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now" (121). Soon afterwards, her last dream begins, and she sets the house on fire; when she wakes up, she seems determined to do something telling us that "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (124). She takes a candle and shields it with her hand as she gets out of her room into the dark passage. What may happen next is a suggestion, a possibility that belongs outside the text; it is an anticipation informed by our knowledge of *Jane Eyre*.

This self-undermining state of dependency accounts for Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of Antoinette's last dream and subsequent decision as evidence of the protagonist's identification with Bertha Mason and her existence in a "fictive England" constructed by Charlotte Brontë (250). What the ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* amounts to, in these terms, is a movement from the Caribbean world constructed by Rhys back to Brontë's England in "an allegory" of the inevitability of "the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (251). Spivak argues that Rhys's Antoinette makes Brontë's *Jane Eyre* possible as she "must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that *Jane Eyre* can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction" (251). Such a reading is an evidence of how closure in its three aspects can find its way into *Wide Sargasso Sea* through its open ending. To attach the ending of Bertha's story to *Wide Sargasso Sea* engenders an interpretative closure that defines Antoinette as a subjugated cultural other incapable of challenging imperialist discourse and structures, a character enacting a predetermined fate.

The choice of an open ending may seem to logically prevent and oppose *Jane Eyre*'s resolution, completion, and terminal devices, the three different ways in which narrative closure occurs as Troy M. Troftgruben points out (47-53). However, in foreshadowing the ending of the nineteenth-century narrative, in making the reader expect it and even desire it, *Wide Sargasso Sea* looks forward to these closural markers. Nevertheless, in the context of the text-to-text interaction that ensues from its project of re-appropriation, Rhys's narrative is informed by formal and thematic attempts to resist the closure that *Jane Eyre* imposes on that ending. It points to the constructed, and therefore ideological, nature of closure, alerting us to the workings of the formal strategies that inform both the irreversible drive to the resolution of plot and the open ending that resists closure. Although it seems to compromise the novel's project of resisting the Brontëan suppression of the cultural other, the open ending in Rhys's novel should be addressed as a conscious choice that informs a complex intertextual debate between the modernist text and its realistic precursor. This debate engages the three closural aspects or levels as a means of deconstructing the Brontëan closure. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Rhys's revision of *Jane Eyre* amounts to much more than the limited achievement that Spivak attributes to the novel: its humanising of Brontë's demonic lunatic or "insane animal" (251).

2. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the Project of Resisting Closure

1. *Jane Eyre*'s Closural Signals in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

In *Jane Eyre*, the main narrative which revolves around Jane's progress towards self-assertion and happiness is informed by a pursuit of closure whose condition turns out to be the disappearance of the

mad Bertha Antoinetta Mason, Rochester's first wife, from the narrative. Her death is both the appropriate and desirable ending to the story-within-the-story, one that offers closure to both narrative and sub-narrative. In the sequence of events, this ending is a little delayed in order for Jane to pursue her progress towards self-assertion and independence, objectives which in the logic of this bildungsroman should be achieved before the protagonist finds happiness through love; however, it remains inescapable and necessary to the closure of *Jane Eyre*. In this sense, the coherence and unity of the main narrative depend on the closure of the sub-narrative whose ending is made to make sense as the predictable, inevitable outcome of Bertha's several attempts to set Thornfield on fire.

This sense of inevitability and predictability relates to four out of five categories of closural signals which make up the analytical model offered by Gerlach in his discussion of closure in short fiction. In his *Towards the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*, he contends that "All short stories use at least one of the five signals of closure: solution of the central problem, natural termination, completion of antithesis, manifestation of a moral, and encapsulation" (8). In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's existence is the dark secret in Rochester's life turning her into an obstacle to Jane's happiness and a problem. Her death becomes, therefore, the solution to that problem making Jane's progress towards happiness possible and her goal reachable. A sense of stability and finality is established as soon as Jane is allowed to know that the problem is solved. So, "solution to the central problem" is the first signal of closure in *Jane Eyre*. The second is "natural termination" which "is the completion of an action that has a predictable end" (9). In fact, a sense of closure is associated with the readers' realisation that the fire scene most logically makes sense as the culmination of a series of

repetitive attempts by Bertha to set the house on fire. Fictionalised as the ghost that haunts the house at night, this character roams the dark passageways of Thornfield with a candle. In a nocturnal visit to her husband's room, she sets fire to his bed. In a similar visit to Jane's, she probably gets distracted by the bridal veil.

The third closural signal is actually the fourth category in Gerlach's model, "manifestation of a moral," which is achieved

when we are aware [...] that a story that up until the end (the end in the physical sense, the blank space that signals, if nothing else does, that the story is over) has been factual, without any obvious intent to make an abstract point, and either a character or the reader sees the more general significance, the conclusion we draw has an effect analogous to the moral in the exemplum tradition. The reader's perception that a theme has emerged can give a short story a sense of having closed. (12)

Bertha's death makes a moral statement about the self-destructiveness inherent in giving way to one's passions. Symbolic of Bertha's lustful nature, fire becomes the very expression of how her passions end up consuming her. The sense of closure that accompanies the "manifestation of a moral" is rooted in the ideological finality associated with this moral lesson that Jane and every nineteenth-century female reader of Brontë should learn. **2**

2 In *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar read Bertha as "Jane's truest and darkest double," "acting out [her] fantasies" while providing her with a "monitory [...] example of how not to act" (361).

The last signal in Gerlach's system is "encapsulation" which, he contends, is "a coda that distances the reader from the story by altering the point of view or summarizing the passing of time" (12). The sense of closure that is associated with this category relates to the belated report of the fire scene due to the fact that the narrative is told from the perspective of the first-person narrator to whom we remain bound as she journeys from one setting to another. This belatedness confers a sense of finality to the scene, of something that is done with, a problem gone. The leap back in time that Jane and the readers experience as we listen to what happened motivates us to take a leap forward to the present of narration, with our thoughts going to Rochester, to another kind of problem, his loss of a hand and of his sight. In this leap, we enact Jane's desire to know about Rochester's fate and the result is that the episode of the fire scene is encapsulated, isolated, and easily pushed aside.

In liberating Antoinette from the grip of the master narrative of Jane, the narrator and the lead character, Rhys manages to challenge three Brontëan closural signals: "solution to a problem," "manifestation of a moral," and "encapsulation". In fact, her story is no longer used to make a moral statement that serves the ends of the female bildungsroman and the narration of her fate is equally liberated from the confines of Jane's storytelling. However, in choosing to halt the narrative before the act of burning Thornfield, Rhys seems both to consolidate the project of challenging the Brontëan closure and to allow its closural signals to creep into her narrative. In fact, stopping her narrative at that point actually preserves the closural signals as the property of that very ending which, as her narrative seems to suggest, is the future of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Therefore, what happens is that while the closural signals work to point to closure, Rhys ironically only manages to reverse the process and turns closure into

the marker of these signals. Therefore, after we finish *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we wander with our imagination and look forward to the closure of *Jane Eyre* bringing to the text all the Brontëan closural signals.

If stopping at that point in the story of Antoinette is meant to challenge the four Brontëan closural signals, it is possible to argue that it only weakens the first one which is "solution to a central problem" as it consolidates the novel's central concern which is Antoinette's imprisonment. In this sense, the ending of the revisionary text restores the status of problem to the issue of imprisonment: Antoinette regains her sense of time and place, realises that she has been imprisoned and is determined to do something about it. So, the problem becomes removed from the character to the situation and experience of the character who is undergoing mental and psychological awakening. However, no substantial or significant change has been effected as to stop the reader from using *Jane Eyre*'s closure to continue from where *Wide Sargasso Sea* has stopped, allowing in the process *Jane Eyre* to creep in **3** and to take the function of the opposing force of the residual. This opposing force is very similar to what Austin Wright calls "recalcitrance," "the resistance of the shaped materials" to "the force of shaping form" in the short story (115). While Wright argues that recalcitrance in the short story is associated with the shortness of the story, his point that recalcitrance does not allow the work to be "a fully realized entity but [rather . . .] an emergent hypothesis of reading" is relevant to the discussion of the residual of *Jane Eyre* which finds its way into *Wide Sargasso Sea* as recalcitrance or resistance to the shaping force.

3 In 1957, Rhys complained in a letter to Selma Vas Dias: "One stupid thing I did was to read *Jane Eyre* too much. Then I found it was creeping into my writing. A bad imitation - quite dreadful. All had to be scrapped" (L 161).

It is this recalcitrance which forbids *Wide Sargasso Sea* from becoming "a fully realized entity" and turns it into "an emergent hypothesis of reading [. . .] a composition that displays a created form in the process of becoming visible" because recalcitrance "slows down or interferes with this process" (116).

2. Anti-closural Signals in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Restricting our discussion of Rhys's project of challenging the Brontëan closure to the last event prior to the Brontëan ending is an endeavour that does not do justice to the narrative. It seems to be based on the assumption that Rhys's challenge of the Brontëan closure amounts to her choice to halt the narrative before the Brontëan ending. Such a reading locates closure within the textual boundaries of the final segment of the story and fails to see closure as a process whereby the text reaches its proper conclusion. In this sense, closure includes ending and relates to the larger issues of artistic forms and thematic concerns, while ending is the place where the various thematic and formal strands of the narrative are brought to resolution. In the words of Torgovnick, it is "the single place where an author most pressingly desires to make his points - whether those points are aesthetic, moral, social, political, epistemological or even the determination not to make any point at all" (19). While ending is located within the textual boundaries of the final part of the text, it foregrounds how artistic resolution is inextricably linked to broader questions of structure and form. As such, the ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the third part in which Antoinette regains her voice and subjectivity after part II which is largely dominated by the voice of the unnamed Rochester who manages to silence her after their marriage. Her awakening is also marked by her last dream after which she decides to do something about her imprisonment.

Both the open ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the closure of *Jane Eyre* should be understood as parts of artistic wholes, determined by the narrative strategies and thematic issues of the narratives. As such, our reading of the open ending of Rhys's narrative should be dealt with on two levels: an intra-textual level in which we remain alert to how the ending is determined by the narrative form and content and an inter-textual one in which we ground our reading of the open ending in the context of a struggle between two narratives competing for predominance. On both levels, the open ending is informed by and predicated on a number of anti-closural markers through which *Wide Sargasso Sea* works to unravel the illusion of unity and coherence created by the closure of *Jane Eyre* and its sense of conclusiveness.

2.2.1. The Intra-textual Anti-closural Strategies of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Rhys's open ending is rather determined by the formal strategies and thematic concerns of the narrative which invests the story of the madwoman with significance that was denied it in Brontë's text. In fact, rewriting the story of the madwoman, Rhys signposts the different stages in Antoinette's growth and awakening through a series of premonitory dreams that structure the narrative. The first dream represents her childhood as she walks in the forest with "someone who hated me" and who "was with me, out of sight" (11). The second represents the future of her marriage to a man whose "face [is] black with hatred" and the third and last one her state of zombification, 4 imprisonment, and regained self-awareness (34).

4 In her "Race and Caribbean Culture as Thematics of Liberation," Sandra Drake refers to Antoinette's subjugation and imprisonment as "her 'real' death," a "long slow process of her reduction to the Zombie state chronicled in the novel" (108).

In choosing to end her narrative with the third dream, Rhys remains faithful to that pattern and structures her narrative into a series of significant nodes that point to subsequent nodes or developments. In fact, Antoinette gradually becomes more and more aware of the dangers that surround her as a child, as a young woman reluctant to marry an English suitor, and as a married woman brought to England and zombified by her resentful and unloving husband. In this case, the predictability of the story no longer emanates from our knowledge of *Jane Eyre* (that Rochester takes her to England and imprisons her) but rather from what we learn in the novel about the psychic processes of the protagonist in her cultural encounter with a displaced and alienated Englishman who considers her an other and her entrapment in a union of love and hate with him. With every dream Antoinette tells us about, we get a glimpse of what will befall the protagonist caught between her desire to win her husband's affections and her awareness of his motives in marrying her and of his incapacity to understand or like the island and her own attachment to it. As such, the dreams take the significance of ominous foreshadowing of the protagonist's future with such a husband. They create a pattern of doom predetermined, not by Brontë's text, but by the cultural encounter in which an English man feels threatened by his loss of control in an alien environment and culture and shielding himself with his prejudices. Rhys here manages to shake the story of the madwoman from the determinism of Brontë's text to the cultural determinism that emanates from an unequal balance of power. As Judie Newman points out:

In part II, on his honeymoon in Dominica, in a house which originally belonged to Antoinette's mother, Rochester clearly resents the female-identified world around him. He is dependent on Antoinette, here. Like Caliban in

The Tempest she acquaints the newcomer with the flora and fauna of the island and interprets its customs to him. Like Prospero, Rochester's reaction is to resent her independent knowledge, accuse her of sexual guilt and to enslave her [. . .]. Henceforward Antoinette is essentially silenced. (16)

As Antoinette stops resisting and allows him to take her to England, she gradually becomes a puppet without volition of her own; he renames her Bertha and even Marionette making her forget who she is: in Part III, the protagonist tells us "and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass. There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now [. . .]. What I am doing in this place and who I am?" (117). This passage signposts the beginning of her self-quest which will culminate in an expression of agency conveyed through her last dream. While in the first dreams she takes the role of the victim, in the last, she seems to choose agency. So, when Rhys halts the narrative before Antoinette sets Thornfield on fire, she foregrounds her agency in what becomes for the reader a frozen moment which creates the illusion of a life halted and poised for analysis. As in the case with the previous dreams, the reader is motivated to stop for a while and think about the significance of the dream. The difference is that what the reader experiences at this point of the narrative is the feeling that something is left unfinished and is forced to think and reexamine this segment to satisfy the urge of resolution and the expectation of narrative wholeness. In the structuring force of the dreams, the reader will most probably seek the unifying principle interpreting the narrative as one of awakening in which the journey is more important than the destination. So, when the reader thinks of what may happen in the future, what is thrown into sharp focus is the lie that is told by Rochester and Brontë, the lie about the first wife

setting the house on fire because she is mad.

Another intra-textual anti-closural signal is the strategy of circularity. A convention commonly taken as a closural marker, circularity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* allows the text to open up both temporally and spatially. In her "Closure and Preclosure as Narrative Grid in Short Story Analysis: Some Methodological Suggestions," Per Winther suggests a revision of the analytical models of Gerlach's closural categories, separating "circularity" from his third category of "completion of antithesis" and giving it a separate status:

Gerlach lists circularity – the return to an aspect of the beginning at the end of the story – as one of several antithetical closural markers. It seems to me this is one closural signal that does not follow an antithetical pattern. Admittedly, even circularity suggests a movement away before the return, and often there will be some change in narrative circumstances so that circularity in narration seldom implies a return to status quo. As Valerie Shaw reminds us, one of the oldest principles of narrative is repetition with alteration, playing variations on initial scenes or situations. But circularity still describes a narrative movement notably different from those implied by the other closural markers, and it therefore ought to be given the status of a separate analytical category. (61)

There are two circular movements in *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s last part implying a return to a beginning, to an initial status while suggesting alteration and change. The first is a movement back from the last dream to an earlier episode in Part I describing the black ex-slaves setting fire to Coulibri. The second is a movement that relates Part III to the title of the novel. In both cases, the alteration and change manifest the emergent force

of the revisionary text and its capacity to challenge and break free from the Brontëan closure.

In an imaginative temporal and spatial journey from Part III whose setting is England back to the episode of Coulibri on fire in Part I, the reader has the function of endowing the text with an episodic symmetry and narrative circularity that signal significant connections between end and beginning. However, this circularity does not evoke similarity and repetition; it rather suggests connection and difference. In her dream, Antoinette is at the battlement of Thornfield and it seems that the sight of fire brings all her memory back:

When I was on the battlements it was cool and I could hardly hear them. I sat there quietly. I don't know how long I sat. Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier [. . .]. The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me [. . .] I called Tia and jumped and woke. (123-124)

This scene reinforces retrospective connection with the scene in which Antoinette's family is driven out of their house, Coulibri, and she attempts to join her black friend Tia who throws a stone at her:

The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left. [. . .].

Then, not far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. [. . .]. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass. (24)

Note how, in both passages, Antoinette identifies with Tia as she would with her own reflection in the mirror.⁵ Tia's attitude, however, changes. After rejecting her in the Coulibri-on-fire scene although she is not happy about it, Tia, in her last dream, urges the protagonist to jump to her. Only in the last part of the narrative does Tia seem to accept that identification, for the protagonist has gone through difficult rites of passage, dispossession, enslavement, imprisonment, and finally uprising, which align her with the Black Caribbeans.⁶ The similarities and differences between the two distant scenes prompt the reader's retrospective patterning and stimulate their awareness that considerable distance and growth in terms

⁵ For a discussion of scenes of mirrors and mirror images in relation to Antoinette's quest for identity, see Helen Tiffin's "Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the Novels of Jean Rhys" and Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism."

⁶ In her *Jean Rhys at "World's End,"* Mary Lou Emery points out that Antoinette's experience of enslavement starts when, in Tia's dress, she "meets the man who will forcefully exchange her in marriage to another white Englishman" (39). In the last dream, she chooses her black friend because in being "enslaved," she "joined the history of the blacks of the islands, learning from them traditional means of resistance" (59).

of experience, rather than desire, have been traversed by the protagonist. The open ending which emphasises the protagonist's resolved decision to do something that the premonitory dream seems to point to could be read as the result of the protagonist's similar retrospective realisation of how much she has grown and of the need to manifest that growth: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (124). Hence, circularity functions as an anti-closural signal rather than a closural one.⁷

The last part of the novel prompts another retrospective patterning that paradoxically resists closure, suggesting explanatory connection that allows the reader to become an active participant in meaning production. Antoinette tells us that "they tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it" (117). Later in a conversation with Grace Pool, she stubbornly insists that she "will never believe" this is England (119). The ending leaves unexplained the symbolic significance of this element and gives no guidance as how to interpret it. It is the title, however, which offers the explanation: both Antoinette and her unnamed husband are lost in Sargasso Sea. Rather than a "return to an aspect of the beginning at the end of the story," circularity, in this case, is an interpretative production in which the reader keeps shuttling between the last part of the novel and its title as they try to reorganise different details of the narrative within a symbolic system for themselves. The unique characteristics of Sargasso Sea provide such a symbolic scheme that suggests fluidity, shifting boundaries, circular motion, calmness, and entrapment. Bounded by and defined by four ocean currents that together form a circulating ring-like ocean stream

⁷ See *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargasso_Sea

called a gyre, the Sargasso Sea is unlike all other seas in the world which are defined at least in part by land boundaries. It is characterised by its calm waters and winds and its seaweed which historically caused some sailing ships to be trapped there.

The explanatory function of the title allows for transference of the meanings it implies to certain perplexing elements in Part III. This transference makes possible interpreting the mystifying information provided by Antoinette that Grace Pool took her one afternoon to England when she keeps insisting that she is not in England but rather lost at sea. This probably means that as the protagonist gradually gains in alertness, she associates her state of imprisonment with a state of stagnation and her "madness" or rather loss of subjectivity, will, voice, and perception of time and place with a spiral motion that suggests a loss of sanity. When on one occasion, she is taken out, she finds England in her momentary freedom: "There was grass and olive green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England. If I could be here I could be well again and the sound in my head would stop." (119). As Antoinette insists that they are lost at sea, we realise that she projects the whole situation in terms of entrapment by calm waters and winds and boundedness by different currents. To say that she is lost at sea is her own peculiar way of commenting on her situation as a Creole doomed to remain stuck between different worlds and cultures. She seems to insist that the journey from the Caribbean to Britain is not an easy one, for she finds herself "becalmed, stuck "in between" these geographical spaces" as Tom Sheehan points out (141). The text names that sea and, in doing so, self-reflexively points to its rejection of closure and resolution of the cultural and social forces and complexities that determine the characters' life experiences. The adjective "wide" in the title further intensifies the sense of spatial openness and plays

down the sense of confinement that the protagonist experiences. The title *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a reflection on the multicultural origin and reality of its protagonist in which the authorial voice joins that of the character to support her refusal to be confined to an English identity (that of Bertha) imposed on her by her husband.

2.2.2 Encapsulation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: an intra-textual and inter-textual anti-closural strategy

In halting the narrative before the fire in Thornfield, Rhys has managed to prevent the Brontëan closural signal of encapsulation from creeping into her narrative as a residual force. However, she manages to use this signal as an anti-closural marker and turn it into an emergent force of signification capable of resisting the residual one. In her last dream, Antoinette seems to speak both of Brontë's Bertha, of Jane, and of Thornfield. The first is the ghost haunting the Brontëan Thornfield, the second is the English woman afraid of the ghost and sensing its presence. Thornfield is referred to as a "cardboard house" (118). When she tells us about the ghost that follows her and chases her laughing and then tells us that she sees "the woman with streaming hair" (123) in a frame and recognises the ghost in her, we realise that Antoinette conveys her sense of being enclosed in a fictional representation that lacks authenticity. At the same time, she encapsulates and encloses that representation as a fictional artifact, a construction. Newman points out to the "duplicity [that] reigns over the ending as a whole. It is a dream but a dream of a familiar book. It gives the reader precisely the feeling experienced by the victim of colonialism of real life being enclosed inside somebody else's fiction. At the close, however, it is *Jane Eyre* which has become the dream, from which Rhys's heroine can wake up and move forward into the future" (25). By encapsulating the Brontëan text,

Wide Sargasso Sea makes Antoinette real and turns Bertha into a dream/fiction. Pointing to the constructed nature of the Brontëan text and its closure as artifact, Rhys weakens their effect on hers by claiming equality in fictionality. Antoinette tells her story and re-appropriates her voice when she regains her senses and after doing what she decides she has to do. This means that the story is actually told after what we suspect to be the Brontëan ending: fire at Thornfield, which means that Antoinette is still alive and well! Note the shift of tense from the simple past to the simple present in the last sentence of the novel: "I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (124). All the narrative is told in the simple past except for the second dream which is narrated in the simple present and for this sentence. Both refer to the now of the storytelling which seems to be more important than the memory. Maybe the character perishes in the fire or because of the jump, but the storyteller is alive, real, active, and alert as she is busy challenging the master text and its representation of her. It is interesting how in its desire to liberate the Caribbean character from the prejudicial and colonialist representation of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* establishes itself both as a prequel and a sequel to it, extending well beyond it, casting doubt on the truthfulness of its narrative, and pointing to its discursive nature.

The very reflection and expression of this strategy of encapsulation is the choice of the protagonist's name: Antoinette Bertha Cosway Mason. It is a name that encapsulates two other characters and their stories, Bertha Antoinetta Mason of *Jane Eyre* and Annette Cosway, Antoinette's mother who, prior to her daughter, experiences a similar life of loss of voice and imprisonment.⁸ Antoinette's story is informed by an anti-closural drive in relation to three stories. Therefore, the project of resisting the closural commitment

of *Jane Eyre* ramifies into resisting three different closures to three stories of imprisonment: the Brontëan closure of Bertha's story, of her mother's Annette and the Brontëan residual closure creeping into Antoinette's story. Therefore, *Wide Sargasso Sea* opts for an open ending or anti-closure which ramifies into:

- a. a formal aspect which employs different anti-closural signals.
- b. an interpretative aspect unraveled in the reader's consent to associate her desire to set the house on fire with the fantasy of joining Coulibri and the desire for liberation. Antoinette's stubborn insistence that she is not in England is similarly a form of resistance to interpretative closure.
- c. and an ideological aspect that endows the cultural female other with a voice whose depth of understanding discredits the accusation of madness.

The choice of the name An(toi)nette suggests the encapsulation of Annette's story, an encapsulation that

⁸ Maurel discusses the similarities between the stories of the mother and daughter. She points to "a parallel between the intertextual determinisms that inform [Jean Rhys's novel] and history as a coercive process in which change and repetition, difference and sameness come uncannily close" and argues that Antoinette's story "is made to develop into a mere re-enactment of past scripts - those of imperial *Jane Eyre* and of imperial history. Thus, not only does Antoinette's fate converge towards Bertha's but it also duplicates her mother's." The novel's repetitive patterns induce a continuous debate whether it breaks the cycle of repetition or reiterates it; however, the desire to challenge the intertextually and historically preordained destiny of the characters informs Antoinette's act of storytelling and her attempt to re-define her future, a predetermined past, in her own terms and not in Brontë's.

is meant to target the closure imposed on Annette and which takes:

- a. a formal aspect as she is fictionalised chiefly from without as a mother emotionally distant from her daughter gradually sinking into grief, silence, anger, and hysteria. Her experience of confinement and abuse remains largely undisclosed and her death happens off stage.
- b. an interpretative aspect in the act of storytelling performed by Antoinette who in telling her family story to her husband imposes closure and tells him that her mother died when she was a little girl. What the husband considers a lie exposed is what Antoinette sees as the truth of her mother being more dead than alive.
- c. an ideological aspect revealed in the way the Brontëan Rochester points to a female inheritance of madness in Bertha's family. This closure dismisses Annette as another hopeless mad woman in a series of stories of female madness.

An(toi)nette saves her mother from oblivion by incorporating her name and her story; the French personal pronoun "toi" (you) both evokes the imperial French origin of the mother (from Martinique) and allows the name to ramify into multiple identities, blurring the boundaries between mother and daughter, English and French, Caribbean and English, self and other. An(toi)nette is the sum of all these identities, a site not easy to inhabit. In this unification of the other and the self in An(toi)nette, Annette's story finds its open ending as the daughter manages to break the circle of inheritance through appropriating her subjectivity and voice. Antoinette in her dream of agency speaks of a desire to fly rather than jump to her death; it is a

Henda Ammar Guirat

Henda Ammar Guirat

longing to create an alternative female subjectivity outside the bounds of the inherited representation of the mad woman in the attic and the bounds of oppressive patriarchy and prejudicial Englishness.

To conclude, Rhys's desire to write a prequel to *Jane Eyre* is a highly politicised project which informs her choice of aesthetic forms meant to resist the closure imposed on the story of the mad woman. In fact, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not so much concerned with liberating the Caribbean character from the confines of her prison at Thornfield as much as with giving her a voice and a story of her own to reclaim her identity. In doing so, it creates a unique dialogic encounter in which the processes of absorbing and transforming *Jane Eyre* do not simply aspire to provide another ending to rescue the character from death; they rather take the meaning of a very interesting and serious attempt to provide the character with a story to tell, to trace her growth as she takes the position of the enunciating subject, and to celebrate her awakening and her capacity for agency. *Wide Sargasso Sea* absorbs the Brontëan text but more importantly transforms the formal strategies that endow it with unity and completeness. Through its use of anti-closural signals, it opens up the closed and enclosed subnarrative of the mad woman and drastically changes the way we approach *Jane Eyre*. These processes of absorption and transformation, therefore, require a thorough exploration that should go beyond pointing to the similarities and differences between the two texts. Instead, it should focus on how the text absorbs and transforms the intertext and how the latter reacts when it is absorbed and transformed. In this dialogic debate between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, the two texts work as opposing forces that resist each other; Rhys's text uses its anti-closural signals as a shaping force to challenge the closure the Brontëan text imposes on Bertha's story, while the closural

forces of *Jane Eyre* linger on as residual forces opposing and resisting this endeavor. Rhys's novel, therefore, turns out to be a battle ground on which the irreversible drive for resolution in the precursor text acts as the opposing force to its openness. It is the resistance or recalcitrance of the absorbed text that prevents *Wide Sargasso Sea* from becoming a closed entity and a finished product. It is not only a text with a multiplicity of meanings but also one in a perpetual state of emergence, a text in which meanings constantly neutralise one another.

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“True Love Conquers All”: The Changing Tropes of Disney’s Fairytale Prince

The fairytale tropes of animated Disney films, from the restorative power of love’s first kiss to the promise of everlasting marital bliss, have been reproduced, reconfigured, and parodied in numerous adaptations of fairy tales, including many of the Disney company’s recent theatrical successes. Yet arguably the most recognizable trope, the handsome Prince Charming who rescues his comely bride-to-be from imprisonment or death, as popularized by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, has been replaced in recent decades by a new fairytale hero: the “Project” Prince Charming, or, as referred to in the 2013 blockbuster *Frozen*, the “fixer-upper.” Introduced in *Beauty and the Beast* with the spoiled, slovenly Prince Adam and continued with the impoverished titular street urchin of *Aladdin*, the shiftless rogues Prince Naveen and Flynn Rider of *The Princess and the Frog* and *Tangled*, and the world-weary shepherd Kristoff of *Frozen*, the “Project” Prince Charming is himself redeemed by a sympathetic heroine whose refinement, diligence, optimism, and/or wealth serve to nullify his defects and amplify his princely graces, thereby rendering him a worthy suitor. This essay traces the evolution of the “Project”

Prince Charming through the animated Disney canon and examines the resultant trope’s effects on audience perceptions of complementary gender roles in romance and marriage.

In the opening chapter to his monograph *Folk and Fairy Tales*, D. L. Ashliman defines fairy tales as “stories with a strong make-believe component” that “satisfy a number of personal needs and social needs” for equality, truth, and justice (2). Although most fairy tales feature basic, easy-to-embellish plots and simple character motifs, their protagonists face real and relatable dilemmas (e.g., loneliness, abandonment, homelessness) that are usually resolved through fantastical means that audiences find engaging and morally satisfying (Ashliman 2, 5, 47). Ashliman’s definition can be readily applied to animated Disney films of the pre- and early post-WWII era (several of which are based upon fairy tales), with their entertaining yet seemingly simple stories, minimally developed characters, and, observes Kristin Kotecki, replicated “conservative patriarchal values” (236).

The studio’s first full-length animated film, *Snow*

White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), features a heroine so compassionate, industrious, and patient that she requires no moral or internal transformation of her own. Rather, Snow White’s social status and physical surroundings are changed (from cottage to castle) to satisfy the audience’s sense of justice and righteousness for this princess-turned-scellery maid. The film’s textual, visual and musical elements shape viewers’ expectations of Snow White’s return to royalty via her eventual marriage to her princely suitor, if she can survive her evil stepmother’s assassination attempts. Memories of her initial encounter with the singing prince sustain Snow White during her exile, and, after breaking the stepmother’s spell with a gentle kiss, the prince promptly whisks away Snow White to his castle in the sky “to live happily ever after.” The prince isn’t so much a fully formed agent of change as the film’s *deus ex machina*, whose kiss restores life and royal status to the displaced princess, resolving the struggle between good and evil but, notes Justyna Deszcz, without any “change in the power relationships” of the general social order (86). (The dwarfs remain in their forest cottage, for instance.)

The Prince Charming Trope

Disney fairytale princes of the postwar era replicate this prince-rescuer motif to varying degrees. The prince of Disney’s *Cinderella* (1950) appears in only one song sequence, “So This Is Love,” but his insistence upon finding the woman who captured his heart and marrying her frees Cinderella from a life of servitude and mental abuse at the hands of her jealous stepmother and stepsisters. Prince Philip of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) plays a more pivotal role in the struggle between good and evil, slaying the demon Maleficent and freeing his betrothed bride, Princess Aurora, from eternal sleep. Interestingly, though, neither Philip nor Aurora speak during the film’s third act. Frankly, none of these characters are especially

well developed. As Jack Zipes notes of the Disney’s early lineup of princesses and princes, “Despite their beauty and charm, these figures are pale and pathetic compared to the more active and demonic characters in the film” (37). Because all conflict is external to each film’s principal characters, who already are good, moral, and brave, they have no reason to change and therefore experience no discernible arc. This is not to suggest that these films have no aesthetic or cinematic appeal. *Snow White* and *Cinderella* were immediate critical and commercial successes; *Sleeping Beauty*, though it lost money initially due to its incredible production costs, has since become one of the higher grossing films of the Disney canon with subsequent theatrical releases. *Cinderella*, *Snow White* and *Aurora* also form the canonical core of the Disney Princess Line (Lester 295), whose ubiquity in merchandise now rivals that of Barbie. Young girls today have little difficulty distinguishing these three princesses from more recent Disney heroines such as Belle and Jasmine, likely because of each princess’s distinct costume, accessories, and hairstyle.

By contrast, the Disney princes have been collapsed into a single Prince Charming trope whose sole purpose is to fulfill the heroine’s wishes for love and happiness and who is, argue Ken Gillam and Shannon Wooden, “too two-dimensional to do more than inadvertently shape the definition of the protagonists’ femininity” (3). Though the prince is essential to the heroine’s happily ever after, most viewers, observes Amy Davis in her monograph *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains*, “would have trouble naming character traits for any of these [royal suitors]” (2). One could argue that the focus of each of these animated fairytale plots is the heroine rather than the hero and so she is by default more engaging (though with Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*, that is debatable). Moreover, the prince’s role in earlier versions of popular fairy

tales is often minimal. In the Grimm Brothers' tale "Little Snow-White," for instance, the prince doesn't even glimpse Snow White until after she has been entombed in a glass coffin by the seven dwarfs; her resurrection is brought about when the coffin is dropped and the bit of poisonous apple stuck in her throat dislodged (Anderson 43). In Disney's version, the prince bookends the story, appearing to Snow White before her exile to give her someone specific to long for and appearing again at her grave to awaken her with love's first kiss. Zipes speculates that the prince is analogous to Walt Disney himself in that both take the credit for others' work, be they dwarfs who provide Snow White refuge or scores of animators who brought this story to the big screen. After all, Zipes argues, "It is the prince Disney who made inanimate figures come to life through his animated films, and it is the prince who is to be glorified in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* when he resuscitates Snow White with a magic kiss" (38). The dwarfs, meanwhile, are left to themselves after Snow White hastily bids them farewell and rides off with her prince. This pattern would be repeated with *Cinderella*, whose anthropomorphic mice remain behind while Cinderella and her prince depart on their honeymoon, and *Sleeping Beauty*, whose three fairy guardians watch from the balcony as Aurora waltzes off into the clouds with Prince Phillip. Despite his limited screen time in each film, it is the prince who gains the princess's utter devotion, if not the audience's full admiration.

The Rogue Emerges

By the 1960s, however, the tall, strong princely counterpart to the lovesick heroine seemed to have worn out his welcome at the studio, as had feature films based upon fairy tales, of which there were none produced after Walt Disney's death in 1966 for nearly two decades. Even the first three films released on

Michael Eisner's watch—*The Black Cauldron* (1985), *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986), and *Oliver and Company* (1988)—depart from the fairytale prince trope despite their fantastical content; each film centers on an egotistical hero who commits one or more serious blunders that inadvertently endangers others or assists the antagonist. The swineherd Taran of *The Black Cauldron* fails at fighting, protecting his master's pig, and alluding capture, yet constantly fantasizes about being a knighted hero. *The Great Mouse Detective's* Basil of Baker Street, an intelligent but brash rodent-sized version of Sherlock Holmes, is frequently outmaneuvered by his archenemy, Professor Rattigan. Likewise, the streetwise dog Dodger of *Oliver and Company* manipulates the kitten Oliver into stealing food and then abandons him. These selfish or inept rogues present a major departure from the strait-laced heroes of Disney's earlier fairytale fare, though wayward male protagonists do appear in other animated films of the postwar era, such as *Peter Pan* and *Lady and the Tramp*. However, with box office revenues increasing with each Eisner film (*TBC* with \$25 million, *TGMD* with \$38 million, and *O&C* with \$74 million), there were clear signs that awkward or rakish males were becoming more appealing and more broadly accepted as principal leads (and, in the case of *TBC*, possible romantic interests) during this transitional era for the studio.

The first fairytale film of the Eisner era, *The Little Mermaid* (1989), features a prince imbued with several of these roguish qualities. Though strong and athletic, Prince Eric frequently requires rescue. He also exhibits a playful and mischievous side, committing the occasional faux pas, such as giggling at the sight of his advisor covered in pipe ash. Like the film's titular little mermaid, Ariel, Eric is love starved and restless, seeming more at ease playing his flute or with his dog than ruling a kingdom. He also is given

far more screen time than any of his Disney prince predecessors; he and Ariel share several scenes touring Eric's kingdom that, while not integral to the plot, show the couple's romance blossoming over shared interests rather than physical attraction alone. It is during these pleasant and sometimes awkward encounters (such as Eric's amusement at Ariel's fascination with pipes and puppets) that the pair's slight imperfections emerge, rendering them more relatable than earlier Disney fairytale couples. Davis notes in her analysis of *The Little Mermaid* that "[t]hose who are that bit more 'into' Disney will remember that the prince with whom Ariel falls in love has a name, Prince Eric," though Davis concedes that while Eric is more memorable, he is "not the most interesting character in the story" (*Handsome Heroes 2*).

Still, Prince Eric is more appealing than either of the two unnamed princes of *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, and his story arc with Ariel is more clearly defined. Such narrative improvements can be attributed in part to the slower pace of their romance (at least, slower by Disney standards). Initially, Ariel falls for Eric from a distance and he for the hazy memory of Ariel when she rescues him from drowning. When they reencounter each other on land after Ariel has become a human, they must get to know each other more fully and overcome awkward moments of confusion and, because of the loss of Ariel's voice, silence. "Without her voice," observes Patrick Murphy, "Ariel cannot immediately re-enchant Prince Eric" (133), as Aurora and Snow White had enchanted their suitors with singing. The couple still falls in love at breakneck speed (three days, to be exact), but for the first time in a Disney fairytale film, each partner must do some of the work to realize their romance. There are both malevolent and benevolent forces driving them apart. Their misgivings, such as Eric's doubts about his feelings for Ariel and her inability

to assuage those doubts with singing or speech, serve to acknowledge, again for the first time in a Disney fairy tale, that falling in love can be fraught with uncertainty and miscommunication.

With the studio's release of *Beauty and the Beast* in 1991, the shift from the charming prince to the awkward rogue is much less subtle, and the romance that develops between the protagonists requires more time and greater compromise. Whereas love is portrayed in *The Little Mermaid* as an immediate, natural occurrence between two attractive beings, here Belle's initial reaction to the Beast (Prince Adam) is one of repulsion and fear. An unsightly assemblage of buffalo, pig, wolf, and lion parts, the Beast is equally revolting in his behavior and temperament, barking orders at Belle and threatening to break down her chamber door when she refuses to eat with him. As revealed in the song sequences "Something There" and "Human Again," the Beast also is uncultured, unable to manage a fork or spoon, and unable to read, despite possessing an enormous library. This slovenly illiterate is a marked departure from the suave, sophisticated man-creature of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's tale, whose worldliness and gentility so impress Beauty that she eventually learns to see past his physical appearance and falls in love with him. In Beaumont's version, therefore, the story is centered on the heroine, who must learn to see others for who they truly are rather than as they appear. For Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, the story's center has been shifted from the heroine, who already can perceive the inner beauty or ugliness of others, to the Beast, who must earn the heroine's affections, and by extension the audience's, by learning to control his temper and showing genuine concern for others. Thus, the Beast rather than Belle becomes the primary agent of change. As Susan Jeffords notes in her essay "The Curse of Masculinity," "Belle is less the focus of

the narrative here . . . than she is the mechanism for solving the Beast’s dilemma” (167). Departing from the usual Disney formula of speed-dating, the Beast’s gradual transformation from spoiled brat to mature adult takes place over an undefined period of weeks or months, dotted with comically awkward episodes such as the barber’s unsuccessful attempt to restyle the Beast’s mane and the Beast’s painfully slow reading of *Romeo and Juliet* to Belle. If the Beast isn’t necessarily humorous in his own right, his efforts to gain Belle’s affections and his humanity are humorous to watch, just as Ariel’s efforts to navigate the human world with incorrect information are likely to amuse. Apart from their entertainment value, these embarrassing incidents endear audiences to the less-than-perfect characters who experience them. Such incidents also present humor and compromise as integral to rather than detracting from friendship and romance, which would become a staple of the leading couple’s interactions in subsequent animated fairy tales.

The next film of Disney’s lineup, *Aladdin*, released in 1992, centers on a lowly street urchin who gains the affections of Princess Jasmine with the help of a wisecracking genie. For the first time in a Disney fairytale film, the hero lacks the requisite pedigree and fortune of a standard prince, though viewers are reassured early on that, despite being poor and dirty, Aladdin possesses the pure heart and gallantry of a prince, “a diamond in the rough” predestined for royalty, observes M. Keith Booker (56). Compared with the bumbling Beast, Aladdin is bold, compassionate, and sharp-tongued, often all in one scene, as when he wittily compares one of Jasmine’s suitors to a horse’s ass after shielding two children from the suitor’s whip. Yet despite being physically and emotionally attractive, Aladdin also experiences his share of self-conscious moments with Princess Jasmine.

Brennan Thomas

After the Genie transforms him into the wealthy Prince Ali, Aladdin is soundly rejected by Jasmine, who dismisses him as another “pigheaded suitor.” He then unwittingly confirms Jasmine’s prejudice when he tells her she is a “fine prize” for any man. Fortunately, Aladdin overcomes these blunders by connecting more genuinely with Jasmine, not through the assistance of the Genie, but through his own quick thinking, bravery, and selflessness. His final act, to use his last wish to free the Genie rather than make himself a prince again, convinces the Sultan, Jasmine’s father, to change the existing marriage laws to enable his daughter to marry Aladdin. This rise from poverty to royalty harkens back to Snow White’s and Cinderella’s ascensions from scullery maids to princess brides due to their successful romantic liaisons, except that for Aladdin, as with the Beast, there is a sense of agency on his part. Jasmine may be the one who lifts Aladdin out of poverty and obscurity, but it is Aladdin’s actions, particularly his efforts to free the Genie from bondage, rather than his physical attributes, that convince her to marry him. “Whereas [Jasmine’s] past suitors failed because they tried to impress her with their power and wealth,” argues Davis, “Aladdin succeeds because he appeals to her intelligence, curiosity, and sense of adventure” (*Good Girls* 182). Aladdin’s marriage to Jasmine suggests that even the most impoverished hero can set his own fate if he possesses those intangible qualities most befitting the benevolent ruler: kindness, intelligence, and bravery.

“A Bit of a Fixer-Upper”

The three most recent princes of the Disney canon—Prince Naveen, the thief Flynn Rider, and the ice deliverer Kristoff—all exhibit these qualities to some extent, making their not-so-princely behavior at worst tolerable and at best humorously endearing. Two of these three heroes are, like Aladdin, not of royal descent; two are

shiftless layabouts, one mooching off wealthy benefactors and the other stealing from them. All three are initially rejected by their respective love interests: Prince Naveen for being “lazy” and “rude” (Lester 305), Flynn Rider for being manipulative and cowardly, and Kristoff, though honest and conscientious, for not quite fitting Princess Anna’s vision of the romantic suitor (he smells, apparently). Each is “a bit of a fixer-upper,” as Kristoff’s adoptive troll family describes him. Yet each hero becomes the agent of his own transformation in much the same manner as the Beast or Aladdin: by employing desirable qualities (bravery, humor, and intelligence) while tempering those less-than-desirable ones (selfishness and laziness). Prince Naveen discovers the value of hard work by joining Tiana’s efforts to build her restaurant, Flynn finds his courage by sacrificing himself to free Rapunzel, and Kristoff dismantles Anna’s stereotypical views of simple peasant folk by poking holes in her love logic.

Conclusion

So, what does all of this mean for viewers? If Disney fairytale princes have become more humorous, humbled, and humanized over time, what effect might such changes have on audiences’ perceptions of romance and partnership? As previous studies have shown, Disney films and other media have considerable influence over viewers’ sense of gender roles and expectations for romantic fulfillment (Gillam and Wooden 7; McDaniel 472; Robbins 110). To this point, I add that even recent films like *Tangled* and *Frozen* yield mixed messages about the transformative power of love. What such Disney films inadvertently teach impressionable viewers is that, while their potential romantic partners may have flaws at the outset (e.g., joblessness, lack of ambition, poor hygiene), these flaws will eventually be fixed or minimized in order for both parties to achieve their happily ever after.

It’s not that couples like Belle and the Beast or

Rapunzel and Flynn give an unrealistic impression of what love is; there is misunderstanding, confusion, humility, anger, and even fighting in almost every recent Disney fairytale couple’s romance. Rather they give an unrealistic impression of what love can do: turn the fixer-upper into Prince Charming.

In some ways, this message is more problematic than that of earlier Disney fare because it pits female fantasies against male imperfections, with the former winning out every time. While the princes have traded in their simplicity and physical perfection for more developed personality traits, their female love interests have remained largely unchanged. Each is still a wasp-waisted, rosy-cheeked innocent girl of fairytale lore whose beauty and singing prowess are usually enough to secure the loving affections of Prince Charming. Only now, however, there’s no need to impress Charming since the princess’s gifts can turn even a frog, a beast, or an unattractive, ill-mannered human into a prince. This isn’t an altogether unexpected development in animated Disney fairy tales, given that the studio’s earlier films proclaimed, either verbally or through action, that “true love conquers all.” That mantra just might need to be updated to “true love corrects all,” or rather the *female’s love* corrects all—beastliness, poverty, even the sloth or greed of the likable rogue. Critical literacy researcher Cynthia McDaniel has already raised concerns about the extent to which fairy tales and films based upon them reinforce “the notion that one of the most important goals in a young woman’s life should be the attainment of a modern-day Prince Charming” (472). Given the widespread influence of Disney films upon generations of viewers’ sensibilities of gender roles and gender identity, it is my hope that, by examining these tropes side by side in several decades’ worth of films from this studio, we may invite further discussion of how romance and relationships are informed and perceived by Disney’s target and tertiary audiences.

Brennan Thomas

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Pedagogy & the Pro fession

Journals Revisited: A Fresh Look at Daily Writing

Writing—like exercise—needs to be done every day, and Michael Connelly, author of the series of novels featuring L.A. detective Harry Bosch, says, “write every day, even if it’s only a paragraph.” I tell my students that the only way to get better at writing is by writing, though three to four times a week seems acceptable to me. The author of *Sharp Objects* and *Gone Girl*, Gillian Flynn, says her advice is to “Read all the time, and keep writing;” there are no short-cuts. No one gets better at writing simply by listening to someone—authors or teachers—talk about it.

One of the best ways to practice writing every day is by keeping a journal, sometimes called a writer’s notebook. Journals are thinking tools and ways to relive memories and preserve thoughts. Lil Brannon and teachers from the University of North Carolina--Charlotte Writing Project believe journals allow “students to write about their lives, to keep track of their thinking, and to notice the entire world around them with open eyes and ears and hearts” (3). Don Murray, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and professor, says the writer’s notebook can be used to

“make lists, notes, ... sketch outlines, draft titles, leads, endings, key paragraphs that will make it possible for [one] to be ready to write” (148). When keeping a journal, the questions that often arise are: what should be the content in the journal; should it be private or shared; how much needs to be written in an entry; and how often do writers need to write in the journal?

When used as part of a writing classroom, some teachers like to use writing journals as a place for students to respond to prompts or to class readings or topics. Still others prefer journal writing to be open and free. As to the length or size of the written journal entry, it can be determined by writing for a certain time limit, when done in a class setting for example, or can be measured by a page length or word count, when done outside of class time. Again, others may feel the length of the response is irrelevant.

Let’s consider some tried and true methods of keeping journals. The most basic methodology would be to have students write daily on their own in their journal and then turn the journals in for review after a certain

James
Strickland

period, a week or semi-monthly, for instance. The teacher would read the journals outside of class and then return the journals in a timely fashion. Unless the students were to keep multiple journals, they would not be able to continue their writing until the teacher returned their books to them. The problems with this design are immediately obvious. Besides being unable to continue writing in an absent notebook, the very collecting of their property signals a hierarchy that weakens the writer's ownership and control of their written words.

Another method would have students write in their journals about a prompt or respond to a reading assigned outside of class, then bring their notebooks to class, at which time they would exchange with someone sitting next to them or near them. After reading what was written the night before, each would respond in some way to what was in their classmate's entry. Then they would return the notebook to the original owner. The problems with this type of exchange are even more pronounced than with the "write and collect" method. First, not every student is present for every class all the time, and sometimes even though present, some arrive without their actual notebook or without the assignment. When the response is a class time, real-time activity, it's impossible to "make up". The second problem is the exchange itself. Students tend to exchange with the same people, out of habit or out of a desire for psychological safety or protection from "unknown" or "untrusted" classmates. The third problem is the amount of time that could be allotted for the exchange. Too little time means some students are rushed and do not have enough time to thoughtfully consider the entry and respond to it. Other students who are slow writers might not have enough time to actually write, and so their responses could be less developed than their more productive classmates. Those who might be

called reluctant writers could write just enough to get by and sit out the rest of the time. So, what was written is not necessarily reacted to and the teacher does not even get to see the response, unless the notebooks are collected and somehow returned in time for the next exchange.

Most people also agree that it is important to get response, some feedback, to our writing. However, that response need not be framed as a traditional graded assignment. The sole audience, or even the primary audience, for the writing need not be one's teacher and the response offered to writing need not always involve a teacher either. "Teachers may choose not to look at some assignments at all. Peer critiques may go directly from the reader to the writer, for instance. Teachers may spot-check journals without reading every entry" ("Strategies"). In fact, educators from across the country, from Brown University to Averno College, are finding ways to evaluate and respond to students with nongraded assignments and alternative grading practices ("Ten Colleges"). "Since writing in itself is of value, teachers need not grade all writing assignments—for instance journals, exploratory writing, and early drafts of more formal pieces. Teachers may make many comments on such writing to help students further their thinking but may wait for a more finished, formal product before assigning grades" ("Strategies"). So, if writing every day is a part of class but we as teachers are not evaluating everything and may not even be the primary audience, the problem becomes how do we give students some incentive, some credit, for the writing that does not necessarily involve grading or evaluating. Laura Rediehs, an Associate Professor at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY, identifies the problem: "Professors can [have] all of the early work in the course non-graded, but . . . students . . . want early indications of their grades in the course, and often

misperceive ungraded assignments as an extra burden and as not really "counting." If we ask students to do a writing that they interpret as not counting, "they may be inclined not to take these assignments as seriously as they should," Rediehs continues. When professors react by reinstating grades, Rediehs maintains that the "grades continue, problematically, to play their dual role." The grades encourage writers to try their best, while discouraging them from trying anything new or creative, for fear of endangering their grade. Since we know at this point most students are not self-motivated enough to make themselves into writers, we need to find a way that minimizes the grading duality of emboldening while disheartening.

So, if we acknowledge that students get better at writing by keeping a journal—writing every day and getting response, not necessarily evaluation, the challenge is to reward their daily effort, while presenting the work as course-related by organizing the daily writing to support the major writing lessons and assignments. Of course, when requiring students to keep journals, especially daily journals, the unacknowledged elephant in the room is the overwhelming

amount of writing that is created—the paper load—that should be responded to in some way. I am going to share a system that "encourages" students to write daily with a plan for different types of journal writing prompts and get credit for doing so, a way to have students experience the benefits of keeping a writing journal while helping teachers get out from under the paper load.

My students write every day; that is, six of the seven days of the week—I count the weekend as one day. Sometimes my students write their journals in composition notebooks and other times in electronic drop-box files. They write different types of responses, but the series of daily writings is what I think of as their journals. As I said, students write six times a week in three sets of paired assignments, shown in **Figure 1: Daily Journal Writing Schema**. Monday and Wednesday are textbook-based responses, the most traditional journal entries. Tuesday and Thursday are in-class free writings. Friday and the Weekend are bookends to the week: Friday focuses on the novel each student is reading, and the Sunday weekend writing focuses on specific class-based content.

Assignment/Due date	Amount of writing	Point Credit	Recipient
Weekend Writing Sunday night	Varies by problem 15-20 minutes	5pts	Teacher only * in Dropbox
Textbook Response Monday night	500 words	5pts	Teacher in Dropbox Classmate thru email
Freewriting Tuesday in class	5-7 minutes	Nongraded	Volunteer sharing During class
Classmate Response Wednesday night	500 words	5pts	Teacher in Dropbox Classmate thru email
Freewriting Thursday in class	5-7 minutes	Nongraded	Volunteer sharing During class
Novel Prompt Friday night	500 words	5pts	Teacher only ** in Dropbox

Figure 1. Daily Journal Writing Schema

Dropbox assignments total
240 /600 points
40% of grade points

*with classmates occasionally
through Discussion Post rather
than Dropbox

**book club share informally
with classmate

James Strickland

James Strickland

The Monday night entry is a response to the “Sharing Ideas” questions that follow the specific textbook chapter assigned as reading for the week. I like my students to read about writing and the process of writing, but the prompt could just as easily be created for a chosen online article or literary passage. The important thing is that there is something written to read and respond to in writing. The minimum length to receive full credit for the journal response is 500 words. Generally, I offer partial credit for journal entries less than the required minimum, but I am more rigid about not accepting late work, since the purpose of the daily journal writing assignment is organic to the content of the course and integral to Wednesday response sequence for the journal.

Students submit a copy of their journal entry to me in the D2L drop box (the classroom management system chosen by the university) in order to get credit, but they are actually writing this assignment (and the Wednesday one) to be shared with a classmate, a different person each week. Unlike the way journal exchanges used to be done, each student goes to the Classmates roster on D2L and counts down the list the number of people that corresponds to the week number in the semester and clicks on that name. This causes D2L to open an email box to that classmate, and the writer simply attaches a copy of the same journal entry submitted to my dropbox and clicks “send.” For example, for the fourth week, Emily F. sends her response to the student who is four below her on the list, Austin K. Emily will receive an email from her classmate four names above her on the list, Ethan B. Each classmate needs the email sent by Monday night because the Wednesday assignment depends on it.

The Wednesday journal entry is a response written after reading the email received from that week’s classmate and sent to the original writer simply by

hitting the reply button on the email. Each week students write an entry to a different person and receive a response from another. This way, the classmate designated for response changes on a rotating basis, so that students do not become locked into a familiarity pattern or stuck with someone who is irresponsible. For the fifth week, Emily would write to Sara L. and receive a response from Lauren A., the students five down and five up, respectively. On Wednesday of the fifth week, Emily would be writing back to Lauren A. What each student writes back to the email author depends on what that person wrote about—simply responding to it—agreeing, disagreeing, sharing similar stories, chatting about the topic. Each student places a copy of their response in my dropbox for credit.

As can be seen, this arrangement solves all the problems with the old way of responding to a classmate’s journal entry. First, students do not need to be present in the same room at the same time; they can send the response on their own schedule when the assignment is complete, eliminating the “make up” issue. Second, students are not stuck with the same people all semester; each week they meet a new classmate in text. Third, whatever time it takes, the work is done outside of class time, so each writer works at his or her own pace. Fourth, everyone writes to the same minimum requirement of 500 words, so no one gets to disappear with a half-hearted attempt. And finally, the teacher can read each entry without need for evaluation and without physically taking the writing away from the author—the author, the classmate, and the teacher all have identical copies.

Since my class meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I have them do a five-minute “free writing” response in class, which is written in their writer’s composition notebook. I give a prompt to respond to, such as “an early memory of reading” or “my driver’s license”

or “promises.” Once the time is up, I ask if someone would like to read their response. If I wait long enough, I can usually get three or four people to share, without having to call upon anyone. I write along with them, though I do not read mine aloud because I feel that would tend to give the impression that they should take my response as the model for the type of responding they should do. I also feel students would be more reluctant to share their writing if they know I will give in and fill the void by reading my own thoughts. I do not evaluate these free-writings, but I do make a positive comment about whatever is shared during this time and even mention if I have written about the same sort of thing or had a similar experience. So, the response to this aspect of the journal is given by me, in the form of an explicit oral response, and given by their classmates, in the form of their implicit listening and occasional comment. Also, as part of the course, I ask them to read a novel of their own choice, the only limitation being that someone else in class must be willing to read the same title. This semester I have students reading *Gone Girl*, *The Help*, *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, *House Rules*, and *Calico Joe*, among others. The Friday journal writing—done outside of class and submitted to the dropbox—is a response to a question that I ask them about the novel they are reading—simple things: tell about the characters so far; describe the plot as you are able to sketch it out so far; think about what I call the backstory (novels are about characters interacting, but they are interacting in a certain situation, some might call it a setting. The backstory is not the plot or storyline). For example, the Twilight books are about young people in love, but set in the world of vampires. So, the backstory is all about what vampires are and what do they do. *The Fifth Witness*, by Michael Connelly, is about young adults falling out of love, but it is also about banks and the mortgage scandal. So, the back-story is about how banks figure out who to give

a loan to and how much to charge for the loan. *Damage*, by Lisa Scottoline, is about a boy with dyslexia, so it is also about special education law and special education therapies. Since there is a court battle, the backstory is also about custody laws and legal guardianship.

I ask students to share the Friday Novel response that they submit to me with a classmate who is reading the same novel, sharing in a way that models book club sharing. I award credit for doing the reading and writing, and their classmates read what is sent and comment if they so choose.

The final piece of the response journal is the Sunday night assignment, which I call the weekend writing, either ending the week or beginning the next, depending on the content of the writing problem that has been suggested by the subject of the week’s textbook reading or a writing problem that relates to the previous or upcoming writing assignment we are working on. For example, if the topic for the week includes teaching summary writing, the weekend writing problem will give students directions on how to do a summary and ask them to summarize a practice article I have chosen, including answering several brief questions about the author of the article, information that can be quickly found by an internet search. This practice teaches them how to summarize and the value of knowing the credentials of the authors that they will conceivably be using in their research. I design these weekend writing problems to give students an opportunity to practice a useful skill, one that more seasoned writers exercise unconsciously, and I reward or credit them for their behavior. Some weeks these responses are shared in D2L Discussion Boards, so classmates can see each other’s responses. For example, after teaching a lesson on effective use of dialogue in a narrative, the weekend writing will ask

James Strickland

James Strickland

them to select the top three uses of dialogue choose from ten examples I provide from previous semesters' writings and defend their choice in the Discussion Board and comment on a classmate's choices.

At the end of the semester, I ask the students to tell me what they have learned. Most of them write about specific skills and strategies that seemed important to them. Others, however, mention how the daily writing changed them. They mention newfound confidence in their writing, discovering things in their life they never thought about, understanding a novel in a different way, using journal writing to reduce anxiety, watching a freewriting spark an idea for major piece of writing, and one even saw freewriting at the start of class as a way of staying more focused during class itself. As one student, McKenna, said: "I became an entirely new writer. ... I have finally been able to find my voice as a writer. My days of writing for a grade while simultaneously writing to please my peers as well as my teacher are over. My roadblocks ... were often rooted in trying to write like someone else." All in all, I believe the daily journal is a valuable component in the first-year writing course, one that teaches students to behave in writerly and readerly ways.

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James Strickland

Yearning to Belong: Navigating Identity in the Academy

My high heeled shoes clip clop along the pavement as I make the journey from the parking lot into the building where the conference will be held. I pause for a moment to look at my watch and once again check the map to make sure I am headed in the right direction. I have not been on this university's campus before, so I want to make sure I am not late for the opening session. I check the map one more time and continue my steady clip clop along the pavement.

I find my way to the check in table. I wait for the woman to look up, and when she does, a look of intrigue is written all over her face.

"Can I help you?" she asks sharply.

"Yes, hi. I am checking in for the education conference today. My name is Elizabeth Yomantas—with a 'Y'—usually at the very bottom of the list," I reply with an attempted warm smile.

She furrows her eyebrows and purses her lips together before scanning through the list to locate my name.

Without a word, she checks my last name off with a thick black Sharpie, and hands me a folder and my name badge. "The conference will be held in the room on the right," she says coldly as she points in the direction of the room.

As I approach the large gathering space and see a breakfast bar set up on the right, I take a big breath. In graduate school, they told us we would make friends, scholar friends, at these conferences. We would meet people who are like us, who do the kind of research we do, who we can co-write and collaborate with on projects. They said we will meet people who we can dream with. This idea was always exciting to me—when my professors would talk about making new friends at academic conferences, a surge of excitement and urgency would fill my body. So, now I would mingle with others while we wait for the conference to begin; maybe today would be the day I make a scholar friend. I place my belongings down and clip clop over to the breakfast bar. I fill up a small plate with fruit and pour a cup of hot coffee into a small plastic black cup.

Elizabeth Yomantas

As I clip clop back towards the table, I see two women have filled in the seats next to where I have placed my belongings. My heart skips a beat as I now know I have some potential scholar friends to connect with as we wait for the conference to begin.

I take my seat and say hello to the two women. They are both older than me; but then again, everyone is always older than me. The woman on the right has long silver hair and the woman on the left has a short black bob.

I turn to the woman on the left. I search her face for friendliness, but I am not welcomed in by her eyes. I try anyway. “Hi, I’m Elizabeth,” I extend my hand to her and we shake hands. “Deb,” she replies. “Cool. Where do you teach?” I try again, despite the one-word answer. “Cornell,” she replies tersely. “And what do you research?” This time, she does not really answer, or at least she does not provide an answer that makes any sense to me. Deb does not ask me where I work or what I research. She instead returns to take another sip of her coffee, and then starts a conversation with the woman on her left.

I then turn to the woman on my right. Maybe she can be my scholar friend. “Hi, I’m Elizabeth. It’s nice to meet you.” She tells me her name is Sara, and she teaches at UCLA. This woman is a bit friendlier but does not ask me any questions about my work or research. When I offer the name of the institution where I work, Sara responds with, “Oh,” and decides she no longer wants to speak with me. She returns to responding to email on her iPhone. I sit in silence wedged between these two women. This is not the first time a situation like this has happened. In fact, at all conferences I have attended, I have not made a single scholar friend. In my personal life, I have no trouble making friends and get along well with people. It is

just here—at these conferences—where I am unable to connect with others.

As I look around the room, I see an ocean of grey hair, bald heads, and wrinkles that represent years of living and learning. I touch my own hair, blonde without a wisp of grey, and consider the fact that academia is a field where aging is respected, and only time can yield big ideas and quality research. I think of my friends in their careers—their youth is still revered. I think of my friends who work in marketing and media, technology, and creative arts. Their youth is seen as a superpower that yields new ideas, vibrant energy, and an unparalleled work ethic. I think of the profession I have chosen—aging will buy me credibility, and it is perhaps then when I will begin to make scholar friends.

Is it possible that I was smart enough to get a Ph.D., but I am not smart enough to survive in this world? As I glance around the room, I feel like a young child standing along the edge of the pool with floaties on my arms. I look in the pool and see the older kids swimming, laughing, trying new tricks in the water, and having fun. The older kids all have different specialties—some dive off the diving board, others fly down the water slide, some have the most beautiful freestyle stroke, and others can just tread water for endless amounts of time. I see myself standing on the edge of the pool, waiting desperately to be invited for a swim. I want the confidence and wisdom of the older kids to help me learn how to float, tread, dive, and swim. I want them to teach me to remove the floaties and enjoy the water. I snap back into reality and look around the room once more. I need to look older, I convince myself. Then they will invite me to swim. Then I will make scholar friends.

“Excuse me for a moment,” I say to the scholar-not-friends sitting next to me. I clip clop all the way to

the bathroom. I study myself in the mirror. I have done everything I can to look professional. I see my thick rimmed glasses in the mirror, my black blazer despite the warm weather, and those darn clip clop shoes. These are just clothes, but I wear them to say, “I am smart! I can do this! I am an assistant professor. Believe me,” because maybe if they believe me, I will believe me, too. I stare at myself and decide I will quickly make a few changes to make myself look older. I pull the hair off my face into a tight bun, and I spend a few minutes chipping off my pink nail polish until it is gone. I take a wet paper towel and wipe the blush off my cheeks. Maybe scholars should be plain, I tell myself.

I clip clop back to the conference room, feeling less like myself than before. Does part of me need to die in order to survive here? I consider this question as I sit in silence once again. I wonder if I will ever fit in; if I will ever be old enough and smart enough to belong. I scan the room one more time; I take one last try to scope out some people who could potentially be scholar friends. I see two girls sitting at a table a few over from where I am seated. The conference organizers invited a few students to the event. The girls are young, perhaps 13 years old, and they giggle as they talk to one another. There is a joy in them that is absent from the rest of the room. As I watch them giggle, I smile to myself. They are the reason I love my work. I became a teacher, and then a teacher educator, because I believe in the hope of youth. I believe it is our collective job to love, care for, and guide our youth into a better, more equal future. We need to support their dreams. I find myself mesmerized in their giggles of joy. One of the girls whispers something into the ear of the other, and they erupt into laughter.

And then, it hits me like a ton of bricks. The hope of youth. In twenty years from now, the people in this

conference room with silver hair will be enjoying retirement. New people will fill these chairs—younger people—who are the youth of today. Individually and collectively, we can change the climate at these conferences. We can welcome young scholars, ask them about their research, and welcome them into the pool. We can teach them to swim without floaties, and we can teach them the tricks we learned through time, struggles, and mistakes. We can teach them to swim well, so when it is time for us to get out of the pool, we know the magic of the swimming space will be in good hands. We know the next generation of swimmers will swim strong because of our labor and love.

I then wonder—when does this begin? When do I become the one that can help others swim? When do I have enough wisdom and experience and joy and hope to swim with the youth in the pool?

As I look at those girls, I realize the moment is now. The moment to welcome them into the academy, to swim with them, to let them know they belong, is now. I gather my things from the table, and I walk over to their table. I sit down next to them. Before I say a word, I pull my hair down from the bun and shake it out. I take off my heaved rimmed glasses, and I remove my black blazer. I kick off my clip clop shoes under the table. I take deep breath. I smile widely at the girls. I am enough. They are enough. We belong to each other. We belong here.

“Hi girls! I’m so glad you’re here today. So, tell me, what are your dreams?” They smile, and without skipping a beat, they begin to tell me their stories. We are swimming.

Elizabeth Yomantas

Elizabeth Yomantas

Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality

By Mary Paniccia Carden
University of Virginia Press. 2018. 248 pp. \$75 (hardcover) \$29 (paperback)

Not long ago a student told me that he was considering an independent study focused on writers of the Beat Generation. Would I give him some feedback on the tentative reading list he developed for the proposed course? The bibliography was a solid starting point including the fiction, poetry, and non-fiction of, among others, William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Charles Bukowski. The student's research, however, reflected the dominant position men held among the Beats. Throughout the several dozen texts, the name of only one woman appeared. Marilène Phipps-Kettlewell was credited for her work as editor of Jack Kerouac's *Collected Poems*. The impression of the movement as a boys' club is not surprising. In the opening chapter of the new book, *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality* (2018), Mary Paniccia Carden observes that, according to basic literary definitions, "the Beat subject is clearly and emphatically a 'he'" (15). Fortunately, Carden's study is an enlightening reassessment of the important role the "Beat woman" played in the literary movement.

Beat women writers have been receiving more critical attention. The uptick in scholarship was initiated in the 1990s with the publication of anthologies that were more gender-inclusive: *The Portable Beat Reader*,

Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution, and *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation*. More research and analysis of Beat generation women soon followed, and the era's canon continued to expand thanks to important collections of essays such as *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (2002), *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Beat Women Writers* (2004), and *Reconstructing the Beats* (2004). Even with the publications of these studies, *Women Writers of the Beat Era* breaks ground as, according to the publisher, the "first single-authored study" of women of the movement.

Carden maintains a sharp focus on autobiographical texts by Diane di Prima, Bonnie Bremser, Ruth Weiss, Joanne Kyger, Joyce Johnson, and Hettie Jones. Earlier studies have called attention to the diverse range of genres found in Beat women writings, and this is also an emphasis in *Women Writers of the Beat Era*. The variety of literary forms addressed include autobiography, memoir, poetry, autobiographical fiction, journals, letters, and photographs. The assortment is not surprising when one considers Carden's observation about the number of positions these writers held in Beat culture: "Their texts document their 'struggles' and achievements

Mark
A. Noon

as—among other things and sometimes all at once—artists, lovers, rebels, muses, philosophers, providers, mothers, friends, and daredevils” (21). Carden examines the works through the theoretical lens of intertextuality, defined generally as the “process by which texts and subjectivities assemble out of encounter and exchange with others” (7). In the first chapter, “Intertextual Lives: Reading the Autobiographical Texts of Women Writers of the Beat Era,” she explains the benefits of this intertextual approach: “To more fully comprehend the cultural and literary positions occupied by women within the Beat movement, readers must recognize and reckon with the intertextual networks pervading their public and private lives. ... Their life-writing engages and incorporates quotes and references, acknowledges and disputes the narratives of others” (16).

The extensive list of sources and the copious notes in the book demonstrate that Carden is well versed in Beat-women scholarship and theories of intertextuality. At the same time, however, the strategy in the book leans less on research and more on the voices of the authors. By analyzing carefully selected direct quotations from major texts like di Prima’s *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, Kyger’s *The Japan and India Journals* or Jones’s *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Carden allows these women Beats to speak for themselves. This approach works well when exploring autobiography. As the narratives are explicated, the reader is provided with not only important biographical details about Beat women but essential background concerning the literary scene in which they were engaged. New light is also shed on their relationships with important Beat players, most notably Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder. The difficulties the writers faced in both their personal and professional lives is graphically delineated. For example, to illustrate the often-troubled relationship between Beat women and

men, Carden draws heavily on intimate passages from Bonnie Bremser’s *Troia: Mexican Memoirs*, a text which includes specific details about Bremser’s life as a prostitute in Mexico. While addressing the portrayal of Beat women as “commodities” to be exchanged, Carden explains that Bremser acted as a prostitute at the “behest” of her husband, Beat poet Ray Bremser: “She prostitutes herself while he writes; she prostitutes herself so that he can write” (71). Similarly, direct quotations from poetry permeate the chapter on jazz poet Ruth Weiss, one of the strongest in the book. To illustrate Weiss’ quest to reconstruct Beat identity, Carden analyzes lines from a considerable number of her poems, particularly those found in *DESERT JOURNAL*. The result is a compelling commentary on Weiss’ contention that “Beat” is not a generation but a “community that ‘continues to grow’” (104).

Women Writers of the Beat Era also pays attention to visual imagery as part of its emphasis on intertextuality. The book includes thirteen book covers. The covers, presented in color, are discussed extensively, occasionally as part of the strategy to introduce the chapters. As Carden explains, “Reproduced book covers serve as visual markers of the intertextual complexities that imbue every level of Beat-associated women writers’ autobiographical texts Readers can and do judge books by their covers” (12). On occasion, comparisons are drawn between changes in book covers between editions or revisions of subtitles. The commentary on the covers is rich and illuminating. Take, for example, a few points made about the cover of Joyce Johnson’s memoir *Minor Characters*. Carden directs attention to the photograph on the cover dominated by Jack Kerouac in the foreground with the author herself a shadowy figure in the background. Carden analyzes another significant feature of the cover: “Also present on the 1999 Penguin cover is a note/poem written by Kerouac, in which he addresses

Johnson as ‘my Angel in a pink slip’ and announces he has ‘gone on the road.’ Penguin’s inclusion of this scrap of text in its cover art seems intended to call to mind Kerouac’s legendary road life and, more indirectly perhaps, his status as a primary author of the Beat Generation” (137). The book covers are a fine addition to *Women Writers of the Beat Era*. These intertextual “paratexts” raise important points about the stereotypes that often surrounded Beat women. In addition, they illustrate the liberties taken by publishers when marketing Beat texts.

In 2011, Nancy M. Grace, an accomplished scholar of the Beat Generation, described a crisis in Beat studies scholarship. According to Grace, because Beat literature is popular and sells, the result has been “a marketplace willing to forego serious vetting of projects and willing to publish subpar works” (312). She had particularly hard words for many young scholars who she claimed were “often oblivious to rigorous research standards, ignorant of extant bodies of Beat literature and scholarship, and unable to produce findings that advance the field” (312). If the crisis Grace described still lingers today, young Beat scholars would be well served by observing the scholarly principles evident in *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality*. The book calls for an expanded view of the Beat that includes “female subjectivity and creativity” (5), and Carden’s thought-provoking, detailed text is an important contribution toward that goal.

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Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition

Edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieck
The WAC Clearinghouse/University Press of Colorado. 2017. 301pp. (open access ebook) \$36.95 (paperback)

In the spring of 1996, one of the senior members of the Rochester Community College English Department and I walked a mile-long stretch of ditch beside East Circle Drive, the highway running past the college. Like several other faculty members, we'd volunteered to pick up trash now that the snow had melted, the frost was out of the ground, and the short brown grass made it easy to walk and find beer bottles, soda cans, and faded seed corn bags. But this task and teaching English 117, the first freshman comp course, were, as I'd discovered during my five years at RCC, all she and I had in common.

Randy Koch

Unlike me, she had a Ph.D. in literature and was in her sixteenth year at the college while I had an MA in creative writing and for the last five years worked as both a sabbatical replacement and a full-time adjunct. She studied and taught at Oxford University in England; I worked for nine years as a nursing home maintenance man and then attended a public university in southern Minnesota. She along with her husband and two children were the average American family; I was a thirty-nine-year-old single father trying to raise Mary, my eleven-year-old daughter.

She was tenured; I was temporary and each quarter hoped for a full class load so I could save enough money during the academic year to pay the rent and buy groceries in the summer when I wasn't teaching. She was active in departmental and college politics and a close friend and ally of the new department chair; I, like all the other adjuncts, was rarely invited to department meetings. She considered herself an academic; I saw myself as a teacher and an aspiring writer. She was from out of state and seemed cosmopolitan; I was a farm boy who'd grown up in Minnesota, just 150 miles west of this ditch.

I was aware of all this and recognized that these personal and professional differences ultimately contributed to our contrary views on composition, student needs, professional priorities, and responsibilities to our colleagues—particularly adjuncts—because the dean, when filling full-time teaching positions in developmental English, consistently selected ABDs or new Ph.D.s over experienced MAs who had taught at the college for years. However, the significance of the differences didn't fully hit me until she stopped and stared at two small mounds of fresh black dirt on the slope of the ditch.

"What are those?" she asked with an edge of exasperation that suggested she'd been puzzling over them for the past quarter mile.

At first I thought she was kidding, but as she continued to stare at them almost as if she thought that by doing so she could explicate them like a sonnet, I realized she was serious. I nearly laughed because they were the most ordinary things in southern Minnesota. "Pocket gopher piles," I said.

She looked at me and again at the dirt. "Hmmp," she said, shook her head, and continued walking through the grass.

Clearly, my knowing what most of our students probably knew, since many of them were from rural Minnesota, didn't change my standing in her eyes one bit. If anything, it simply confirmed for her the deficiency of who I was and the irrelevancy of what I knew. Granted, I had considerably less teaching experience and education and had no reason to think that I knew more than she did about anything but pocket gopher piles, not to mention how best to teach students to write. However, her un-writerly ignorance of the common details of the place where she had lived for sixteen years and the way she dismissed my answer and me fit the typical pattern of elitism and exclusion I'd observed before. And it wasn't the last time—although obviously I didn't know it then—that a colleague would dismiss the message because of the messenger's status, the sort of ad hominem attack that English instructors and professors criticize students for making, that perpetuate a class system within departments and institutions, and that work against the possibility of genuine improvement in writing instruction for the benefit of students.

This is one of the issues running through *Contingen-*

cy, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition. According to editors Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieck, this collection of eighteen essays "clarifies and specifies the means and effects of exploitation across institutional contexts ... [and] addresses the situation by highlighting alternatives to the hollow and horrific, to the anger and despair" (6).

In order to examine the extent to which they accomplish these goals, in this review I will

—
Oh, gawd. It's happened.

I suppose that as a result of teaching alongside academics at colleges and universities for the past twenty-eight years, subscribing to *College Composition and Communication*, and reading this book twice, I would inevitably pick up rhetorical patterns employed by nearly every author in this collection. Among the most obvious and mechanical tendencies is announcing at the beginning of each essay what the writer or writers intend to accomplish even though Eileen Schell's foreword, the editors' "Introduction: Paths toward Solidarity," and the list of "threads" preceding each essay do essentially the same thing. Consider these perfunctory examples, first from Nardo and Heifferon's Chapter 2: "In the following essay, we will outline." (27). Or this from McBeth and McCormack: "In this chapter we explain" (43). Or from Murphy: "this chapter will explore" (73). Or Norgaard: "This chapter examines" and "This is a tale about" (133-34). From Wootton and Moomau: "In this chapter, we want to feature" and "In this chapter, we will describe" (199-200). And this from Holter, Martin, and Klausman: "In this chapter we focus.... [and] reflect upon" (236). Even in Chapter 18, where LaFrance and Cox attempt to break out of this absurdly

Randy Koch

monotonous, predictable, and—in the context of the entire book—redundant convention, they fail to see the irony of mechanically announcing, “[W]e will break the generic form of the academic narrative as necessary... in... this chapter” (280). Out of these eighteen chapters, only two avoid this pattern, which raises a relevant question: What does this uniformity and strict adherence to disciplinary convention imply about the authors’ motivations for writing these essays?

Clearly, some do so out of self-interest. Applying this formula shows that they recognize and are able to use the rhetorical structures habitually employed by other academics in the field, which improves the possibility that peers reviewing their work will accept it for publication. This inevitable concern of the many tenure-line writers whose work appears in this collection and their need to add another line to their CV is not only implied by their organizational and stylistic choices but also recognized by Colby and Colby in Chapter 4: “Two studies looking at motivations to publish have found that tenure and promotion are powerful incentives for scholarship” (63). In addition, the presence of common patterns in nearly every essay implies that the writers believe that substance is not enough and that surface and structural features revealing writers’ familiarity with and willingness to adhere to accepted disciplinary conventions are necessary. However, as George Orwell points out in one of his famous essays, “Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration” (128). This seems particularly relevant not only in our country’s current political climate but also—and maybe especially so—in academia.

Randy Koch

In addition to explicit announcements of purpose, these essays share other patterns, some of which reveal a streak of hypocrisy. For example, even though many English departments’ common course objectives for freshman composition prioritize “academic” writing over both formulaic five-paragraph themes and “personal” writing such as narratives, more than three-fourths of the eighteen academic essays in this collection, nearly all of which follow a common formula, use narrative in either a primary role or secondary but still essential role. Plus, in the one or two final paragraphs of every essay, eight of which needlessly insert the label “Conclusion” before what is obviously the conclusion, authors call on readers to take various actions. Though somewhat more logical and relevant than introductory purpose statements, this repetitive practice is another example of academics’ strict adherence to a common formula. Unfortunately, however, instead of suggesting concrete actions that address “the largest issues of adjuncts[—]... salaries, access to full-time positions, access to healthcare benefits, and job security” (Holter, Martin, and Klausman 244)—several authors encourage readers to perform vague, abstract, academic actions, such as “never end[ing] our scrutiny and resistance” (McBeth and McCormack 54), “identify[ing], theoriz[ing], and circulat[ing] narratives about rhetorically-informed activism” (Blankenship and Jory 167), “read[ing] the emotional output of academic labor activists” (Doe, Maisto, and Adsit 232), or “examining these rhetorics” (Wright 277). Though several writers give lip service to the importance of “complication,” “complexity,” and “professionalization” (see especially Colby and Colby, Murphy, Blankenship and Jory, and LaFrance), the fixed structures and common mode they all employ in order to be part of the “club” depend, instead, on simplification, imitation, and adherence to these and other disciplinary conventions.

This inconsistency between what these rhetoricians claim and what they do is also evident in the diction many of them employ. While looking down their noses at universities’ “capitalist language,” “the slipperiness of the language of excellence” used in a “marketing campaign” (Wright 272), the “rhetoric of exploitation and standardization” (Babb and Wooten 181), “the language of consumption” (Wright 273), the “economic language du jour with its allegiance to notions of productivity,” and “market-driven language” (Doe, Maisto, and Adsit 213-14), many of this collection’s authors seem tone deaf to compositionists’ and rhetoricians’ own pervasive status-driven “language du jour.” In addition to the use of fashionable terms, such as “agency” and “discourse(s),” each of which recurs at least twenty-seven times, or “theory,” “theorize” and “theoretical,” which appear at least fifty-five times, these academicians are notorious for attaching prefixes and suffixes wherever grammatically feasible because, apparently, without this “desimplification,” their ideas would appear too straightforward and anti-intellectual. In order to give the impression of objective theorizing, several of these authors create and depend on numerous multisyllabic abstractions, many of which are awkward and seem to be employed to impress like-minded academics: “adjunctification” (264, 265), “casualization” (31), and “ghettofication” (xvi); “dominant paradigm of generalizability” (215), “normativity” (220), “objectality” (282), “emotionality of research” (216), “liminality” (284), and “positionality” (110, 216, 218, 221); “languaging” (308), “storying” (215, 230), “re-storying” (230), and “totalizing” (282, 291); “adjunctified” (296), “decontextualized” (166), “disaffiliated” (38), “instantiated” (xi), and “situate(-d)” (172, 199, 215, 229, 230, 272); as well as dozens of other unnecessarily convoluted constructions. This “inflated style,” as Orwell points out, “is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and cover-

ing up all the details.... When there is a gap between one’s real and one’s declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink” (136-37). The verbose patterns into which many of these academics fall not only negatively affect the book’s readability but also—despite the implication of the word “solidarity” in the title—obscure authors’ complicity in the discord present in many English departments.

Fortunately, however, several writers explicitly and constructively confront the class distinctions between tenure-line faculty and non-tenure-track instructors and adjuncts—particularly Carol Lind and Joan Mullin, who, in Chapter 1, describe “an effort ... to create a research opportunity for contingent faculty within ... a traditionally resistant academic culture” (14); Lacey Wootton and Glenn Moomau, who, in Chapter 13, “argue ... that contingent faculty in writing programs are among the best situated to advocate for contingent-faculty issues” (200); Desirée Holter, Amanda Martin, and Jeffrey Klausman, who, in Chapter 15, “focus on ... how ... the professional gap between adjunct and full-time TT faculty ... [and] the realities of this two-tiered system cannot be eradicated” (236); and Allison Laubach Wright, who, in Chapter 17, examines “the material realities of graduate student labor” (277). They effectively use specific examples, include details, and usually employ the active voice to confront the disrespect and hostility of numerous administrators and tenure-line faculty toward non-tenure-track faculty.

In contrast, by reverting to the passive voice, many of the rhetoricians writing in other chapters ignore, obscure, or deny the identity of those who work against and/or oppose improved compensation for and fairer treatment of instructors and adjuncts teaching freshman comp. This in spite of Orwell’s advice to the

Randy Koch

contrary: “Never use the passive where you can use the active” (139). Lalicker and Lynch-Binieck, for example, state that in “the already hierarchical structure of English departments ... literature degrees are often seen as sufficient qualifications to teach writing, but a composition degree does not qualify one to teach literature” (94). While they make a relevant point, the authors fail to specify who—tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, WPAs, contingent faculty, department chairs, deans, administrators, etc.—have “often seen” these “degrees” in this way. Similarly, Blankenship and Jory state that “when the discussion turned to including NTTF [non-tenure-track faculty] in department governance, ... [TTF] support turned into resistance” (163). The passive voice here, too, minimizes the role of people both by attributing the sole action verb “turned” to the vague abstractions “discussion” and “support” and by using the abstract noun “resistance” rather than specifying what actions tenure-track faculty apparently took to “resist.” LaFrance also uses the passive to argue, “Space is too often conceptualized as an unmovable face of the status quo” (282); however, her later claim that “[i]nstitutions so often perpetuate the issues they were created to address” (287) ignores the fact that many of these chapters’ authors, including LaFrance, do the same thing. By relying on passive voice, obscure and/or meaningless abstractions, verbose convolutions, and intentional and unnecessary ambiguity, several of these professors “perpetuate the” status distinctions that result in the exploitation of contingent faculty even as they supposedly rhetorize against it. The objective of employing such overly academic prose appears to be to “situate” compositionists and their discipline as equals in the larger academic world, where they perceive themselves to be unfairly considered second-class academics, all the while ignoring their own complicity in maintaining the second- and third-class status of colleagues in their own discipline.

Randy Koch

One of the commendable objectives of this collection is, as the editors state at the end of the introduction, to offer “multiple, creative, constructive responses that can both enact labor justice and champion the disciplinary energies of all members of our collegial community” (Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck 11). Several chapters provide such “constructive responses.” For example, Dani Nier-Weber in Chapter 7 and Dawn Fels in Chapter 8 examine contingent labor and directorships in oft-ignored writing centers. In Chapter 10 Chris Blankenship and Justin M. Jory describe “genre appropriation” at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs as a specific and effective form of contingent faculty activism. In Chapter 12 Tracy Donhardt and Sarah Layden narrate events leading to the establishment of the Associate Faculty Coalition at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. And in Chapter 15 Desirée Holter, Amanda Martin, and Jeffrey Klausman describe the serious and tangible effects on adjunct faculty when Whatcom Community College in Washington state reduced the required composition sequence from three courses to two.

Other chapters, however, are neither “constructive” nor “collegial.” Michael Murphy, for example, in “Chapter 5: Head to Head with edX?: Toward a New Rhetoric for Academic Labor” begins with some reasonable criticism of “contract graders” and “automated reading software for MOOCs” (71), both of which ignore the “considerable complexities” of writing instruction (72) and “make well-prepared, reflective teachers entirely disposable” (71). But Murphy’s real and far less “collegial” objective soon rears its head. “In the best of all possible worlds,” he declares, “faculty teaching writing everywhere would have ... Ph.D.s in composition-rhetoric” (83). This narrow-minded, impractical, elitist claim denigrates and minimizes the knowledge, experience, and skill

of writing instructors with MAs and MFAs—those other so-called “members of our collegial community” who more often consider the ability to produce clear, clean, engaging prose as a valuable end in itself and, therefore, emphasize applicable skills in comp classes. Ph.D.s, on the other hand, too often view writing and writing instruction as a necessary but dull means to a far more interesting end, i.e., their own external academic research interests, such as “genre theory,” “service learning,” and “the computer game World of Warcraft” (Colby and Colby 60).

But Murphy not only envisions a disciplinary world where all faculty have the same educational background resulting in the same advanced degree, he also dreams of “teachers ... with a demonstrated grasp of a tangibly shared set of texts and ideas who [speak] a common disciplinary language” (84). Apparently he doesn’t realize that this uniformity in “shared ... texts and ideas... [and] language” (i.e., passive voice, multisyllabic abstractions, convoluted constructions, mechanical announcements, etc.) will likely result in either consistently less relevance to composition students or more standardization and less “complexity ... [in the] teaching [of] first-year writing” (Murphy 81). And unfortunately, Murphy’s snobbish declarations are echoed by other academics elsewhere in the book. Colby and Colby in Chapter 4 argue that “real faculty” (57) are encouraged to research, are expected to research, are compensated for researching, and are engaged in academic research. The implication here and throughout much of this book is that we are not “real faculty” if we pursue any other endeavor—such as producing creative rather than scholarly work OR focusing on comp students’ needs rather than on faculty’s academic research interests OR viewing composition as application of skill rather than “knowledge construction of theory building” (Colby and Colby 63) OR applying in real-world, non-academic contexts

the writing skills most needed by comp students, who typically are not English majors and who likely will not work in academia after earning their degree. In this collection authors repeatedly ignore and exclude the professional pursuits of lecturers, instructors, and adjuncts with MAs and MFAs that don’t involve traditional academic research. This omission obviously implies that they are less than “real faculty” and their pursuits are not only irrelevant and unsuitable but even damaging to “composition as a discipline” (Colby and Colby 65).

But that’s not the end of their condescension. Babb and Wooten also emphasize the need for contingent writing faculty to be exposed to “the scholarly focus of the field” and “to the valuable theoretical frameworks that help them to talk knowledgeably about their courses and their pedagogical practices” (172). According to them (and note again the authors’ use of passive voice here), unless “efforts are made to familiarize instructors with recent scholarship concerning writing pedagogies,” “outdated or naïve ideas of writing instruction ... [will] persist” (Babb and Wooten 180). Rather than offer what editors Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck characterize as “constructive responses that can ... champion the disciplinary energies of all members of our collegial community” (11), Babb and Wooten insult and disparage, suggesting that unless “naïve” contingents are educated by their more enlightened composition theorists, they are likely to ignorantly discuss “their courses and ... practices” and to be unable to provide a logical or theoretical basis for their methods. Rather than offer practical suggestions that benefit “all members of our... community,” authors with these attitudes too often resonate across this collection and demonstrate why, as Donhardt and Layden point out, “adjunct faculty[’s] ... working situation ... has grown worse over time” (186).

Randy Koch

Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition is an often infuriating and frustrating read. Yes, the book contains chapters that narrate successful efforts to initiate change and improve contingent faculty's working conditions and that, as a result, "highlight ... alternatives to ... anger and despair" (Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck 6). For this reason, college and university educators and administrators should read it. However, authors of other chapters actually provoke these emotions by minimizing adjuncts' contributions, teaching methods, and professional pursuits, not by providing evidence of their ineffectiveness or irrelevance to students' needs but by accusing them of not being in line with or pursuing the more fashionable and Ph.D.-approved constructed "knowledge" (Colby and Colby 63). And if that wasn't bad enough, these same rhetoricians prioritize status, power, and self-interest over the principles that English departments typically espouse—social justice, equality, diversity, and mutual respect—and are simply unwilling or blindly unable to identify who dug the financial and professional hole in which numerous contingent faculty find themselves. Like my colleague who was bewildered over pocket gopher piles in that Minnesota ditch more than twenty years ago, these academics offer little more than a superior "Hmmp" and dismissive, self-serving disquisitions in response to the exploitation of contingent English faculty and their ongoing efforts to help student writers.

Randy
Koch

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