

SPRING 2012 VOLUME 28:1

# PROTEUS

A JOURNAL  
OF IDEAS



The Body in Culture and Society



SHIPPENSBURG  
UNIVERSITY

# PROTEUS

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

The Body in Culture and Society

VOLUME 28:1

SPRING 2012



*An ancient Greek sea divinity, herdsman of seals, Proteus could be elusive by changing his form at will appearing as a lion, a serpent, a boar, water, or a tall tree. However when those who caught him succeeded in holding him fast, Proteus assumed his proper shape of an old man and told the truth.*

# PROTEUS

A JOURNAL OF IDEAS

VOLUME 28      SPRING 2012      NUMBER 1

## Upcoming Issues of *Proteus*

Watch for our Call for Papers on H-Net and in the Chronicle of Higher Education among other places in the Summer of 2012.

## We welcome ideas for future themes!

Submissions, requests for further information, or orders for copies should be addressed to the Managing Editor of *Proteus* at proteus@ship.edu.

## Cover Art: "Frida Now!"

A Group Sculpture Project by Professor Steven Dolbin's Fall 2012 9 AM Sculpture Class:

|                    |                   |                 |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Katherine Bowley   | Dave Heiss        | Ashley Weston   |
| Catherine Carroll  | Jessica Laughman  | James Whitworth |
| Jolie' Duhon       | Diana Lecco       | Samantha Wood   |
| Shawn Gingrich     | Katelin Pufnock   |                 |
| Christina Heineman | Amanda Shortridge |                 |

(Photo courtesy of Bill Smith)

- *Proteus* is indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography*, *PAIS International* (<http://www.pais.org/>), *America: History and Life*, *ISI Web of Knowledge*, *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, and *Historical Abstracts*.

- It is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ).
- Past issues are available on microfilm from ProQuest, Information and Learning.
- *Proteus* is published annually and is funded by Shippensburg University.

MEMBER



Council of Editors  
of Learned Journals

## THE BODY IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

## CONTENTS

- |    |  |    |   |
|----|--|----|---|
| 1  | <i>Introduction</i><br>Allison C. Carey  | 29 | <i>The Vampires of True Blood and Beyond: Bodies, Desires, and Addictions in the Social Imaginary</i><br>Dusty Lavoie |
| 5  | <i>Nancy Mairs: Family, Disability, and Writing Beyond the Familial Self</i><br>Hayley Mitchell Haugen         | 37 | <i>Docile Choristers and the "Choir Machine": A Search for Agency in "Choir"</i><br>Juliet Hess                       |
| 13 | <i>Virtual Disability: A Look at Avatars in Wheelchairs</i><br>Lawrence J. Mullen                              | 49 | <i>The Chronic Pain Conversions</i><br>Zach Savich  |
| 17 | <i>Writing Women's Bodies: Body as Text and Context to Medieval Mystical Theology</i><br>Christopher M. Flavin | 53 | <i>The Caged Bird Sings</i><br>Hayley Hughes  |
| 23 | <i>Parsing the Body: Frederick Douglass and the Recorporealization of Self</i><br>Jennifer McQuillan           |    |   |

---

 EDITORIAL BOARD
 

---

H. James Birx  
*Canisius College*

Harry M. Buck  
*Wilson College*

Dan T. Carter  
*University of South Carolina*

Valerie Ceddia  
*Fayetteville, Pennsylvania*

O. R. Dathorne  
*University of Kentucky*

Don H. Doyle  
*University of South Carolina*

Henry Louis Gates Jr.  
*Harvard University*

Glenda Gilmore  
*Yale University*

Shelley Gross-Gray  
*Shippensburg University*

Scot Guenter  
*San Jose State University*

Donald L. Henry  
*Shepherd University*

Stephen Kantrowitz  
*University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Mary Karasch  
*Oakland University*

Judy Ruud  
*Shippensburg University*

Linda Smosky  
*Wingate, North Carolina*

Marjorie J. Spruill  
*University of South Carolina*

Rebecca Steinberger  
*Misericordia University*

---

 EDITORIAL STAFF
 

---

Laurie J.C. Cella, *editor*  
Richard A. Knight, *editor*  
Allison C. Carey, *review editor*  
Matthew J.C. Cella, *managing editor*  
Jessica S. Kline, *publications assistant*

---

 ADVISORY EDITORS
 

---

David Godshalk  
Mary Stewart

---

 REVIEW COMMITTEE
 

---

William (Turi) Braun  
Corinne Bertram  
Michael Bibby  
Steve Burg  
Galen Clough  
Jennifer Clough  
Neil Connelly  
Barbara Denison  
Catherine Dibello  
Misun Dokko  
Cynthia Drenovsky  
Margaret Evans  
Marita Flagler  
Erica Galioto  
Thomas Gibbon  
Shari Horner  
Karen Johnson  
Carla Kungl  
Mary Libertin  
Misty Knight  
Deborah Montuori  
Suzanne Morin  
Shannon Mortimore-Smith  
Sally Paulson  
Katie Peel  
Paris Peet  
Blyden Potts  
Michael Pressler  
Christine Senecal  
Kim Van Alkamade  
Stephanie Witmer  
Cheryl Zaccagnini  
Rich Zumkwhala-Cook

## INTRODUCTION

*ALLISON C. CAREY*  
SHIPPENSBURG UNIVERSITY

Until recently, the body had been naturalized, mostly understood as a biological entity without need of social analysis. For instance, because Descartes believed the mind to be the source of self, the body was positioned simply as a shell or machine housing the mind and doing its will; the mind was a topic worthy of philosophical musings, but the body was not. In psychology, the mind emerged as conceptually distinct from the body, so that psychologists focused on the workings and problems of the mind distinct from the physical functioning of the brain (which was relegated to the care of physicians/neurologists). In sociological tradition, scholars explored the interaction between social structure and agency, but rarely brought the body into these discussions. Thus, in Western intellectual thought across a range of academic fields, the body was conceptualized as a natural machine, the study of which was limited to the realm of medical doctors (Howson, 2004).

Several factors shifted our attention towards a sociopolitical understanding of the body, including, though not limited to, Foucault's writings; the growing scholarship in feminist, race, sexuality, and disability studies; and the recent controversies and anxieties involving the body. In many ways, Foucault made the body a legitimate matter of study. Ironically, the impact of his work serves as evidence of his central thesis: that claims of scientific fact are discursive narratives expressing the hierarchies of social and political power of the day. The body is both a matter of knowledge and impacted by knowledge. Madness, sexuality, health, and disease all serve as discursive strategies to impose disciplinary power; through the narratives of madness and rationality, for example, we legitimize the development of techniques of surveillance and regulation that enforce subtle control upon the body in order to persuade, rather than force, people to participate in social norms (e.g., Foucault, 1973, 1979, 1990). As a result of persuasive external control and, more importantly, self-control, we come to manage our bodies and transform them into fit, disciplined bodies appropriate for the capitalist marketplace, while marking and restraining those deemed unfit. Not only is the personal political, to quote a common feminist mantra, but the *body* is political, the object and product of systems of power.

As Foucault's work gained popularity in American intellectual circles, scholars in the emerging fields of feminist

and critical race studies also scrutinized the role of the body in systems of oppression. These fields opened the doors to the study of other marginalized populations such as sexuality and disability studies. While there are many differences across these fields, they each participate in a growing criticism of biological reductionism. Biological reductionism assumes that the motivations, identities, and behaviors of individuals are best explained by the physical body and therefore do not need social analysis. In contrast, scholars in these emerging fields showed that gender, race, ability/disability, and sexual orientation were social constructions largely imposed on individuals. For example, women were not naturally weak or passive; rather, they were trained by society to fulfill these expectations and penalized when they did not. People with disabilities were not dependent due to their biologies; instead, exclusion from the work place, politics, and other valued social roles created and enforced their dependency (Oliver, 1990; Linton, 1998). Much of this work moved the focus away from the "natural" body towards an analysis of power, stratification, and social structure. Ironically, the new "social model," which situated oppression within social systems, exposed the oppressive narratives of biology while simultaneously devaluing the social analysis of the body, as scholars worked to show the situation of oppression outside of the body. The body typically came to be seen only as a discursive tool to legitimize oppression rather than as central to the experience of individuals. More recently, though, scholars have brought the body back into a social analysis by focusing on the ways in which embodiment shapes our experience and the ways in which the social world shapes our bodies, a theme developed later in this essay.

A third factor related to the increasing attention given to the body in scholarship is the heightened social, political, and moral concern related to the body that has emerged as new technologies and rights offer us more opportunities and freedom with regard to the body. Matters of life, death, sexuality, and the body broadly are increasingly subject to technological interventions, raising a range of new individual and social questions. For example, in recent news we see a court deciding whether a child conceived using in vitro fertilization after the father had died can claim social security survivor's benefits (Tottenburg and Chen, 2012); another court is considering the extent and

---

Allison C. Carey is an associate professor of sociology at Shippensburg University. She is author of the book *On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century America* (Temple UP, 2009) and a range of articles on disability history, policy, and citizenship.

conditions under which patients should have access to physician-assisted suicide (Coleman, 2012); and another news story tells of how multiple families are using “the Ashley treatment”—medical treatments designed to prevent physical growth and maturation that has been sharply criticized by disability rights activists—on their severely disabled children (Pilkington & McVeigh, 2012). The body has become a source of social anxiety and controversy as the boundaries of the natural, social, and technological blur. The questions raised by this blurring are central to broader issues of politics and citizenship as they intersect with ideas related to freedom, moral regulation, private enterprise, and capitalism. Thus, Kenneth Plummer (2003) notes the rise of “intimate citizenship” and the centrality of public debate over and related to intimate decisions. To some extent it seems that people are so caught up debating what we can and cannot do to and with our bodies that other political and economic issues such as war and recession at times fall by the wayside. Clearly, academics now have much fodder for analyses related to the body in modern society.

What do we gain when we bring the body into social analysis? The theoretical contributions are vast, but here I will only attempt to review a few of the most important themes that have emerged from the study of the body. The politics of the body reveal the ways in which false dichotomies related to the body—such as normal/abnormal, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual—have justified political and social subjugation. For example, Lennard Davis (1997) argues that the rise of statistics and the normal distribution served to legitimate the social and political enforcement of “normality” and the attempt to segregate, marginalize, or eradicate particular forms of human variation that became defined as abnormal, inferior, and deviant. Scientists identified the “normative” body and practices—such as the “normal” development of a child, functioning of the body, range of intelligence, and response to stimuli—and correspondingly identified, categorized, monitored, and brought under “treatment” those who did not comply with the expectations of normality. The new science of statistics was situated alongside burgeoning understandings of heredity and harnessed by the eugenics movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Eugenists located social deviance in the body, saw such deviance as inheritable and therefore as posing a current and future threat to the nation. They had as an explicit goal the production of superior bodies and minds, and advocated policies to institutionalize and sterilize the “unfit.” According to Snyder and Mitchell, eugenics marks the “centerpiece of U.S. attitudes towards bodies marked as deviant from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of World War II” (2006, 26).

Eugenics was far from just a dramatic divergence in America’s history. Rather it reflects deeply held and long standing traditions that allow the exercise of rights for only particular bodies and minds (Carey, 2009). Despite the political narrative of equality before the law, individuals have been denied legal personhood on numerous bases associated with the body. Liberal political traditions assert

that citizens must be rational and autonomous; as stated by Anne Phillips, “The individual had become the key to legitimate government—but not of course any old individual” (1991, 24-25). Feminists were among the first to explore the exclusionary assumptions of liberalism. Historically, women were depicted as too impaired by hormonal fluctuations, intense emotions, and child-bearing activities for political participation (Pateman, 1988). Similarly, people with disabilities, especially those defined as having intellectual and mental disabilities, were deemed too irrational to participate politically. Women and people with disabilities also face charges of dependence, or a lack of autonomy; women’s roles as child-bearers and nurturers connected their bodies to the household rather than the marketplace, while individuals with disabilities were seen as constrained by their bodies and unable to enter the marketplace. Without a paid wage, women and people with disabilities were positioned as dependents within a household unit led by a rational, autonomous male, rather than as contributing citizens in their own right. Feminist and disability studies scholars have questioned the political narrative of the rational, autonomous citizen by illuminating the interdependence among people and the contextual, rather than biological, basis for rationality (e.g., Benhabib, 1992; Reindal, 1999; Berubé, 2003). In addition to these criteria rooted within liberal political philosophy, Rogers Smith (1997) argues that ascriptive traits are built into our ideals and requirements of citizenship as a way to create and maintain national identity. Sue Schweik’s research on the “Ugly Laws” show the ways in which American society demands a particular appearance and certain physical capabilities and criminalizes what is deemed ugly. Similarly, Martin Pernick’s (1996) work on American euthanasia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century explores the aesthetic values that led to the justification of killing disabled babies deemed “monstrous.”

In a society in which almost one-fifth of Americans are affected by disability (Census, 2003), the ideal of the young, white, fully able, productive male excludes most Americans, yet is still deeply embedded in American culture, architecture, and law. While there are an increasing number of characters with disabilities in the media, disability is still often associated with evil, charity/pity, or the normalizing narrative of overcoming one’s disabilities (Brown, 2003). For example, children today are still surrounded by demeaning media coverage, even in films that claim to be progressive. *Shrek* seems to assert that we should not judge by appearance, yet makes Lord Farquaad the butt of many jokes by directly associating his short stature with moral and masculine shortcomings. *Finding Nemo*, a film replete with disability references, ties its happy ending upon Dori’s ability to suddenly overcome her memory impairment at crunch time, as if all she needed was to want it badly enough. Like the media, legislation has come a long way but is undermined by the perpetuation of ableist assumptions and resistance against transformations that would value the participation of people with disabilities. For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 set new standards for architecture in

order to alter the spatial dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, yet its mandates are often reduced to a ramp at the back of a building or other minimalistic attempts to meet the requirement that still deny full inclusion and respect to people with disabilities (Gilson & DePoy, 2011).

Considering the socio-spatial dynamics of power and privilege, Snyder and Mitchell call for an analysis of the “cultural locations” of disability to understand the places and ways in which people with disabilities “find themselves deposited, often against their will” (2006, 3). Such an analysis draws attention to potentially all social institutions and the roles that they may play in enforcing the marginalization of bodies labeled as deviant. These analyses may focus on clear segregation through the institutionalization and incarceration of deviant bodies. Indeed, scholars such as Anne Parsons (forthcoming) find disturbing intersections across these sites of confinement; for example, when large state institutions for people with labels of psychiatric and intellectual disability closed, they reopened in many states as prisons and detention centers. Prisons and detention centers had a “new” focus on detaining “criminally deviant” bodies but still relied heavily on narratives of mental and physical deviance to emphasize the threat posed by these people and to thereby justify their incarceration. Other “cultural locations of disability” are less blatantly incarcerative, though they still serve to marginalize. Sites such as segregated sheltered workshops, educational programs, and recreational programs typically structure activities and relationships in ways that enforce segregation and “normalization” as primary goals (Drinkwater, 2005). Thus, rather than empower people with disabilities to pursue their goals and interests, many “services” assert a priori what the goals and interests of people with disabilities should be and reward accordingly. Enforcing “typical” bodily rituals and behavior become central to the mission and practices of such services.

We must also consider the role of stratification, poverty, and war upon the body. Approximately 80% of persons with disabilities live in developing countries. Socio-political environmental factors, such as lack of access to clean water, sufficient nutritious food, and medical care,

certainly impact the health of a nation’s population. War has a particularly devastating effect; for every child killed in warfare, three are injured and acquire a permanent form of disability (Disabled World, n.d.). The injuries are not only physical, but also emotional and psychological. People with disabilities are far more likely to live in impoverished conditions that promote a vicious cycle in which poverty creates disability and disability creates poverty. Thus, we must consider not only how a society understands and treats various bodies, but how it produces different bodies.

After much work considering the ways in which society produces, categorizes, and treats particular bodies, there has been a call to reassert the importance of the body itself in shaping experience, not just society’s treatment of the body. Disability scholars have increasingly sought to have open conversations about the impact of pain, limitation, and physical/mental/cognitive traits on our lived experience (Seibers, 2008; Wendell, 1996). Feminist scholars have re-engaged with the ways in which female biology affects the way women experience the world. For example, people with autism not only have different experiences because society treats them differently; they experience the world differently because they process information differently. Rather than ignoring this fact, we can instead explore how bodies affect the way we understand and experience the world, not by focusing on limitations or deficiencies per se, but by focusing on the impact of human variation. These experiences constitute an element in one’s embodied experience of the social world and one’s identity in relation to that social world, yet this remains largely understudied.

As a relatively new area of study, there is much to be learned about the role of the body in shaping our identity, experiences, and society, as well as how society shapes our understanding of and treatments of the body. This volume represents a valuable contribution to this growing field. In particular, the interdisciplinary nature of *Proteus* allows us to consider the body through a rich and varied set of lenses. I hope “The Body in Culture and Society” offers you new and innovative ways to rethink the long naturalized body.

## REFERENCES

- Benhabib, Seyla. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Berubé, Michael. "Citizenship and Disability," *Dissent* 50(2): 52-57, 2003.
- Brown, Steven. *Movie Stars and Monstrous Scars*. New York: iUniverse, 2003.
- Carey, Allison. *On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in the Twentieth-Century America*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009.
- Coleman, Korva. "Georgia's Top Court Strikes Down State Law Limiting Assisted Suicide Ads." *National Public Radio*, February 6, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/02/06/146468684/georgia-s-top-court-strikes-down-state-law-limiting-assisted-suicide-ads>.
- Davis, Lennard. "Constructing Normalcy: the Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Intervention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century." In *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. By Lennard Davis, 9-28. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Drinkwater, Chris. "Supported Living and the Production of Individuals." In *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, ed. Shelley Tremain, 229-44. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Disabled World Towards Tomorrow. "World Facts and Statistics on Disabilities and Disability Issues." <http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/statistics/#ixzz1rewzZtA5>.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic*. London: Routledge, 1973.
- . *Discipline and Punish*. London: Peregrine, 1979.
- . *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Gilson, Stephen, and Elizabeth DePoy. "The Student Body: The Intersection of Spatial Design, Architecture, and Cultural Policy in University Communities," *Research in Social Science and Disability* 6 (2011): 27-28.
- Howson, Alexandra. *The Body in Society*. Malden MA: Polity, 2004.
- Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York UP, 1998.
- Parsons, Anne. "From Asylums to Prisons." *Journal of Illinois History*, forthcoming.
- Pateman, Carol. *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1988.
- Pernick, Martin. *The Black Stork*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Phillips, Anne. *Engendering Democracy*. University Park: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- Pilkington, Ed, and Karen McVeigh. "'Ashley Treatment' on the Rise Amid Concerns from Disability Rights Groups." *The Guardian*, March 15, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>.
- Plummer, Kenneth. *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues*. Seattle: U of Washington Press, 2003.
- Oliver, Michael. *The Politics of Disablement*. London: MacMillan, 1990.
- Reindal, Solveig Magnus. "Independence, Dependence, Interdependence: Some Reflections of the Subject and Personal Autonomy," *Disability and Society* 14, no. 3 (1999): 353-367.
- Seibers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Schweik, Susan M. *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*. New York: New York UP, 2010.
- Smith, Rogers. *Civil Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History*. New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1997.
- Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago IL: U of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Tottenburg, Nina, and Steven Chen. "Is a Baby Conceived After Dad's Death a 'Survivor'?" *National Public Radio*, March 19, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/2012/03/19/148453252/is-a-baby-conceived-after-dads-death-a-survivor>.
- Wendell, Susan. *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- United States Census Bureau. "Disability Status: 2000." Washington D.C.: U.S Census Bureau, 2003. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-17.pdf>.

# NANCY MAIRS: FAMILY, DISABILITY, AND WRITING BEYOND THE FAMILIAL SELF

HAYLEY MITCHELL HAUGEN  
OHIO UNIVERSITY SOUTHERN

*Unless you're awfully careful, bodies get you in trouble.* (Nancy Mairs)

Disability studies theorists convincingly defend the concept of illness and disability as being social constructions and argue against the traditional medical or "deficit model." The medical model, psychology professor Simi Linton explains, has traditionally been accepted by most academic curricula; it conceptualizes illness and disability as problems that "reside in the individual, requiring remediation, treatment, or intervention to amend or compensate for what is perceived as wrong, missing, or dysfunctional" (Linton 1998, 5). Under this model, the "meaning accorded to disability is that it is a personal medical condition, rather than a social issue; an individual plight, rather than a political one" (5). In an effort to make the social model of illness and disability the new dominant model, disability studies theorists such as Linton examine the social construction of illness and disability to illuminate the ways in which people with disabilities are "disabled" as much by their culture as by their impairments. Linton, for example, examines disability in the academy, offering suggestions for the sciences, arts, and humanities to start reconsidering and reconstructing ideas about illness and disability in the classroom.

While this effort to define "disability not as an individual defect but as the product of social injustice" (Siebers 2008, 3) has been a part of the emerging field of disability studies from its inception, critics have more recently turned their attention to issues of embodiment. For example, Tobin Siebers, who writes extensively about the ways in which the identities of people with disabilities are both medically and socially constructed, argues that "while identities are socially constructed, they are nevertheless meaningful and real precisely because they are complexly embodied" (Siebers 2008, 30). He understands embodiment as "central to the field of disability studies. In fact, a focus on disability makes it easier to understand that embodiment and social location are one and the same" (23). In light of this understanding, Siebers maintains that the

next step for disability studies is to develop a theory of complex embodiment that values disability as a form of human variation. The theory of complex embodiment raises awareness of the effects of disabling environments on people's lived experience of the body, but it emphasizes as well that some factors affecting disability, such as chronic pain, secondary health effects, and aging, derive from the body. (25)

The autobiographical works of American essayist Nancy Mairs raise the kind of awareness that Siebers calls for. Through her work, Mairs illustrates that as a woman with disabilities she has had to acknowledge the extent to which both familial and societal forces have constructed her identity. Before this acknowledgment takes place, however, she experiences a kind of self-erasure, a series of incidents through which she submits herself to the identity-shaping control of others at the expense of expressing her embodied self. It is not until she recognizes the extent to which she has participated in the suppression of her true identity that she is eventually able to value her own embodiment, regain the power of self-construction, and move toward claiming and writing her authentic self.

Tanya Titchkosky holds "that the problematic of 'embodiment,' of fleshy life, of our being embodied beings, can be grasped through an analysis of how we give meaning to disability within everyday life" (Titchkosky 2007, 12). Mairs's essays offer an especially insightful look at disability from an everyday perspective, as she shows how others have prescribed meanings to her various ailments that have ultimately disembodied her. For Mairs, this process of self-erasure occurs slowly. She is ill with various ailments throughout her childhood and young-adulthood before she develops the symptoms of multiple sclerosis which eventually cripple her. As a child, Mairs's family considers her difficult and hypersensitive. She becomes self-conscious of her mother's dismissal of her depressive

Hayley Mitchell Haugen holds a PhD in 20th Century American Literature from Ohio University and an MFA in poetry from the University of Washington. Recent critical work appears in *On the Literary Nonfiction of Nancy Mairs: A Critical Anthology*, *The Body in Medical Culture*, and online at *The Brock Review*.

episodes and is made to feel that she must suffer alone in her illness. Additionally, Mairs's family members seek to repress all difficult emotions within the family, and consider illness as one of the many family secrets to be kept from outsiders. Mairs explains how this repression of feelings within the family leads to her lack of mental and physical well-being, and how the secretive nature of illness in her family causes feelings of shame over her own conditions, which ultimately leads to a dangerous denial of her physical symptoms. Mairs loses her sense of self when she gives up control over her own body and life, first in a mental institution and later while trying to play the traditional role of the good wife and mother. Mairs eventually recognizes the ways in which the dynamics of her family have shaped her negative views of herself. Ultimately, she is able to peel away the layers of this familial construction and rebuild herself and her self-esteem through her writing.

### The Familial Gaze and the Erasure of the Self

Nancy Mairs's autobiographical works frequently show her family's changing influence in the construction of her identity. Mairs has written for over twenty years about her experiences with depression, agoraphobia, and multiple sclerosis. Mairs's work shows that her family—first her mother, most specifically, and later her husband and her children—often serves to construct her identity, especially at the onset of her various illnesses. However, after more than twenty years of living with MS and her other disorders, and after becoming, through her writing, a voice for people with disabilities, she is in a better position to not only resist these constructions, but to advocate for more positive views of her embodiment. Mairs's essays, in fact, provide abundant support for G. Thomas Couser's contention that "Autobiography can be an especially powerful medium in which disabled people can demonstrate that they have lives, in defiance of others' commonsense perceptions of them" (Couser 2009, 7).

In her second collection of essays, *Remembering the Bone House*, Mairs returns to the houses of her youth to help her remember the ways in which her childhood and teen years, in addition to her years as a young wife and mother, helped inform the woman she later becomes. The essays in this collection clearly demarcate the family's role in the development of its members, and in Mairs's case, the construction of herself as a future patient.

In the opening pages of *Remembering the Bone House*, Mairs explains the importance of the family in the creation of the self, how through the repetition of family stories our memories begin before we have the capacity for remembering them on our own. "Adults," she explains, "provide the texts for their pre-reminiscent children. But the children must tease out the subtexts for themselves, without being told, as a rule, even that this task exists, let alone how to go about it" (Mairs 1989, 17). Part of the subtext that Mairs teases out is that in addition to not being the boy her parents yearned for, she is considered the difficult, hypersensitive child of the family. She is, she explains, the "one who deviates from the family's most cherished values,

which in my case tend toward the Yankee conventions of thrift, diligence, restraint, discretion, modesty, a cheerful though undemonstrative disposition, and, as soon as we're old enough, a vote for the Republican ticket" (17).

Mairs reflects that much of the difficulty she causes within the family springs from her depressive nature, which she believes is caused, in part, by the early death of her father in a traffic accident when she was four (Mairs 1993, 51). This death, as expected, has a devastating effect on the family. While grieving, Mairs's mother is forced by practical matters to move on quickly, relocating herself and the children from the army base where they were living at the time to her home back in Massachusetts. She also goes back to work to take care of the family. Although her mother is forced to move forward, Mairs's own development within the family is hindered, crippled, even, by the loss of her father.

Mairs places herself under undue strain as a child, trying to live up to her father's image and trying to escape the role that the family has assigned to her as the "difficult" child. But it is not only the memory of her father that makes her young life difficult for her. She is also more self-conscious, more uneasy about her physical body than the other children around her, a fact that her mother dismisses. Mairs recounts one incident in which her younger sister's head struck her hard under her chin while they were bouncing on their bed. Mairs writes:

I run howling into Mother's room, certain that the ruin of my body is upon me. She laughs—perhaps the first but certainly not the last time she'll laugh at what she calls my "dramatics"—and assures me that teeth always fall out of five-year-old children. I stop crying, but a certain uneasiness about my body is never allayed. Later, in the front bedroom overlooking the river, having come down with some sort of aching and queasiness, I lie in the big double bed and memorize the exotic birds on the wallpaper while the others leave on a jaunt, the first of the hundreds, probably thousands, of hours I spend alone, ailing mildly, while the rest of the world goes off for some fun. (1993, 25)

Couser contends that disability autobiographers typically begin from a position of marginalization, belatedness, and pre-inscription. Long the objects of others' classification and examination, disabled people have only recently assumed the initiative in representing themselves; in disability autobiography particularly, disabled people counter their historical objectification (or even abjection) by occupying the subject position. (2009, 7)

Mairs's passage above clearly illustrates the objectification she encounters within the family. Until she learns to embrace the embodiment that her family refuses to recognize, Mairs is forced to suffer in silence; despite her mother's offering of small comforts, Mairs's suffering does not necessarily register with her family. Although she is too young to recognize it at the time, her family's response to her various ailments reflects a perspective that is at the core of the medical model of illness. They

see Mairs's complaints as an *individual* problem that she is responsible for fixing, rather than focus on how the social environment of the family may be contributing to her lack of well-being.

### Family Secrets: An Abscess Grows in Silence

In her collection of essays, *Ordinary Time*, Mairs reiterates her mother's casual response to her emotional outbursts and periods of depression. Since she has always felt close to her mother, Mairs says, "to have her shrug off as ridiculous my declarations of a pain that I came to fear was driving me mad stung me bitterly" (Mairs 1993, 52). By her fifteenth birthday, Mairs's loneliness is so great, her search for love so desperate, that she notes in her diary that she has asked God to take her life, and for the first time, she says, she means it. "The rest of my life," Mairs writes, "would be shaped by these themes: depression, detachment from both human sympathy and life's meaning; an ecstatic, erotically charged desire for death" (59). Her mother's refusal to acknowledge her burgeoning depression as a child and young adult certainly confounds her feelings, but Mairs says her mother continues to follow a policy of "no emotional rescue" (94), which highlights the family's refusal to tackle its own dysfunction. This results, Mairs says, "in emotional absences sealed away under scar tissue which will one day poison the lives of those in the new household I establish: the consequence of refusing permission to speak" (94).

These silences—the repressed feelings and shameful family secrets—are a controlling theme in much of Mairs's autobiographical work. Time and again she provides examples of not being allowed to express her emotions within her family and her belief that the effect of this repression is crippling: it contributes to her lack of mental and physical well-being. Nonetheless, through her family conditioning, she knows she must not express her feelings. She explains, "This is the relation to speech adopted by my family. You may prattle (indeed, should prattle in order to fill silences that might otherwise turn awkward or productive) all you like, but you must not express emotionally troublesome thoughts" (90). In *Disability Theory*, Siebers writes about the silencing of people with disabilities in particular. He says they

need to resist the suggestion that their personal stories are somehow more narcissistic than those of nondisabled people. If we cannot tell our stories because they reflect badly on our personalities, or make other people queasy, the end result will be greater isolation. For human beings make lives together by sharing their stories with each other. There is no other way of being together for our kind" (2008, 48).

As Mairs proves, the silence of the family and her own repressed feelings literally make her sick. "The price of this restraint," she writes, "is an emotional absence as a result of which I'll have trouble recognizing that my words and actions have genuine power to wound" (1993, 93). As a child, though, she is unable to make this discovery because her family does not allow her to express her natural, hostile thoughts about her loved ones.

Mairs not only learns to absorb her hostile feelings as a child, she also learns that in her family there lies a strict demarcation between what may be aired in public and what must be kept private. One of Mairs's family's repressed secrets is the suicide of her maternal grandfather. The family does not talk about the event, his death only referred to as his having come "to a bad end" (1989, 60). Mairs writes, "I, too, will turn out to be a suicide. Except for this taint, unrecognized until much later in my life, I'll never feel connected to him at all" (1989, 60). What is significant in Mairs's brief discussion of her grandfather is her feeling that she has received the "taint" of his suicide in her own suicidal tendencies. Had her family talked openly about his death, she would be less likely to refer to it—and by extension her own suicide attempts—as shameful. What's more, if her family had not cloaked her grandfather's death in secrecy, Mairs's doctors may have been able to diagnose and treat her own depression more accurately and at an earlier age.

Like her grandfather's suicide, illness and disability in general in Mairs's family is treated much as it is in society at large: with fear, silence, shame, and misunderstanding. Mairs's sense of these emotions as a child helps construct her response to her own illnesses and how she expects others to respond to her. Illness, then, takes on a mysterious, perhaps shameful, aura for Mairs at an early age, which has a direct result of her own handling—her avoidance, actually—of her own depression. At summer camp when she is nine, for example, while the other children are enjoying themselves, she writes that she is "so unhappy that, for the first time in my life. . . I think I am going to die" (1989, 53). Rather than discuss her homesickness with the camp counselors, however, Mairs keeps her sadness to herself, crying in the latrines and in her cot at night. "How could [the counselors] guess to comfort a child who denies her own sadness?" she writes (1989, 54). When she returns home from camp, Mairs feels that she cannot tell her mother that she feels like she is going mad, for in Massachusetts, she says simply, "We do not crack up" (1989, 112). Psychopharmacology not being as advanced then as it will later become, Mairs writes that nobody in Enon would have likely been knowledgeable enough to treat her depression as the biochemical imbalance it turns out to be; therefore, the cause of her depression "goes unattended for years" (1989, 112).

Mairs's mental state as a child is confounded by her feeling betrayed by her body at age thirteen. Her periods become debilitating, inducing "nausea, diarrhea, hemorrhaging, and the kind of pain that sucks the whole world down into itself and sets itself up in the world's place" (1989, 113). The theory at the time, she writes, "holds that menstruation being a natural process, dysmenorrhea is caused not by physiological problems but by a woman's refusal to accept her own femininity. . . . If I were a true woman, none of this would be happening to me. The doctor defers my guilt into adulthood when, without doing a pelvic examination, he diagnoses a tipped uterus and says that my cramps will diminish after I have a baby" (1989, 115).

Her mother, on the other hand, refers to the whole process, simply as “the Curse,” encouraging Mairs to think of it in the same light (1989, 113). But thinking of her difficult periods as a curse encourages Mairs to feel both blame—she must have done something to deserve this—and victimhood; curses, after all, are cast upon one by malevolent outside forces. Eventually, she writes, she stops calling her period “the curse,” unwilling, finally, to “confer power through a name on something already strong enough to throw [her] around like a ragdoll” (1989, 115). It is not until she is in her thirties that she finds a female gynecologist who concludes, simply, “You just have cruddy periods,’ and after that,” she says she is able to see herself as a “victim suddenly redeemed from blame,” and is able to “settle down with my cruddy periods to wait for menopause” (1989, 115).

Menopause is a long way off when she is a young adult, however, and what is especially important to note about these years is that before Mairs graduates from high school, she already identifies illness as an essential aspect of herself. At this point, she does not have a diagnosis for her various, intermittent symptoms: queasiness, sore throats, trembling hands, abdominal pain, and chronic fatigue that affect her daily life, so nobody, especially within her family, validates these symptoms as being real. Instead, the family essential erases Mairs’s body by denying the obvious illnesses embodied therein. Mairs notes in her journal at the time:

I drag myself along day after day as though my bones were condensing and transforming, through some improbable alchemy, from porous calcium to solid granite. These I regard as “unreal” symptoms, impermissible to bother others about, just another wearisome outbreak of Nancy’s “dramatics”; and so they are complicated by a sense of alienation, both from others and from my own body, which serves as an instrument not of pleasure but of torture. (1989, 116)

Had her family not silenced her previously, had they not made her feel shame for her complaints, she could have been treated sooner for these ailments. Furthermore, she could have been made to feel less alone in her symptoms, that illness is not something that belongs to her alone. Without this support, she notes,

by the time I’m feeling continually ill, I’m old enough to believe that illness belongs to my body, as though ‘I’ were somehow separate from that entity and could even, with the correct attitude and discipline, transcend it, by which I mean ignore it and leave it behind, the way you give the ugly sweater your great-aunt bought you for Christmas to the Salvation Army as soon as you’ve appeared in it a few times. (1989, 117)

Ignoring her own embodiment, Mairs denies her symptoms the necessary care that, in hindsight, they obviously warranted. Rather than adjusting her hectic school, church, and social schedule to accommodate her fatigue, for example, she keeps up her hectic pace, until, fatigue, plainly rooted in this frenzied pace,

becomes the constant gray undertone of my days but I never accept its authenticity. I berate myself for it as my shortcoming, my personal failure, a physical frailty setting me apart from others. Neither do I recognize my reclusive nature, which renders the relentless social interaction I have to sustain excruciating, and if I did recognize it, my shame would only flare higher. Mother’s tacit disapproval of my wandering off alone hunts me, but precisely because it *is* tacit, I lack words for thinking about the problem. (1989, 118)

By this time, she yearns to be alone to read, daydream, and watch television, but these solitary activities are suspect in her family, so that when she does things for and by herself, she feels guilty for these simple pleasures that could have actually given her body the relief it needed.

Mairs’s family and society, of course, do not change to allow Mairs the psychological care she needs as a young adult. Ultimately, later as a young wife and mother, she ends up signing herself into the Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham, Massachusetts for a standard ten-day medical evaluation and stays there for over six months (1989, 206). While there, Mairs begins to feel stigmatized because of her depression, especially by her family. Her in-laws, for example, do not come to visit her while she is hospitalized, despite the fact that they live close by. She notes, “Their shame at my condition intensifies my fear that I have now forfeited my place among the ordinary human lives I fitfully long to rejoin on ‘on the outside’” (1989, 206). Although Mairs knows she needs treatment, she does not see herself as bad off as some of the other patients around her. As a result, she initially resists the medical care under which she now finds herself. “I am a mental patient. I do not act; I endure. I receive, but do not participate in, my treatment. When I resist, I am accused of not wanting to get well. No one interprets my resistance as a sign of health” (1989, 208). Here, Mairs begins to understand that she will need to become an advocate for herself, and that she will need to fight to reconstruct the socially accepted view of her identity. Part of what Mairs reacts against is the fact that her female psychiatrist never sits her down to discuss her treatment “woman to woman” (1989, 209). No one explains the chemical imbalance in her brain, nor the fact that this imbalance can be treated. Significantly, Mairs adds in *Ordinary Time*,

I was certainly never told that the world held others like me—young intense women terrified of flaw or failure—and because my background set me apart from most of the people confined with me, I didn’t figure it out for myself. . . . And my treatment at Met State aimed at returning me, not so much transformed as resigned, to precisely the context in which I’d cracked up in the first place (1993, 109).

Under this traditional, patriarchal medical model of treatment, Mairs continues to endure an erasure of her embodied self: the physicians expect her to allow them to speak for her, to surrender herself fully to their care. While she begins to resist this model, she finds that she prefers not

to resist it when she is later sent to a chronic ward for treatment. Mairs is willing to become the “good girl” on the chronic ward, sensing that to act otherwise would not be to her benefit. She takes her medication, attends group and individual therapy sessions, and undergoes twenty-one shock treatments (1989, 210). When her depression eventually begins to abate, she finds she is bored with the drab surroundings of the hospital and ready to return home. She does not leave more knowledgeable about her condition; in fact, she does not even have a name for the condition nor does she realize that she will suffer its symptoms for the rest of her life. It is not until she *is* able to find a term through which to construct this aspect of herself that she can then gain some semblance of control over her attacks. She explains, “I am an agoraphobe, I will discover for myself long after Dr. Julian has released me from her healing clutch, and these [symptoms] are called panic attacks. Once I figure that out, I learn to survive them, though I hate them just as much as when I thought they meant I was crazy” (1989, 210).

After Mairs leaves the hospital, she gets on with her life, part of which includes having her second child. Having Matthew, however, turns out to be an even more traumatic experience than having her daughter, Anne. Because the infant is jaundiced at birth, Mairs’s physician erroneously informs her that she will not be able to breastfeed him because he will be allergic to her milk. Doctors give her a shot to dry up her milk without her consent, and she ends up feeling cheated of the opportunity to bond with the new baby.

On top of the violence that she feels her doctors have committed against her, Matthew turns out to be a miserable baby who cries inconsolably. She is certain that something is wrong with him, but his pediatricians assure her that since he is gaining weight and thriving, he is fine. When George does not share her concerns she feels the stigma of her time in the mental hospital coming back to haunt her:

“Don’t worry so much,” George replies, in what I’m coming to recognize as his Nancy-spent-six-months-at-Met-State-and-we’ve-got-to-take-that-into-account tone. “Matthew’s just fine.” He’s going to give me the same line, with the same degree of condescension, in all the years to come. What he means by it is, *I do not (or do not choose to, I’m not sure which) perceive a problem here, and therefore no problem exists. If Nancy perceives a problem where no problem exists, then she’s screwed up and may be safely ignored.* He sees in the situation not a conflict to be resolved but evidence of a defect in my maternal character. (1989, 218)

When the baby gets a little older, Mairs considers going back to work, in part to give herself a break from this child who cries up to eight hours a day. Rather than support Mairs in her choice to pursue work outside the home, her family supports the socially prescribed life-script that, ironically, she once so ardently wished to live by. Her place, she is reminded, by her mother in particular, is in the home. In fact, her mother accuses her of abandoning

her children when she expresses her emotional need for more than her family life can provide (1993, 146). As a result, Mairs writes, “I was haunted throughout their childhood by the conviction that my professional life, which I believed I needed not just for the money but for my sanity, rendered me neglectful and selfish” (1994, 147). To assuage this guilt, Mairs remains at home with her children and takes on freelance editorial work. She falls steadily into a depression without realizing the symptoms sneaking up on her. “No one ever taught me what signs to look for so that I could care for myself responsibly,” she writes. “They probably didn’t think I *could* care for myself. They thought only doctors could do it” (1989, 219). Clearly, what Mairs recognizes now is that the medical model of care she was once under may have cured her temporarily, but it did not give her the skills to care for herself. This approach encourages a revolving door system of treatment as necessary, rather than the self-sufficiency and self-agency Mairs slowly becomes aware that she needs.

### From Self-Erasure to Self-Construction

In recognizing both familial and social construction of her disability, Mairs is ultimately able to sift through the layers of this formation to reclaim a more authentic sense of her embodied self. One way that Mairs has discovered this more authentic self is by breaking the silence of the body, and the disabled body in particular, in her writing. Despite her family’s need for privacy, she tells the story of her body and of how her family helped—for better or for worse—to shape it. As illustrated above, her family’s repressed emotions certainly exacerbated her inner turmoil. In addition to these emotionally driven silences, her family also suppressed talk about the body, especially bodies in trouble. According to Couser,

facing our bodies is important in part because it is difficult, and it is difficult because so many forces in Western culture—Christian theology and Cartesian dualism, to name just two—operate to devalue and thus *efface* the body. Furthermore, as part of its pervasive and persistent tendency to efface embodiment, Western culture has tended to *deface* some bodies; that is to say, it has marked, marginalized, and muted whole sets of people on the basis of bodily difference—along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, of course, but more generally along the lines of those somatic conditions we call illness and disability. (2009, 9)

For Mairs, not being able to face her body, in addition to the suppressed layer of talk within the family, increases her feelings of shame about her own ailing body, both while still living with her family as a young adult and also later in her life when she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

At age twenty-nine, Mairs moves to Tucson, Arizona, to begin graduate school. Soon after, she begins to experience the first symptoms (dropping things, stumbling over things, suddenly developing a limp) of multiple sclerosis. Told she may have a brain tumor, Mairs approaches her new illness differently than she has dealt with her depres-

sion in the past. Grown suspicious of the medical model of care that has encouraged blissful ignorance about her body's ailments, she is finally determined to arm herself with information before handing herself over to the care of others: "I once trusted an obstetrician and a pediatrician too much and the damage to my soul has never healed," she says, recalling the trauma she suffered after the birth of her son. "This time, I want to participate, and if necessary to balk, every step of the way" (1989, 233).

Once Mairs has her diagnosis—chronic and progressive, degenerative multiple sclerosis—she is relieved to "have *something*, something real, not a nameless mystery" (1989, 234). Later, when she takes on the role of teaching medical students how to give neurological exams to MS patients, she will stress that they not try to protect their patients from the knowledge of their disease (as her own doctor at first tries to protect her), but to tell them their diagnosis and prognosis (234). With the knowledge of her disorder, Mairs begins to approach her body differently:

Now I am who I will be. A body in trouble. I've spent all these years trying alternately to repudiate and to control my wayward body, to transcend it one way or another, but MS rammed me right back down into it. "The body," I've gotten into the habit of calling it. "The left eye is weak," I say. "There's a blurred spot in the right eye." As though it were some other entity, remote and traitorous. Or worse, as though it were inanimate, a prison of bone, the dark tower around which Childe Roland rode, withershins left, withershins right, seeking to free the fair kidnapped princess: me. My favorite fairy tale as a child turns out to have nothing to offer my adulthood. Rescue from the body is merely another word for death. Slowly, slowly, MS will teach me to live on as a body. (1989, 235)

In a similar vein, Couser notes, "Illness and disability are nature's way of making us face our bodies. The moments in which we are perhaps most aware of our embodiment, then, may be those times when our bodies ail or fail, when they deviate from more or less comfortable stasis or some norm that allows us to take them for granted, to put them out of mind" (2009, 10). Certainly for Mairs, the epiphany she has above as a result of facing her body has an emotionally freeing effect on her. However, she must learn that despite her newly defined sense of self, others will continue to construct her and affect her new view of herself.

Eventually, lest her own new sense of self as a *body* be completely subsumed by her family's often antagonistic views of her, Mairs resists further erasure of her self by creating a place to escape. She rents a studio apartment to gain some independence from her family during the day and to have a place to write (1989, 250). Around this time, a tumultuous extramarital affair she is having comes to an abrupt end and she finds herself slipping into another depression. She writes, "The fact that I'm having a breakdown strikes me abruptly and with perfect clarity. I go on having the breakdown anyway. Knowledge is no

proof against certain kinds of disaster. Maybe most kinds. Part of me knows I am ill; another part sneers incredulously, accusing me, (in Mother's long familiar words) of dramatics" (1989, 252). Despite the strides she has made in taking responsibility for her MS, her acceptance of herself as a "body in trouble" does not seem to extend to her mental health. She cannot get past the damaging familial construction of herself as oversensitive. While one part of herself knows she is ill and propels her to seek medical attention from her neurologist and psychotherapist, another part remains wary of such help, wary of being pulled out from the urge of wanting to kill herself (1989, 252). After meeting with her lover, who assures her that their relationship is over, Mairs takes an overdose of Elavil. When George calls her at the apartment later that night, she is still lucid enough to tell him that she has taken the pills, but she barely has the energy to unlock the door for him to come over and save her. It seems, after all, that her favorite fairy tale does have something to offer her adult life. Despite her arguments to the contrary, she has slipped into the role of the damsel in distress, the body in need of saving. MS, then, having perhaps taught her to learn *how* to live as a body, as she says, has not likewise taught her to *want* to live. And when George, her own Childe Roland, does arrive to save her, he does not swoon with relief that he has reached her in time. Rather, he is openly furious with her for not telling him she was again in the grips of a depression (1989, 253). The fair maiden, it seems, despite her upbringing in an environment of denied emotions, is still expected to know better.

At the hospital, she receives a massive dose of antidepressants that "blasted me out of my depression in a kind of shortcut to normalcy" (1989, 254). When she returns to her normal routine, she is able to put her failed love affair behind her, and she begins to write stories, poems, and essays at an increased pace. Ultimately, she writes her way toward healing. Her writings, she says, "are carnal acts, enabling me to inscribe the earthly life I've tried to flee: its tricks, its sweet poisons. They dis-enchant me. I'm awake. And I will write my self into well-being" (1989, 245).

Mairs's discovery of a new passion for language gives her confidence to exert herself at home. When she gives up her apartment and returns home after her suicide attempt, she demands to have a space of her own where she can continue to write and find peace within the busy household. The household complies, but just over a year later, George announces that he wants to leave her. George is leaving, in part, because he finds her difficult, a label she at one time accepts but now questions, unwilling to play the "Big Meanie" role that the family has constructed for her, in part, because of her illness (1989, 258). Her unwillingness to play the role, however, does not deflate her family's need to continue to cast her in it. For the first time, though, Mairs seems to have the strength of mind to question it. She confesses:

A woman with a crippling disease who runs away from home and tries to kill herself is unquestionably hard to deal with. But maybe, it occurs to me in a rush, I don't have to be all that difficult.

Maybe their treatment of me, and Mother's before them, has thrown me in to that architectural position, and I've been fool enough to occupy it all these years because it's what everybody, including me, expected. (1989, 259)

Despite this pivotal moment in her understanding of the ways that others have sought to construct her over the years, and her own compliance in becoming the person they have anticipated, Mairs concedes that if she really is so difficult to live with, no one should be forced to live with her. Likewise, however, she argues that she should not "have to live with people who assume that I'm a madwoman, a bitch, a problem—the lexicon varies depending on the speaker but the message remains the same. People who demand that I play those roles. Who treat me as though I'm playing them both when I am and when I'm not" (1989, 260).

When George actually decides not to leave the family, Mairs says it is perhaps because he really is the saint that various reviewers of her work have noted him to be. While on the one hand she suspects that George stays because he sees himself as the only one capable of holding things together, on the other, despising herself, she says, "I've grown convinced along with everyone else that only a saint could bear life with me" (1989, 260). Although she has grown stronger in her sense of self, these sentiments clearly suggest that the strides she has made at this point are tentative. Somewhere inside, the woman who feels tainted, shamed by her grandfather's suicide, still remains.

When Mairs turns forty her first book of poems, *All the Rooms of the Yellow House*, wins the Western States Book Award, and her essays collected in her University of Arizona doctoral dissertation, *Plaintext*, are published two years later. That she has finally succeeded as a writer lightens her heart and mood, but this success cannot mitigate the problems within the family. She escapes from her role in the family for a few months, however, when she accepts a temporary teaching position in California. "Then," she writes, "I was scrambling as fast as I could away from the stifle of domestic life: the way it seemed to cramp my creativity and deaden my sexuality. I thought I would die of suffocation. Now I sense that I was really scrambling out from under the projections of others" (1989, 267); finally, she begins to sense that no matter what, "all that happens can be accepted, incorporated, celebrated" in her life (1989, 267). In Los Angeles, she proves that she is capable of taking care of herself, despite her failing body, but she also finds that she misses the support and company of home. After coming into enough money to live on while she writes her next book, she decides to return home to George and become a full time writer. Her writing continues to get published and she is asked to speak at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in Seattle, an experience which encourages her to feel "like somebody" (1989, 270).

In gaining this sense of becoming *somebody*, Mairs becomes more adept at understanding and critiquing how this *body* has been socially constructed. As I have

shown above, she is acutely aware of the ways her family informs her identity from inside the microcosm; she also recognizes how people outside of her family make assumptions not only about her own, but also about her family's identity as a result of her MS. More specifically, she reflects on the views of those in the "helping" professions: doctors, nurses, physical therapists, psychiatrists, etc. "These people," she notes,

are generally physically fit themselves, and they seldom live with people who are chronically ill. Moreover, they have been trained to search out, diagnose, and then relieve or cure problems. Thus when they encounter a person with MS, and often that person's family, they immediately assume that this cluster of people is in trouble and that "being in trouble" is always a bad way to be. (1996, 121)

After living with MS for seventeen years at the time of writing her essay, "Good Enough Gifts," Mairs concludes that "the assumption that MS is bad for the family ignores the possibility that MS may also be, in a variety of ways, good for the family; and the helper who tries to intervene in the family's dynamics, assuming they must be 'sick' in some way, risks damaging whatever wholesome processes my be going on" (1996, 121).

This more positive view of her illnesses and disability is indicative of the tone of her essays collected in *Carnal Acts*. In this work she works to reconstruct the negative view of her disability and stops focusing on the *difficulties* of living with MS in her work. "There's nothing anyone can do to make it go away," she says, so "I'm going to stop talking about how bad it is" (1996, 121). At the same time, she says she is going to strive to reject the conventional family narratives that we in American society accept as the norm, the narratives we see in movies and television which, week after week, present a new problem that "in no more than half an hour's time, with the affectionate and good-humored support of the other family members, are resolved to everyone's satisfaction" (1996, 122). Mairs urges others with chronic illness to reject the narrative norm and accept that

the important point about the stories we tell ourselves about our lives: We make them up as we go along. . . . You may choose to view your life as the saddest story ever told and yourself—whether you have MS or love someone who has MS—as a tragic figure in its center, [but] most people who live with MS are looking for ways to spin out tales about love and strength and accomplishment. (1996, 125)

Many of these tales, Mairs shows, emerge out of the family. While her family experiences pain, Mairs notes that in her work and life she tries to "normalize that pain, making it seem not rare and tragic but natural and manageable" (1996, 125). After all, she says, "the presence of pain in a family doesn't have to mean that the family's in trouble, disintegrating under the pressures of living with chronic illness, ready to fall apart at any moment. That's one possible story. But there are plenty of others" (1996, 125).

The story Mairs commits to telling is the one about the advantages living with chronic illness has afforded her family. First, she says, is coherence. In a culture where many family members are living their very separate lives, split between work and school and extracurricular activities, the MS family has at least one concern in common, illness, and this concern helps the family cohere in a kind of “sharing of affliction” (1996, 130). This sharing, Mairs believes, does not have to have the effect of crippling the family; it often can create bonds that make the family stronger (1996, 131). Her MS has also created tolerance within her family. Unlike her experiences as a child, this tolerance has, in part, allowed her own family to “accept the presence of troublesome feelings as normal to our human being. Even more important, however, we can learn to tolerate the presence of adversity in our lives” and “together with coherence and tolerance, the family with MS can learn responsibility for their own well-being” (132). And it is with these lessons in hand that Mairs encourages us to take a different view of the calamities that befall our lives: “Since we get to choose how to interpret the events that befall us, why not look on them as gifts?” (133).

Of course, Mairs has come a long way from accepting the familial construction of herself as a difficult, hypersensitive child, to being able to *interpret* her own life and look at her embodiment as a gift. And her writing is the gift she both gives and receives. In finally having the opportunity to express herself freely to others, she comes to recognize her self:

I am *somebody*. A body. A difficult body, to be sure, almost too weak now to stand, increasingly deformed, wracked still by gut spasms and headaches and menstrual miseries. But some *body*. Mine. Me. In establishing myself as a writer, however modest my success, I have ceased to be *nobody*. I have written my way into my embodied self, and here I am at home. (1989, 271)

In writing her embodied self, Mairs illustrates Siebers’s belief that

people with disabilities have a better chance of future happiness and health if they accept their disability as a positive identity and benefit from the knowledge embodied in it. The value of people with disabilities to themselves does not lie in finding a way to return through medical intervention to a former physical perfection, that that perfection is a myth, nor in trying to conceal from others and themselves that they are disabled. Rather, embodiment seen complexly understands disability as an epistemology that rejects the temptation to value the body as anything other than what it was and that embraces what the body has become and will become relative to the demands on it, whether environmental, representational, or corporeal. (2008, 27)

Reading her body as inscribed by the family, Mairs provides a microcosmic view of the social construction of illness and disability. Her insistence on examining her own development constructed, in part, by others, serves as a counternarrative to the medical model of illness and disability that seeks to isolate her development within her impairments alone. “Disability,” Siebers writes, can be viewed as “the effect of an environment, hostile to some bodies but not to others, requiring advances in social justice rather than medicine” (2001, 738). In the works of Nancy Mairs, the environment which frequently affects her is a familial one, and the justice sought is the power to uncover the familial scripts in an effort to reclaim and rewrite her authentic embodied self.

## REFERENCES

- Couser, G. Thomas. *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2009.
- Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability*. New York: New York UP, 1998.
- Mairs, Nancy. *Carnal Acts*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.
- . *Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.
- . *Remembering the Bone House: An Erotics of Place and Space*. New York: Harper, 1989.
- Siebers, Tobin. “Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body.” *American Literary History* 13, no. 4 (2001): 737-754.
- . *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Titchkosky, Tanya. *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2007.

# VIRTUAL DISABILITY: A LOOK AT AVATARS IN WHEELCHAIRS

LAWRENCE J. MULLEN

HANK GREENSPUN SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

For many with physical disabilities, virtual media serve as social, entrepreneurial, and entertainment outlets. But as Katie Ellis and Mike Kent say in their book *Disabilities and New Media*, “the link between a person’s physical body and the construction of their online persona can be a complex negotiation” (2011, 116). Indeed, there need be no link at all between a user’s “real” self and how she visually represents herself in a virtual setting.<sup>1</sup> For example, not all people with physical disabilities represent themselves in wheelchairs and not all people in virtual wheelchairs are disabled in their real lives. Thus, the wheelchair becomes a detached symbol for things other than the mobility of the impaired human form. Moreover, unlike in reality, the wheelchair may or may not serve to construct or shape the human form in the virtual setting.<sup>2</sup> The look or design of the human form is dependent on choices made by the individual and the options offered by the creators of the virtual world.<sup>3</sup>

Although for some people with “actual” disabilities (i.e., those who have disabilities in reality) it remains a kind of psychological attachment to the reality of their physical condition, the virtual representation of a wheelchair also becomes a politicized, stylized, and ritualized aesthetic representation of the self in the virtual environment. Indeed, people use wheelchairs for any of a variety of reasons within the virtual environment. Some wheelchairs are even designed to engage one’s avatar in sexual activity. And on rare occasions you can find wheelchair-using avatars in virtual dance clubs, out on the dance floor. Curiosity about the potential visual dissimilitude between reality and virtuality led to this exploratory photographic study of wheelchairs in a virtual setting. In keeping with the theme of this issue of *Proteus*, eight Figures are presented below of avatars in wheelchairs.

The wheelchairs pictured in the figures were designed by people who use Second Life and can be purchased in virtual stores located in the virtual setting.<sup>4</sup> There is also an online marketplace where one can search for and buy a variety of virtual items (located at <https://marketplace.secondlife.com/>). All of the figures below show a wheelchair and an avatar sitting in it. A non-contextual, studio-style setting was created to depict the wheelchair-seated avatar

(except for Figure 8 which shows the avatar in her virtual home). The pictures themselves were produced using the snapshot function in Second Life. The snapshot function is basically a screenshot taken in the virtual setting.

The first wheelchair, shown in Figure 1, was named for the English city in which it was invented. Referred to as the Bath Chair, it was a popular style of wheelchair during the Victorian Era. When the avatar “wears” the Bath Chair, his or her legs are automatically covered with a maroon blanket, thus “hiding” the impaired portion of the body.<sup>5</sup> Here we see how the virtual setting has the potential to historicize the relationship between the wheelchair and the human form. Figure 2 shows the common form of a collapsible wheelchair seen in most hospitals today. The avatar is in a normal seated position, perhaps not impaired at all. Figure 3 shows the avatar of a woman who, in reality, is paralyzed from the chest down and confined to a wheelchair. The chair shown here was custom-made for her by someone who makes virtual wheelchairs. The wheelchair was designed with various scripts which help pose her avatar differently from time to time; in this image we see her leaning forward slightly, while at other times she sits back in the chair. So, there is a more natural motion of her avatar’s body as she moves about the virtual environment. In Figure 4 the same woman is shown, but this time in a motorized virtual wheelchair. Those who use electrically powered wheelchairs often have more severe forms of paralysis, perhaps from the neck down. Thus we see the avatar posed in a more stiffened, motionless position than in some of the other images. Note also how this person chose to depict her avatar’s body with a distended belly to depict the weight redistribution she has experienced in her real life of over twenty years in a wheelchair. Figure 5 shows another powered wheelchair, this time positioning the avatar in a sideways tilt at the waist. The last three chairs (in Figures 6, 7, and 8) show some futuristic wheelchair designs. Figure 6 looks more like a military vehicle than a wheelchair, but is marketed as a wheelchair.<sup>6</sup> Figures 7 and 8 are the kinds of virtual inventions that could only exist in the virtual setting. The hover chair in Figure 7 sports four jet-powered engines instead of wheels, which hover the avatar over the ground as he moves through the

virtual setting. In Figure 8 the chair has runners instead of wheels, like a kind of sled-chair. Both chairs provide a rather relaxed look to the human form. They even put into question the nature of the disability, or even whether one is present at all.

Indeed, the nature of disability has been questioned before. Kenny Fries tells us that, "Throughout history, those who live with disabilities have been defined by the gaze and the needs of the nondisabled world" (1997, 1). People with disabilities are isolated by the institutions of our society—including media institutions—confined and stared at as objects of pity, remorse, or worse. The representations of the human form (as avatars) in virtual wheelchairs both reflect and extend this image (and imagination) of disability.<sup>7</sup> But if it is true that we take some of what we see and learn in the virtual setting with us into our real lives, then maybe our perceptions and negative stereotypes of disability can be changed by virtual media. And maybe, through the lens of the virtual image, those with disabilities can now stare back at the world.



Figure 2. Traditional Folding Style



Figure 3. Personally Designed Chair



Figure 1. Bath Chair



Figure 4. Power Chair with Sever Paralysis



Figure 5. Power Chair with Bent Spine



Figure 6. All-Terrain Chair



Figure 7. Hover Chair



Figure 8. Space-Age "Sled" Chair

## END NOTES

1. The digital representation of oneself in a virtual environment is called an "avatar."
2. In reality, being paralyzed or losing the use of one's legs for other reasons and being confined to a wheelchair changes the human body in many ways, especially over many years of disability. From the withering of one's legs, to weight gain and redistribution, to the sculpting and build up of muscle in the upper body of wheelchair athletes, life with a wheelchair has many potential body changing effects.
3. In this case, the virtual world is Second Life, which was created by Linden Labs based in San Francisco. Second Life is one of the most popular virtual worlds and offers over one hundred ways to alter one's avatar.
4. To buy virtual "things" like wheelchairs a user needs to set up an account tied to a credit card or PayPal account in order to conduct virtual world transactions. The account is tied to the user's avatar. With such an account the user can exchange US dollars for Linden dollars. The exchange rate fluctuates, but as of this writing it is \$248L/\$1.00US based on the LindeX Exchange market data. Linden dollars can be converted back into US dollars.
5. Some wheelchairs found in the virtual environment of Second Life require the avatar to "wear" the chair and for others, the avatar "sits" in the chair. "Worn" chairs allow the avatar to sit in the chair anywhere in the virtual world since the chair, in essence, is part of the avatar. Wheelchairs that require the avatar to "sit" in them are more restricted in terms of where the chair can be used in the virtual world, since the chair is detached from the avatar and has to be "placed" in the virtual world. This is because some areas in the virtual environment prohibit anyone other than the virtual land's owner from "placing" objects including wheelchairs. So, a chair that you "place" then "sit" in could not be used in these restricted areas, but a chair you "wear" could be used. What is relevant to this study is that there is no visual difference between these two types of wheelchair; the difference lies only in their functionality in virtual space.
6. See <https://marketplace.secondlife.com/p/wheelchair-any-ground/1389658>.
7. It should be said here that this exploratory study is not to be considered a "catalog" of wheelchairs found in Second Life, for there are many dozens to be found, more than could reasonably be shown here. Indeed one "type" of wheelchair is not represented here. These include wheelchairs designed specifically to engage and manipulate avatars into sexual positions and movements.

## REFERENCES

- Ellis, Katie, and Kent, Mike. *Disability and New Media*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Fries, Kenny. "Introduction." In *Staring Back: The Disability Experience from the Inside Out*, ed. K. Fries, 1-10, New York: Plume, 1997.

# WRITING WOMEN'S BODIES: BODY AS TEXT AND CONTEXT FOR MEDIEVAL MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

CHRISTOPHER M. FLAVIN  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

For medieval women writers, the liminality and the recursiveness of the body mirrors that of their received theology. From the pulpit and in the male texts which serve as their references, women are depicted as divided creatures, simultaneously *anima*, the holy ideological spirit frequently represented as a naked woman borne aloft through purity and faith, and the sinful daughters of Eve, intrinsically bound to the corruption of the flesh. The body provides both the text and context for their expression of both circumstances, and provides a vehicle for their active participation in society.

The participation of these women in their culture, particularly in matters of theology and literary identity, is shaped by specific interpretations of the suffering of Christ as explicated in concurrent male texts. The duality inherent in the concept of a nurturing yet suffering Christ, which dominates the male discourse of late medieval theology, is particularly relevant to the identities constructed through the texts of medieval mystical women whose use of bodily suffering illustrates the ways in which the dominant model of Christ's humanity encouraged specific forms of imitation. These medieval women authors seem characterized by the freely chosen infliction of bodily pain, miraculously sustained by God so they can go on performing such activities, which serve as personalized reiterations of Christ's suffering that themselves confirm and sacralize the model that informs them (Aers and Staley 1996, 24). Their personal passion and spiritual elevation is written on and through their bodies in their suffering and in the renunciation of the flesh. Yet, even as the body is presented as the vehicle for presenting their theology, the body itself is defined in cultural and social terms. These women are only able to describe a body which has already been defined by male models of piety and through the recognized languages of culture and memory.

This is particularly true of women, such as Blessed Angela of Foligno, who wrote from within tertiary orders, particularly the Beguines and the Mantillates, whose

spiritual focus lay in the common people and not within the strictures of the cloister. The connection between the body, as both public and private, and the spirit as experienced rather than as an abstract theological construct often makes these women's texts the site of tensions between the established traditions and the lived religious experiences of the community.

Angela of Foligno's *Memoria* provides modern readers with a clear example of the ways in which the body serves as both liminal space and as a separate text in medieval women's biography. The body as text allows these women a vehicle for expressing themselves within their cultural framework, while the corruption or sublimation of the body and its associated sinful state provides a degree of orthodoxy within their texts through both *imitatio Christi* and mirroring male ascetic motifs. The Latin text of the *Memoria* was initially circulated in 1298, translated by Angela's confessor from her dictation in her native Umbrian dialect. Angela's use of a male amanuensis to both record and authorize her narrative was the standard practice for women of Angela's social status at the time, and the text as it is preserved is equal parts conversion narrative and spiritual instruction. There is evidence within the text that Arnaldo's interpretations of Angela's visions and actions were occasionally contrary to her original intent, and Arnaldo interjects himself into the text, adding emphasis to specific theological points and highlighting elements which he feels are salient to the goals of the text. These emphases often reinforce the distinction between her youthful worldliness and her mature connection to divine enlightenment. In many ways, the text serves as the vita of an aspiring saint promulgated for her canonization (Arnaldo's success in shaping this element can be seen in the fact that Angela was beatified in 1701) and as a vehicle for disseminating Angela's bodily theology.

One of the most telling moments in Angela's *Memoria* is her exhortation to the friars with whom she lives as a tertiary:

Christopher M. Flavin received his doctorate in English from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale in 2011 and currently serves as an instructor in the Department of English at the University of Southern Indiana. He is working on a study of early modern Irish women as subjects and authors of poetry.

I turned to those friars who are called my sons, and said to them, "I do not want you to believe in me anymore. Do you not see that I am a demoniac? Can you not see that, if there were no evil in the whole world, I would fill up the whole world with the abundance of my evil?" (Lachance 1993, 115)

The emphasis on the visible nature of her own corruption, the bodily expression of both her "evil" and possession, is central to the abjection of the body in which Angela and her contemporaries frequently engage. The body exists as a means of expressing both sanctity and corruption, a representation of both her mystic connection to the divine and her feminine susceptibility to the demonic through the sinful nature of humanity.

The connection between mystical speech, demonic possession, and the abasement of the flesh is grounded in the medieval concept of women's bodies as being both primarily carnal and inherently sinful. Abjection, in all its forms, serves to further ground the text in the author's sinful state and biological condition. As Karma Lochrie notes, "mystic speech is always located in (or straying into) abjection. It always transgresses and blasphemes because it speaks of divine mysteries through polluted lips. It also transgresses in its association with the excesses of the flesh" even as such excess in speech and action attempts to elevate the speaker beyond the body and into the realms of divine enlightenment (1991, 71).

While the sublimation of the flesh and the submersion of the self in favor of divinely inspired excess becomes a commonplace in the writings of later medieval mystics, both male and female, what marks Angela's text as uniquely feminine is the way in which it serves as a physically interpreted response to male mystics' writings and the cultural norms of the period. The excess, the physicality with which the body is engaged in both decrying and elevating the subject, not only specifically appropriates elements of the male traditions for mystic speech and action, deliberately modeling the examples provided by St. Francis and the ascetic Desert Fathers, but also amplifies them. It is not enough for Angela to consume the water used to bathe a leper's wounds; she must exult in it as a means of expressing both her sinful corporeality and her divine inspiration. Similarly, it is not enough for English mystic Margery Kempe to tremble at the sight of the Eucharist; her whole body must become involved in the display of her piety and she must give voice to the passions it arouses in her. The danger in such amplifications of the physical in order to compensate for their sex is the potential for alienation from the very traditions they seek to take part in. While the extreme nature of Angela's participation in the traditions, as well as Margery Kempe's or St. Catherine of Siena's, seems excessive to a modern reader, their texts survive in part due to the underlying orthodoxy of their thought. This orthodoxy of thought is reinforced by the interjections of male scribes and official endorsement within the texts, which both provide the women with a degree of cultural and theological continuity by approving their appropriation of masculine behaviors and bodily theology and reinscribing the physical boundaries which define them.

Angela's identity within the text is as much of a physical construct of the biography as is her bodily presence. Angela was likely born around 1248, seems to have married around 1270 and bore her husband several sons. Her entire family died prior to her entry into the Third Order of Saint Francis in Rome in 1291, based on the scant details provided about her life before entering her order. Alain Boureau emphasizes the fact that Angela's own texts minimize the role of her life before her conversion, noting that in the three hundred pages "copied in Angela's name, the reader doesn't know who she was: there is no mention of events, dates, or places, except a pilgrimage to Rome and a few journeys to the neighboring city of Assisi" (2006, 186). In effect, Angela does not exist in the text before she assumes her identity as a tertiary and the identity she assumes is inseparable from the body presented by the text. This isolation from her pre-conversion life, and therefore the exclusion of her body before she was physically received into her order, is unusual, the most notably for the lack of societal referents available upon which the author can ground her text. Unlike the commonly used models for the development of a literary self, such as St. Augustine's *Confession*, Angela has no recourse to an earlier physicality or a body beyond the text. By erasing her past, she effectively effaces her own access to any identity beyond the text and to any sense of a physical presence which she does not perform for the reader in the *Memoria*. This isolation from her past, and the intervention of a male amanuensis, emphasizes Angela in the text as a physical being and highlights the immediacy and the cultural locatedness of her text.

The *Memoria*, in essence, upholds Angela as a model for feminine pursuit of divine enlightenment. While the first seven steps of her doctrine follow the proscribed order of confession, penance, and self-awareness, the subsequent steps become progressively more difficult to categorize within the traditions. The eighth and ninth steps of Angela's plan for perfect humility are particularly relevant to this discussion because of the physical groundedness of Angela's actions and the deliberate spectacle she engages in to publicly display her piety. Angela's eighth step, including her "greater perception of the way the Son of God had died for our sins" (Lachance 1993, 126), captures the essence of her use of the body as a didactic text.

Nonetheless, this perception of the meaning of the cross set me so afire that, standing near the cross, I stripped myself of all my clothing and offered my whole self to him. Although very fearful, I promised him then to maintain perpetual chastity and not to offend him again with any of my bodily members, accusing each one of these one by one. I prayed that he himself keep me faithful to this promise, namely, to observe chastity with all the members of my body and all my senses. On the one hand, I feared to make this promise, but on the other hand, the fire of which I spoke drew it out of me, and I could not do otherwise. (126)

Angela's removal of her clothing both recalls the suffering and nakedness of Christ at the crucifixion and also parallels that of St. Francis before the bishop in Assisi (Morrison

2001, 37). The emphasis on the visual in Angela's abnegation of the body and the self reflects a deep awareness of her own createdness within the text. The details, such as the individual accusation of her members and faculties, presents the reader with a fully realized body within the account, grounded in the moment of its presentation before the crucifix, through which she is able to present her experiences. The theatrical performance of corporeal identity, the presentation and enunciation of the body, reinforces the connection between the constructed position she occupies theologically and the negated, abased body presented to the reader in the text.

The metaphor of renunciation is apparent in the ninth step as well, in which Angela takes the metaphor of naked acceptance to its literal conclusion within the traditions:

I was instructed, illumined, and shown the way of the cross in the following manner: I was inspired with the thought that if I wanted to go to the cross, I would need to strip myself in order to be lighter and go naked to it. This would entail forgiving all who had offended me, stripping myself of everything worldly, of all attachments to men and women, of my friends and relatives, and everyone else, and, likewise, of my possessions and even my very self. Then I would be free to give my heart to Christ from whom I had received so many graces, and to walk along the thorny path, that is, the path of tribulations. (Lachance 1993, 126)

Molly Morrison sees this visual display in terms of a "theatrical display of emotion," as even Angela's scribe Arnaldo describes her experience in the Basilica of St. Francis as an "acting out" of her personal experience of Christ" for the benefit of others (2001, 38). The public display of piety for the edification of those around her is grounded in the masculine traditions, recreating the scene of St. Francis's disrobing before the bishop as a display of humility in the same church in which Francis himself performed his penance, and functions as a representation of the internalization of the trope of the naked, bleeding Christ of the Passion.

It should not be assumed, however, that women such as Angela define themselves solely through the examples provided by male saints. Rather, their texts serve as a cultural taxonomy of responses which also engage with the roles and motifs established by women. An example of literal, theatrical interpretations of the feminine traditions in Angela's text focuses on her inability to enter the Church of the Virgin of Portiuncula. She is allowed to enter the church, but is immediately paralyzed with rapture.

The next morning, when I was about to enter the church of the glorious Virgin of the Portiuncula in order to receive the Indulgence, I was holding the hand of a certain woman who wished to help me. The moment I placed my foot over the threshold of the church, I was suddenly enraptured with such an impact that my body just stood there and did not move, and I let go of the woman who was going ahead of me to help me. (Lachance 1993, 284)

The connection between Angela's inability to enter the church and the third century account of a similar incident in the life of Pelagia, which would have been familiar to her medieval audience, is unmistakable. In Pelagia's account, she is unable to touch the doors of the church in Antioch where she has stopped to pray before fleeing into the desert and renouncing her previously sinful life. The primary difference between the two is the nature of the barrier that prevents each woman from freely entering the church. Pelagia's account attributes her inability to a divine refutation of her sinful state, while Angela's paralysis is the result of divinely inspired rapture. Unlike her predecessor, Angela is allowed to enter the church before her progress is halted and her physical rapture, in her eyes, is a reward for her active engagement with her own improvement. The image of the women physically unable to enter, or move through, the church is a clear physical display of their positions in the spectrum of feminine virtue and, in both cases, the arbiter of their physical freedom is the Virgin Mary. Angela is, therefore, more worthy of the church than the as-yet unredeemed Pelagia, but Angela's paralysis functions as a reminder of her incomplete redemption.

One of the more graphic events recounted in Angela's biography involves the consumption of filth as a means of attaining perfection. Unlike St. Francis's sharing a meal with lepers as a self-imposed penance for his aversion to them, Angela and her companion actively seek to engage with lepers outside Foligno as a means of self-improvement.

We washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one of the lepers which were festering and in an advanced stage of decomposition. Then we drank the very water with which we had washed him. And the drink was so sweet that, all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received Holy Communion. As a small scale of the leper's sores was stuck in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience would not let me spit it out, just as if I had received Holy Communion. I really did not want to spit it out but simply to detach it from my throat. (Lachance 1993, 163)

It is important to note that the event with the lepers, and Angela's scatological communion, occurs on Maundy Thursday, the traditional day of confession and penance. Angela's actions, therefore, provide a bodily representation of the Lateran Council's requirement for confession and the acceptance of the Sacraments at least once a year by all the faithful. The consumption of filth is by no means unique to Angela's text, but rather represents a specifically feminine appropriation of the established traditions which serves to reinforce the bodily internalization of *imitatio Christi* which takes Bynum's analysis of "Christ's agony on the cross" as a material and consumptive vision to extremes (1987, 211-12).

David Aers and Lynn Staley reiterate the orthodoxy and authorization of extreme measures of personal debasement, such as Angela's exultation when the scabs of lepers became stuck in her throat and the self-mortification of Catherine of Siena, as well as the verbosity with which

the ecstasy of such experiences was often recounted by these women (Aers and Staley 1996, 33). Catherine of Siena's observation to her biographer, Raymond of Caputa, that she had never tasted "any food or drink sweeter or more exquisite" than the pus from the putrefying breast of a dying woman (Bynum 1987, 171-2) is an acknowledgement of both the abhorrence of the flesh illustrated by these behaviors and the physical union with God's "humanity" through their own suffering and mortification. Aers takes this analysis a step further, noting that the seemingly self-destructive behaviors in narratives such as Angela's represent "the combination of model and imitation that *empowered* the subordinate, that *subverted* the logic and religion of a patriarchal and profoundly misogynistic culture" (Aers and Staley 1996, 34). This line of argument is particularly relevant to the physicality with which women such as Angela embrace the model of *imitatio Christi* and explicate their actions in terms of concurrent theology. The structure of these narratives, and the implied clerical encouragement of such behavior provided by scribal redactors and amanuenses, provides inclusive models for women's participation in the church and experiential piety in the face of heresies and Cathar dualism. The emphasis on the body must be positioned in light of the larger traditions in which individual women see themselves as participating through their experiences, as there is a direct connection between such seemingly self-destructive forms of experiential piety and the ascetic traditions of the early church.

The visceralization of experience and the affectation of suffering to participate in Christ's humanity draw heavily on similar accounts in earlier ascetic literature. The renunciation of earthly food and drink, of all that which would be beneficial to the body, figures prominently in the lives of Mary of Egypt, Pelagia, Thais, and to a lesser degree Macrina and Paula. The connection between affective experience of religion and the oral/aural experiences of late medieval women such as Angela, St. Catherine of Genoa, and St. Catherine of Siena is also reminiscent of the ways in which St. Jerome's epistles describe Paula's participation in the passions by kissing, possibly consuming, the earth at Golgotha and licking the stones in Christ's tomb. Jane McAvoy suggests that this renunciation and consumption is in many ways a logical extension of the bodies which these women construct in their texts as vehicles for their theologies (2000, 15). They must create a body which is capable of experiencing these moments of affective empowerment, and they must then renounce or destroy the created body in order to achieve spiritual perfection.

The renunciation and destruction of the physical self is tied to a medieval understanding of the modern concept of abjection. Morrison argues that, in a Kristevan context, Angela's willingness to ingest the filth associated with the body is logical within her theological framework.

Filth is the 'object.' It is often repulsive not so much because of the lack of cleanliness or health because it 'disturbs identity, system order.' It does not 'respect borders, positions, rules'. Following Kristeva's argument... the morally and physically corrupt leper disturbs the order of medieval soci-

ety and as such is expelled....Angela humiliates and pollutes herself by associating with them. Her choice to do so illustrates her belief that self-loathing leads to the soul's exaltation. (2003, 206)

St. Catherine of Siena's ingestion of filth shares its motivation with Angela's encounter with the lepers. This scatological approach to abjection is not limited to purely medieval mystics, but rather continues to evolve over time until it becomes an affective trope in its own right. The sense of sacrifice and abnegation of the self remains consistent throughout these accounts, but the motivation for such actions is deliberately contrasted with male examples of similar behavior, such as St. Francis's meal with the leper.

The physicality of the abasement that these women engage in can also be seen as an extension of the martyrological spectacle inherent in the received, collective Christian memory tradition they seek to access. Despite frequent polemics against public spectacle, the foundational texts with which these women would be most familiar make frequent use of the notion of spectacle as a means of reinforcing Christian identity. Elizabeth Castelli notes the almost reflexive recourse in early texts to Scriptural sources such as 1 Corinthians 4:9: "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to human beings" (Castelli 2004, 117). Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian and others resituate the spectacle of Christian sacrifice and martyrology as pleasing to God and possessing the power to transform the viewers and readers (124). In this sense, narratives such as Angela's provide rubrics for both the explication of individual experiences of faith and the literal internalization of the spectacle inherent in the received traditions these women access through their writings.

The ingestion of filth, the literal corruption of the flesh as a means of purifying the soul, is not an exclusively feminine trope. However, the degree to which women such as Angela engage in these practices, and the zeal with which they are described, further isolates their texts from those of their male contemporaries. St. Francis does not relish his meal with the leper, but accepts it as appropriate penance. St. Jerome does not exult in his own misfortunes in his letters—although others writing about his life make him do so—but accepts and describes the physical misfortunes which have befallen him. The male and female interpretations of voluntary abasement of the body remain clearly separated, even as they attempt to achieve similar ends.

However, these physical pursuits of perfection, and the zeal with which these practices are displayed, is often accompanied by suspicion when these events are recounted in women's texts. This is due in part to the bodily display it represents, but also the lingering question about the sincerity of the theatrical presentation of divine experience. Demonic possession, malfeasance, and madness are charges frequently leveled at mystical women and their writings, as even the most revered mystics could be suspect if their texts or their miracles violated or threatened the traditions in uncomfortable or unexpected ways.

The canonization of Angela's near contemporary Clare of Montefalco († 1308) provides an example of this suspicion of the woman's body's ability to express divine inspiration. The procedural documents associated with her canonization included a deposition which "declared that she had associated with heretics, and that the miraculous transformation of Clare's heart—the signs of the Passion were found to be sculpted out of the heart's inner flesh—was an act of maleficence" (Caciola 2000, 277). Nancy Caciola notes that despite Raymond of Capua's championing of Clare's cause, she was often accused of consorting with demons, being possessed by an "indwelling demon" herself, and repeatedly examined by prelates because of the rampant rumors which surrounded her (277).

In the Latin and vernacular models Angela and her contemporaries would have likely been familiar with, the identity and the locatedness of women could only be described in contrast to that which was seen as male. This was not a male/female binary, but rather a system of continuously reinscribed differences defined and limited by the cultural system (Wiethaus 2002, 212). The appropriation of masculine language and imagery by women in the construction of their literary lives lends women's texts, and therefore their physical presence within their narratives, credibility within the traditions while allowing the authors to remain recognizably Other. The body as presented by Angela's text remains liminal in that it both defines and limits her as a woman within the tradition. It becomes both the vehicle for the presentation of her theological plan and the origin of any failings the reader may attribute to her.

Texts such as Angela's do not represent a static form of participation in the literary and cultural traditions or the pursuit of *imitatio Christi*. Rather, within individual texts the degree of mortification engaged in by women "had a performative function in faith communities that is an integral part of their meaning. They were not private communications between silent individuals, but contributions to a lively, personally and liturgically engaged community who shared similar hungers for transcendent meaning" (Dreyer 2004, 157). These women position themselves in their writing as "both victims of social and ecclesial forms of patriarchy, and, at the same time, agents of resistance, women who spoke, wrote, and acted to confront oppression" (158). The performance of the self through the text and the simultaneous performance of faith complicate the relationship between woman and body, as the experiences recorded by these women cannot be attributed to a passive, physical Other but rather create a self through the body within the text which functions as a secondary text. This secondary text then supplements and illustrates the intellectual and theological development of their narrative. Angela's theological plan cannot be expressed without being bracketed and endorsed by her amanuensis within her community, given her gender and social position. However, this overwriting of her narrative serves to further illustrate the divided nature of the text, as it is first written by the hands of the male scribe then written again on her performative body that is actively seeking abjection as a means of connecting with the divine.

## REFERENCES

- Aers, David and Lynn Staley. *Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*. University Park PA: Penn State UP, 1996.
- Boureau, Alain. *Satan the Heretic: The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West*. Trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1987.
- Caciola, Nancy. "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (April 2000): 268-306.
- Castelli, Elizabeth A. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004.
- Dreyer, Elizabeth A. "Whose Story is It?: The Appropriation of Medieval Mysticism." *Spiritus* 4 (2004): 151-72.
- Lachance, Paul, tr. *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*. Mahwah NY: Paulist, 1993.
- Lochrie, Karma. *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- McAvoy, Jane. *The Satisfied Life: Medieval Women Mystics on Atonement*. Cleveland OH: Pilgrim, 2000.
- Morrison, Molly. "Ingesting Bodily Filth: Defilement in the Spirituality of Angela of Foligno." *Romance Quarterly* 50.3 (Summer 2003): 204-216.
- . "A Mystic's Drama: The Paschal Mystery in the Visions of Angela da Foligno." *Italica* 78.1 (Spring 2001): 36-52.
- Wiethaus, Ulrike. "Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century." *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blunfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren, 209-238. *The New Middle Ages* 28, Bonnie Wheeler, series editor. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

## PARSING THE BODY: FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE RECORPorealIZATION OF SELF

JENNIFER MCQUILLAN

OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE & WEST BLOOMFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

*My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.* (Frederick Douglass)

This striking image, from one of the most famous lines in the 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, is central to the point of the text itself: Douglass is using his pen to heal the debasement of the body from which he has long suffered. The pen seals the gash caused by the bitter conditions of slavery and makes his disfigured body whole again. Writing is Douglass's act of righting the wrongs of slavery, of filling in the gaps in his own conception of self caused by hunger, torture, pain, verbal abuse, hard labor and the denial of basic human rights. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes in his article "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," "Text created author; and black authors, it was hoped, would create, or re-create, the image of the race in European discourse" (1985, 11). Throughout his *Narrative*, Douglass uses the language of the body to fashion a new identity, a new body, and wholly different conception of self.

Douglass's black body—born into slavery and marked for servitude and violence—still existed once he escaped to the North and pursued his now famous oratory, writing, and social justice careers. Critics have long debated the ways in which Douglass uses the body in his text. Katherine Fishburn describes how Douglass uses his body "to strike just the right balance between demonstrating his superior intelligence (his rationality) and exploiting his physical suffering" (1997, 65) to inspire political action for the abolition of slavery. This comes, argues Fishburn, from the inherent knowing of the body that Douglass inscribes into his text, challenging metaphysics and humanist thinking by offering an alternative philosophy "premised on recalling the Body and honoring its recollection of Being" (1997, xiii). This "inherent knowing" challenges what she calls a "virulent hatred of the body that marks so much Western thought and religion, a hatred that itself helped make possible, if not entirely inevitable, the enslavement of African Americans in the New World and the Nazi

Holocaust" (1997, xiii). Slaves could not afford this kind of philosophy:

For what, in the economy of slavocracy, were the slaves free to love if not the body? How else were they free to know if not by the body? The fruits of their bodily labor might have enriched the slavocrats rather than themselves, but the fruits of their *bodily knowing*, though they indeed entered into their own form of economic exchange, could not be stolen from them. In the economy of the slave narratives, the ex-slaves could only gain by making known what their bodies knew. (1997, xiii)

Alternatively, Jeannie DeLombard argues that although Douglass attempts to transcend his body via the creation of text, he is unable to become the "transparent eyeball" that Ralph Waldo Emerson describes in *Nature*: "if anything, he has become an eyewitness to the 'strength of prejudice against color' in the North" (2001, 268), bound by the color of his skin no matter where in the republic he chooses to go. Indeed, this is further heightened by white abolitionists' glowing descriptions of his body, descriptions that persist in shackling Douglass to the very body he himself had tried so hard to shed. Fishburn argues that Douglass remains firmly embedded within his body, using it to further his own ideas on abolition and philosophy, while DeLombard believes that Douglass attempted to transcend that body and failed, in part, because of the gaze of his white peers.

Literally embodied within an African-American skin, a skin inescapable from certain judgments and valuations, I believe that Douglass does attempt, as DeLombard notes, to transcend it by creating a body of text to stand in for his own corporeality. But I also believe that he does this via that very same marked body, sharing with readers what, as Fishburn points out, his body already knows.

In order to dehumanize slaves, slave owners whipped, burned, shot, and scarred those black bodies in a variety of ways through barbaric physical violence. This practice continued after slavery's end in the form of lynching, in which victims often suffered the dismemberment of their toes, fingers, ears, and genitals in addition to being hanged, burned, or shot to death. This scarring and dismemberment—debasement of the body by destroying it piece by piece—is one of the ways in which slave masters and, later, racist Southern whites believed they were able to maintain control over black men and women. By breaking the body down into scarred, charred, and bloody pieces, slave owners and their ilk hoped to keep it from wholeness—both as a single human being and as a race.

Rather than destroying these body parts, Frederick Douglass uses them constructively to recreate and elevate the African American. In his 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass parses out his body parts in an attempt to create a new vision of African-Americans that had not been seen in an otherwise white-dominated publishing world. I deliberately use the word “parse” here because of its connection to writing, as defined by *Webster's New World Dictionary*: “to break (a sentence) down into parts, explaining the grammatical form, function, and interrelation of each part” and “to describe the form, part of speech, and function of (a word) in a sentence.” In his *Narrative*, Douglass parses out his body—head, hands, eyes, voice, and ears, among others—to recreate not only himself through writing, but to provide both white and black America with a new standard, a new creation, of what an African American was and could be. He indeed explains the form, function, and interrelation of each part in relation not only to his own marked body (as a word in a sentence), but also as a revised version of the race (the sentence) entirely. In Douglass's language of the *Narrative*, then, a slave can achieve his freedom and his manhood through the use of three important body parts: the brains, necessary for reason, intellect, and the inflamed desire to escape the bondage of slavery; the eyes, necessary for clear vision, perspective and the power of observation, whether to assess a situation or to “see” the best escape route; and finally the hands, with which a man can perform honest labor and be paid well for it, thus supporting himself economically in a white man's society. It is significant that Douglass unites those very body parts in the art and practice of writing, which not only serves to reclaim his physical body from the hands of slaveholders, but also creates a body of text that allows Douglass to reframe his identity on his own terms.

The body of Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* begins at the beginning: in the first few paragraphs, Douglass recalls his own birth, the birth of a body situated in a place (Tuckahoe, Maryland) but not in a time. From the first lines of his *Narrative* he links his body with the act of writing: “I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it” (12). As a slave baby, Douglass's birth is not worthy of inscription, of entering the official record keeping, and he is left only with an

estimated age, a state of affairs that troubles him deeply. In a way, however, it is through this lack of inscription that Douglass achieves both a transcendence of sorts and a chance at rebirth. If there is no fixed date of his birth, he is not solely bound to the circumstances of that birth; his identity is fluid and malleable. Through the act of writing, he has the opportunity to create another, which he does as he chooses to open the *Narrative* with these lines. In the *Narrative*, a second body has been created for Frederick Douglass, one that has cast off its old identity (Frederick Bailey), one marked by a specific time (as noted by copyright and publishing dates), and one that is finally worthy of not only inscription, but of a voice that can proclaim a new Frederick Douglass, one who has the power to fashion a new identity and comment on the system that tried to restrain the old. This framework, then, sets the stage for a text for which the body and writing itself—like the pen laid in the gash of his foot—are inextricably intertwined.

Chapter X comprises nearly half of the entire *Narrative* and has long been recognized for its structural and thematic importance (Bland 2000, 88). Miserable with Thomas Auld and his wife, recalcitrant and rebellious, Douglass stews for nine long months in a fertile environment of tension and anger, emotions that serve him well upon his arrival at Edward Covey's farm. A new Douglass is reborn there through his determined resistance to Covey's slave breaking methods. The language of the body is paramount both here and in the beating he receives at the hands of white laborers, and these scenes provide the best examples of how Douglass parses out his body to rewrite his own identity.

When Douglass moves to Covey's farm, he notes it was the first time in his life he had been a “field hand” (42), bound to labor with his body and mainly with his hands in the cornfield. The opening to Chapter X also recounts the first extended description of Douglass's own marked body through violence: “I had been at my new home but one week before Mr. Covey gave me a very severe whipping, cutting my *back*, causing the *blood* to run, and raising ridges on my *flesh* as large as my little *finger*” (42; emphasis mine). His back is designated for discipline, this vicious attack coming as a result of Douglass's perceived bodily “awkwardness” (42). Covey, like so many white Southerners before and after him, seeks to destroy Douglass's rebellious ways by injuring his flesh and controlling his actions by administering pain. When telling of his whipping, Douglass explains the method used and the wounds incurred but never mentions the pain he must have felt from these attacks, as if to indicate that while Covey could lacerate his flesh, he could never crush Douglass's spirit entirely.

Like the “in-hand” and “off-hand” oxen he drives, Covey relegates Douglass to mere body parts, especially his back and his head (particularly when Covey beats him for illness while he and other slaves are fanning wheat). It is his brains that usually get him into trouble, and it is his back that is used for punishment. Indeed, Douglass fears that the untamed oxen's wild ride would end with his “brains...

dashed out against the trees” (43), and it seems that quite often, slave owners both punished and killed their charges by virtue of injuries to the head. Demby dies of a gunshot to the face, where “His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he stood” (24). Slave owner Thomas Lanman kills another nameless slave “by knocking his brains out” with a hatchet (24). Thomas Hamilton's slave, Mary, is severely whipped on and about her head: “The head, neck and shoulders of Mary were literally cut to pieces. I have frequently felt her head, and found it nearly covered with festering sores, caused by the lash of her cruel mistress” (30). Douglass's own brother is the victim of a similar kind of torture by Master Andrew, who “took my little brother by the throat, threw him on the ground, and with the heel of his boot stamped upon his head till the blood gushed from his nose and ears” (36). Douglass himself is not immune to this treatment: “Mr. Covey took up the hickory slat. . . and with it gave me a heavy blow upon the head, making a large wound, and the blood ran freely; and with this again told me to get up” (47). Head injuries not only render the victim senseless, but the act of attacking the brains gets at center of where one's humanity lies—the locus of intelligence.

The difference between Douglass and the others, however, is made quite clear in the very next sentence: “I made no effort to comply, having now *made up my mind* to let him do his worst. In a short time after receiving this blow, *my head grew better*” (47; emphasis mine). Douglass may have been violently hit in the head, but his brains remain intact and ever rebellious, working to defy Covey even as he is badly injured, unlike the other slaves he describes who are beaten or killed without recourse. In opposition to the other slaves, Douglass rises above the physical assault on his head to assert his intellect, shrewdly planning his next move by virtue of his mental faculties. To be sure, Covey's fiendish methods are no match for Douglass's superior intelligence, and he refuses to let himself sink into the level of a brute animal that gives in when faced with torture, punishment, and pain. Although Covey tries to break down his body, his intelligence allows him to outwit Covey, and Covey's underhanded fighting tactics are no match for Douglass's outstanding physical strength.

Douglass stresses not only the need for intellect, but he also proudly displays the prowess of his physical body, weaving a tale of courage and stamina in the face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles. Douglass's physicality serves him in good stead as he makes the trek to Master Thomas's house in an attempt to speak out against Covey's barbarity and secure some protection from his brutal master. He is “feeble,” having been kicked and beaten by Covey, “blood. . . oozing from the wound on [his] head,” “barefooted and bareheaded, tearing [his] feet,” but still manages to walk the seven miles to his master's house, despite obstructions of “bogs and briers,” “thorns,” and his own severe injuries (48). Clearly, Douglass is no ordinary slave, or even *man*, for that matter. Throughout the *Narrative* he relates countless stories of slaves who, out of defiance to their masters, are whipped and shot and tortured for their

efforts. Not only does Douglass escape whipping by both Master Thomas and Covey, but he also evades the latter by hiding in the cornfields after he returns to the farm. His nearly superhuman strength factors in again when he describes the famous fight with Covey.

Although Covey attempts to secure the upper hand by surprising Douglass (literally catching “hold of [his] legs” and sending him “sprawling to the stable floor” [49]), Douglass somehow twists and gyrates out of Covey's hold, “seiz[ing] Covey hard by the throat,” rising as he did so (50). Like some sort of superhero, Douglass “h[olds] him uneasy, causing the blood to run where [he] touched him with the ends of [his] fingers” (50). The arrival of another man to help Covey doesn't faze Douglass at all, for even as Hughes “attempt[s] to tie [his] right hand,” Douglass “watche[s] [his] chance, and [gives] him a heavy kick close under the ribs” (50). Finally, as Covey endeavors to drag Douglass to a nearby stick in preparation for a sound beating, Douglass again eludes his master: “[He] seized him with both hands by his collar, and brought him by a sudden snatch to the ground” (50). Douglass's hands—seizing, touching, snatching, unable to be bound—resist the unpaid labor they have been bargained for and instead reclaim freedom and manhood in this most important scene, for Douglass has, by virtue of his own body, “repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery” (50). In hand to hand combat, Douglass prevails, without engaging in a savagely bloody uprising most whites would have both feared and expected. Rather, he is controlled and careful, humane and sane, no longer “broken in body, soul, and spirit,” no longer a “brute” (45), but rather a man who has been made whole because of the actions of his body.

The scene in which the white laborers beat Douglass at Fell's Point in Baltimore is also full of the same kind of body imagery, parsed out mainly into brains, eyes, and hands. As Douglass recounts the kind of commands shouted at him by the carpenters, the list moves from more benignly stated requests like “Fred., come help me to cant this timber here” (62), which uses his given name and sounds more like someone asking for help with a project, to “I say, darcy, blast your eyes, why don't you heat up some pitch” and “Damn you, if you move, I'll knock your brains out!” (62). These last commands are not only forceful and demeaning, but they also explicitly threaten violence towards Douglass if he does not perform their tasks to their satisfaction—violence that foreshadows what actually occurs, in just the way it was threatened, later in his retelling of the incident.

It is Douglass's brains and eyes that are threatened, not his muscular body, which belies a concern of whites in his company that Douglass is as much of a threat to them because of his powers of observation, his intellect, and his reasoning than because of his physical strength. Perhaps cognizant of this, Douglass cogently weaves this language throughout his tale. In terms of his brains, the initial mention is a threat: “Damn you, if you move, I'll knock your brains out!” This threat is ultimately realized during an uprising against Douglass: “While I was attend-

ing to those in front, and on either side, the one behind ran up with the handspike, and struck me a heavy blow upon the head." Thus, the threat has come to pass quite literally; Douglass has been hit in the head, his power of reasoning temporarily "stunned" (63), momentarily powerless as the whites beat him. His "brains" have figuratively been "knocked out" for the moment.

The importance of Douglass's brains appears again later in the story, when he discusses his longing to be free: "When in Mr. Gardener's employment, I was kept in such a perpetual whirl of excitement, I could think of nothing, scarcely, but my life; and in thinking of my life, I almost forgot my liberty" (64). In the rush of daily living, he does not have time to think, which distracts him from thoughts of escape and liberty. He continues, "I have observed this in my experience of slavery,—that whenever my condition was improved, instead of it increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom" (64). It is Douglass's powers of observation that whites should fear, for it is in his ideas about how to keep men enslaved that he also realizes what they need to be free. As a thinking black man, he is as dangerous to them as one wielding a fist or a handspike. He comprehends their methods and motives in a way that they themselves may not. Douglass also equates the power of thought with liberty as exemplified in these two quotes: "I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one" and that the slave owner must work "to annihilate the power of reason" (64–65). Indeed, when the white carpenter threatens to knock Douglass's brains out, it echoes the notion that the white workers did not want to work with *free* colored workmen, for, as Douglass notes, it was alleged "that if free colored carpenters were encouraged, they would soon take the trade into their own hands, and poor white men would be thrown out of employment" (62). Free black men, then, would subvert the existing authority and threaten to undermine the tenuous economic advantage of working class whites as well. It was both the brawn of the black man and the freedom of the thinking and hardworking black man that, when combined, most threatened the white man's position in the hierarchy of American society.

As tensions mount among the shipbuilders at Fell's Point to meet a looming July deadline, violence towards Douglass increases suddenly and threateningly. Douglass's eyes are the first to be targeted by the white carpenters: "I say, darky, blast your eyes, why don't you heat up some pitch?" Soon after this warning, his "left eye was nearly knocked out" (62). Douglass describes the scene after he rose from the blow to his head: "In an instant, I gave a sudden surge, and rose to my hands and knees. Just as I did that, one of their number gave me, with his heavy boot, a powerful kick in the left eye. My eyeball seemed to have burst. When they saw my eye closed, and badly swollen, they left me" (63). As DeLombard and others have noted, this is no transparent eyeball as Emerson describes it, no part and particle of God. Rather, Douglass's vision has

been compromised, his powers of observation temporarily dulled, his point of view shattered by the vicious attack on his eye. As he puts it later, the assault on his eye could be a physical attempt to keep him a slave; as he notes, it was "necessary to darken his moral and mental vision" (64) to keep one in the bondage of slavery.

Hands also play a key role in Douglass's retelling of the incident. Douglass needed "a dozen pair of hands" in response to the commands of the white carpenters, and he is asked to "bear a hand, and get up a fire as quick as lightning" (62) in a gesture of helpfulness. Initially, white carpenters and black freemen work side by side, and "All hands seemed to be very well satisfied" (62), until anti-black sentiment contaminates the white group, seemingly without warning. It is that sentiment that propels the assault on Douglass, and here hands are paramount: the white carpenters strike him, "armed with sticks, stones, and heavy handspikes. . . beating me with their fists" (63), their violence and rage unleashed as their hands rain blows upon Douglass. As "hands" that labor, their hands are used to build, to create, and to make; they do not destroy. When anti-black sentiment darkens their thinking, their hands become weapons, attacking Douglass furiously, striking him a stunning blow on the head, knocking him senseless for a moment. It was impossible for Douglass to "stand my hand against so many" (63), to fight back, so he takes refuge in flight, the only recourse for a black man who has dared to strike a white man. Finally, when he discusses his improved wages for his superior caulking skills, he notes that although he was compelled to give Master Hugh his earnings, the slave owner did not have "any hand in earning it" (65). Master Hugh has not produced anything through his own labor; instead, he merely has Douglass hand over what Douglass himself earned through his hard work. As Douglass notes, "The right of the grim-visaged pirate upon the high seas is exactly the same" (65). Master Hugh is a thief and a robber of what rightfully belongs to Douglass, a "pirate" who has a limited or darkened vision of morality and human rights.

Carol Henderson argues that Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Ida B. Wells "focus attention on the black body and the traumas visited upon it. In this way, they undeniably make their discussions 'personal' by framing their rhetoric around the very thing that makes us all equal and human" (2002, 58). While I agree that Douglass focuses attention on the traumas visited upon *other* black bodies as a way of invoking outrage for the sins of slavery, I believe that Douglass only focuses on the trauma to his *own* body as a site for showcasing his tremendous ability to overcome it. Even at his most physically abused moments—the seven mile walk, badly injured, covered in blood, or when his eyeball is nearly kicked from his head—Douglass's personal injuries are only described by way of explaining what sort of extreme circumstances he is able to surmount. Other slaves succumb: black women are savagely beaten and raped, defiant black men are whipped or killed. Only Douglass is able to triumph over these adversities by the very body his masters seek to destroy, restrain, and control.

In addition to his physical triumphs, Douglass's intellectual advancement, especially in terms of his mastery of literacy, remains the crowning achievement of his life. In fact, committing to paper the story of his life is even more of a conquest over the institution of slavery than his corporeal victories. Despite repeated attempts by various white men to knock him senseless, to blind him, to steal the products of his labor, Douglass has not only preserved all three of those bodily elements but has used them in unison to inscribe himself into history as a thinking, seeing, and doing man, one who has managed to survive all attempts at dismemberment and one who has risen to become more than the sum of his parts.

In this vein, body parts are crucial to Douglass's acquisition of literacy. When Mr. Auld cautions his wife against teaching Douglass to read, the "words sank deep into [his] heart. . . and called into existence an entirely new train of thought" (29). As a result, Douglass pursues reading by any means possible, even trading bread with the poor white street urchins for "that more valuable bread of knowledge" (32), feeding their bellies while enriching his own mind. His new awareness that education is the key to escaping slavery powerfully resonates within his body; freedom permeates every sense: "sight," "hearing," and "feeling," "smil[ing] in every calm, breath[ing] in every wind, mov[ing] in every storm" (33). Desiring to "write his own pass" (34), Douglass teaches himself to write by "copying what [Master Thomas] had written. . . until [he] could write a hand very similar" (35). This literacy later allows him to teach his fellow slaves how to read as well, for "their minds had been starved by their cruel masters" (55). He is also able to forge passes for an escape attempt. When caught in the act, Douglass advises Henry to "eat [his pass] with his biscuit" (60), literally consuming the language Douglass has fought so hard to master, making that writing one with the body, digesting it, nourishing continuing hopes of freedom. When he does finally procure his freedom, he heads to work as a free man, "with a glad heart and a willing hand" (74), ready to labor with those hands in order to provide economically for himself and his wife. He also reads William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, "which became [his] meat and [his] drink" (74), much like the lessons of the poor street boys from long ago. Reading and writing, then, sustain Douglass by both educating him and allowing him to share what he knows with others, writing not only his own pass but writing a pass for others. He does this literally during the escape attempt, but the *Narrative* itself exists as a kind of pass,

a pass that shows other slaves how they can reclaim their own bodies in order to escape from bondage themselves. It is the labor of his hands through writing, his eyes by observing, and his brains by thinking that he is able to achieve this recorporealization of self in a text that can give hope to others still enslaved.

Even as he doles out his own body to create a new Whole, Douglass also advocates the very violence he so abhorred as a way of ending the body of slavery itself, even calling for a "few dead slavecatchers" (Foner 1999, 421) to sound an alarm for others engaged in the "peculiar institution" that slaves themselves were ready to fight back with the very violence that had been wrought against them. To be sure, Douglass himself never engaged in this kind of action, but he did indeed repeatedly support John Brown and his gang of militants who did just that. Though his ties to the raid on Harper's Ferry were never proven by federal or state authorities, "Douglass *had* been actively involved in Brown's scheme. . . [he] had enormous praise for Brown's plan to invade the South and liberate the slaves," but he considered himself more effective as a writer and speaker than as a warrior (Stauffer 2001, 247). Brown and his accomplices did not just kill the slaveholders they captured, but they also dismembered hands and ears and fingers in a move reminiscent of the very tactics used in quelling slave disobedience and later in lynchings. It is beyond the scope of this essay to tackle the question of Douglass's rhetorical espousal of violence, but it is worthy of further attention.

Bound to images of the body to recreate himself, Douglass's text weaves together body and identity, fusing together text and self to create a new Frederick Douglass in black and white, text that remains with us today. This text of self, created from the parts of Douglass's body, has a life of its own. As Walt Whitman writes in his poem "So Long!" from *Leaves of Grass*,

*Camerado!* This is no book;  
Who touches this, touches a man;  
(Is it night? Are we here alone?)  
It is I you hold, and who holds you;  
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease  
calls me forth. (55–59)

In one way, Douglass, as Whitman's poem acknowledges, does transcend his own corporeality via the text itself, which has remained for us to read and touch long after his own body has disintegrated, a version of Douglass that surpasses the length of time his physical body roamed the earth.

## REFERENCES

- Bland, Sterling Lecater. *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and Their Fictions of Self Creation*. Westport CT: Greenwood, 2000.
- DeLombard, Jeannie. "'Eye-Witness to Cruelty': Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass's 1845 Narrative." *American Literature* 73.2 (2001): 245-275.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. Eds. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997.
- Fishburn, Katherine. *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African American Narrative*. Westport CT: Greenwood, 1997.
- Foner, Philip S., Ed. *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (Autumn 1985): 1-20.
- Henderson, Carol E. *Scarring the Black Body*. Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 2002.
- Stauffer, John. *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2004.
- Whitman, Walt. "So Long!" *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Signet Classics, 2005.
- Webster's New World Dictionary, College Ed.*, s.v. "Parse."

# THE VAMPIRES OF *TRUE BLOOD* AND BEYOND: BODIES, DESIRES, AND ADDICTIONS IN THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

DUSTY LAVOIE  
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

## Introduction: "A Highly Addictive Nature"

As Paul Gilroy tells us, "the body [is] an immediate and inescapable issue" (2006, 389).<sup>1</sup> The representation of the body is at once two *supplementary* acts: the symbolic replacement of a tangible corporeality and the presentation of that corporeality over time (Derrida 1974). Working in concert, then, bodily representation and bodily re-presentation both reflect and constitute cultural exigencies and desires to the point of making their social constructedness appear invisible, natural, even inevitable.<sup>2</sup> In Anthea Callen's words, "visual representations of the body are particularly powerful; . . . their impact is direct and immediate" (2002, 603). Studying the body's place in media, then, allows us to pull back the curtain, as it were, in order to reassess just how it is that bone, flesh, and blood come to have meaning—or meanings, at times contradictory ones to boot—in the 'social imaginary.' This collective, according to Charles Taylor, "is some picture of ourselves" (2004, 26), or "our sense of our whole predicament in time and space, among others and in history" (28). Yet the social imaginary for Taylor is more than simply 'imaginary' in its most literal sense: it "is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (2). In other words, the social imaginary involves both material acts and sociological inclinations; in the representation of the body, then, we come to understand how the body is constituted through its performative articulations and through the sense we make of such articulations.

This process of bodily representation is cyclical: what we think about who we are influences who we are and vice versa. "Deviations" from bodily normality, Richard Sennett writes, "have a curious effect of reinforcement. . . confirm[ing] the norms of the others by making clear in a striking fashion what is to be rejected" (1976, 191). Sennett's sentiments echo Michel Foucault's concept of

what he calls *biopower*, which Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explain is "a system enacted among all strata of society and effective in normalizing bodies in order to maintain relations of dominance and subordination across these strata. Power relations, he argued, establish the criteria for what gets to count as knowledge in a given society, and knowledge systems in turn produce power relations" (2009, 108-9). By retroactive extension, then, experience that is privileged begets approved knowledge, which brings about authentic experience, and so on. Vampires, then, are the ultimate abnormal deviant.

The representation of the vampiric body, with all its excesses and addictions, becomes intelligible through the same process, only it is usually mediated by another force, stance, or *sub-stance*.<sup>3</sup> The traditional substance is simply blood itself; in recent years, though, bodily representation of vampirism in media has become more complicated: now we have to consider blood as not only an addictive substance, but also one that mesmerizes, even hypnotizes, those who consume it along with those whom vampires covet. Additionally, actual narcotics (heroin, methamphetamines, and especially marijuana) have intertwined with fictional ones (alternately referred to as 'vampire blood,' 'v-juice,' and 'V') to create increasingly complex metaphors for bodily excess. Those who sympathize with vampires become 'fangers' or 'fangbangers,' labels deliberately aligned with homophobic rhetoric against 'fags' or 'fag-bangers.' This nexus of meanings and metaphors is illustrated particularly well vis-à-vis society's fascination with and horror over marijuana.

Indeed, the current popularity of vampires in film and television owes much of its rhetorical and structural mapping to the already-established rhetoric of indulgence and addiction available in the social imaginary of drugs, specifically marijuana. Granted, marijuana is not usually thought of as an addictive substance, a point even conceded

---

Dusty Lavoie, PhD, graduated from the University of Maine in 2011 and has been published in prominent academic journals, including *Film & History*; *Feminist Media Studies*; *Utopian Studies*; and *Consumption, Markets & Culture* (forthcoming). A book version of his dissertation, *Marijuanatopia?—Placing Pot Media in the U.S. Social Imaginary: Surveillance, Consumption & Pleasure*, is also forthcoming.

by most marijuana opponents, but it does hold a strong force over the rhetoric of drugs in general, where marijuana is typically thought of as participating in the 'gateway theory' of being a 'stepping stone' to harder narcotics. As Eric Schlosser writes, though, "marijuana does not create a physical dependence in its users, although it does create a psychological dependence in some" (2003, 17). This grey area gives the rhetoric of addiction the upper hand, even though pot-smokers are more likely than abstainers to later use other drugs, there has never been established a direct causal relationship. Taking up this rhetorical template, vampirism performatively uses the corporeal pleasures of marijuana as models of illicit indulgence for the vampire's urges and releases. "The body," after all, Terry Eagleton writes, "is anterior to self-interested rationality, and will force its instinctual approbations and aversions upon our social practice" (1990, 39). In other words, whether intentional or not, each of these activities—inhaling the smoke from dried marijuana leaves through a joint, bowl, or bong; and sinking one's teeth into the flesh of a living being to extract his/her blood—is performatively tied to sexual and, more specifically, to homosexual tropes of non-normative bodily insertion, the expelling or consumption of a substance, and removal of some sort.

As Marc Redfield and Janet Farrell Brodie write, desire lures with excess: "There is always desire left over; and there is always the possibility that this excessive, addictive desire—including, of course, the desire to stop desiring—comes from elsewhere: from foreign parts; from something not altogether human, a monster, a 'substance'" (2002, 14-15). Possessing corporeal excess, vampires in particular animate their desire by transgressing boundaries of flesh, skin, fluids, and even human reason to 'return,' as the word's Serbian/Slavic etymology suggests, to the life-world. Such 'revenants' are re-embodied corpses that draw vital energies from human blood to reanimate their lost souls (J. Taylor 2009, 15). Like modern-era drug users, vampires—"blood addicts" (26)—demand a constant supply of a commodified substance. This complex intersection of the superhuman, the botanical, and the sexually excessive problematizes the binaries of life/death, of nature/culture, of law/chaos, of human/nonhuman, throwing these firmly established paradigms into stark relief.

There are various performative levels of evil and moral transgression across the vampire figures in the following artifacts, so much so that it seems that marijuana can now be invoked within vampire narratives with a conservative and/or liberal ethos, with a political and/or romantic slant, with willful debauchery and/or tenuous asceticism, with utopian and/or spiritual elements, with physiological and/or psychological effects, and participating in a general rhetoric encompassing the self-gratifying performance of desire. Donna Haraway asks rhetorically, "since when does one get to choose which vampire will trouble one's dreams?" (2004, 285). It seems that that time is now in terms of popular media. Today, there are three main types of vampire figures: *sensitive*, *paradigmatic*, and *animalistic*. Therefore, we will look at 1) the *sensitive vampire* as it appears in HBO's *True Blood* (2008-present), where the

vampire suitor Bill is full of angst and self-asceticism (although he consumes ersatz TruBlood), along with a smattering of romantic melodrama; 2) the *paradigmatic vampire* in *The Lost Boys* franchise (1987, 2008, 2010): mainstreamed, easy on the eyes, but still bloodthirsty; and 3) the non-linguistic *animalistic vampire* in *30 Days of Night* (2007) and *I Am Legend* (2007): more creature or zombie than human. These are performative lenses whereby levels of vampirism [sensitive < paradigmatic < animalistic] almost precisely line up with levels of sinful drug use [abstinence < consumption < addiction]. In this way, media can call upon marijuana's entire countercultural legacy, aesthetics, and ethos on a scale from five songs and a character's name in *I Am Legend* to a cornucopia of pot in the bacchanalian *topos* of *True Blood*: in other words, from invoked to smoked. The accessible *utopia* of marijuana in the social imaginary enables the intertwining of blood, sex, addiction, pleasure, and death.

### "Some Serious Shit": Vampiric Excess and Addiction in Film and TV

The rhetoric of vampirism subsumes that of marijuana in its articulation of compulsive, consumptive excess. Both rhetorics traffic in the same realm of hedonistic pleasure of the *pharmakon* (remedy/poison) that germinates into a *pharmakos* (scapegoat) for fears of difference and Otherness.<sup>5</sup> Vampires, Haraway writes, are "those toothy creatures who pollute the blood of the normal [and] remind us of the infectious association of Jews, lesbians, intellectuals, foreigners, and other deviants in Western culture. Vampires remind us why alliances to defeat normalization remain crucial" (2004, 5).<sup>6</sup> Echoing that sentiment, Milly Williamson writes that in the social imaginary, "the vampire is a voraciously sexual woman, and a hyper-sexual African, a hypnotic Jewish invader, an effeminate or homosexual man" (2005, 1). Excess and abnormality indeed function as a marker of cultural difference, even to the point of unnaturalness and non-humanness: "Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations" Haraway (37) points out.

Similarly, Richard Dyer locates "the mesmeri[z]ingly excessive vampire" (1997, 222) as a primarily white fear: "The idea of whites as both themselves dead and as bringers of death is commonly hinted at in horror literature and film." He goes on: "The vampire's bite, so evidently a metaphor for sexuality, is debilitating unto death, just as white people fear sexuality if it is allowed to get out of control (out from under the will)—yet, like the vampire, they need it. The vampire is the white man or woman in the grip of a libidinal need s/he cannot master. In the act of vampirism, white society (the vampire) feeds off itself (his/her victims) and threatens to destroy itself" (222). The desires, fears, and obsessions of the public mind of any society manifest into scapegoating (*pharmakos*), with 'monsters' of all kinds—vampires, minorities, homosexuals, as well as addicts to blood and other poisons/drugs (*pharmakon*)—filling the void where logic, rationality, and even common sense fall short.<sup>7</sup> As explained earlier, these 'monsters' have manifested most coherently into three

groups: *sensitive/abstinent*, *paradigmatic/consumptive*, and *animalistic/addicted*.<sup>8</sup>

### The Sensitive/Abstinent Vampire: *True Blood*

According to Margaret L. Carter, the contemporary creation of the *sensitive vampire* coincides with societal changes concerning authority and rebellion (1997). Similarly, Carol A. Senf writes how "changing attitudes toward authority and toward rebellion against that authority have...led to a more sympathetic treatment of the vampire" (1988, 150). A complex and sustained exploration of the vampire-drug metaphor, trope, and plot device comes in the HBO series *True Blood* (2008-present), which features a human-vampire-werewolf triangle (in Season 3 and on). An adaptation of Charlaire Harris's Southern Vampire Mysteries series by Alan Ball, *True Blood* is an "intoxicating," sometimes-Campy, Emmy-winning drama starring Anna Paquin, Stephen Moyer, Alexander Skarsgård, Ryan Kwanten, and others. Even the act of watching the series has been described as addictive: "It's like crack," says Moyer. . . 'You just want to do one more. One more hit'" (Stack 2010, 46, 44).<sup>9</sup>

The *sensitive vampire* (Bill) is threatened by a hierarchical takeover by *paradigmatic vampires* (Eric, Godric, the Queen, Russell Edgington). Meanwhile, many vampires in *True Blood*, especially Bill, sustain their urges by drinking a synthetic replacement for human blood ironically called 'TruBlood.' This means that Bill's construction of evil excess wavers between the *sensitive vampire* and the *paradigmatic vampire*, depending on the authenticity of the synthetic TruBlood. Simultaneously, marijuana is occasionally smoked onscreen, but is more often invoked, making up part of the larger performance of vampirism. And since the vampires themselves consume blood as a drug, however synthetic, their construction of excess is [abstinence < consumption < addiction], where artificial consumption qualifies their evil as less in some ways than those who continue to kill or turn humans to satiate their bodily needs.

The show mostly centers on good-hearted white waitress Sookie Stackhouse (Paquin) and her relationship with Bill Compton (Moyer), an old-fashioned suitor whom a more indulgent vampire calls "everyone's favorite buzz-kill" in "Mine" (episode 1.3). Vampire Bill hails from the Civil War era; a superior of Bill's named Eric Northman (Skarsgård) also covets Sookie's affection, but she has the ability to resist the hypnotic "glamour" of the vampire's seductive stare. Sookie, a telepathic (and, she later learns, a faerie), hears everyone's awful thoughts except those of vampires, so her union with Bill is symbolically and literally balanced, at least temporarily. In some ways, TruBlood is freeing for the *sensitive vampire* who wants to separate his needs (blood) from his desires (sex). By drinking the copy—the *simulacra*<sup>10</sup>—they get a more public and more real life. But, as Bruce A. McClelland writes, "we have to wonder whether the attempt to bring the vampires into the human world by encouraging them to consume TruBlood represents a drive to ensnare them in the same dependencies and lack of freedom that characterize our

society, one that many would characterize as lacking belief, trust, or a deep link to nature" (2010, 88). Is TruBlood, then, a penetration-free method of corporeally controlling this abnormal sect of the population?

At the same time, though, TruBlood brings about a freeing political atmosphere in which vampires can "come out of the coffin," an overt replication of the homosexual 'coming out of the closet.' Indeed, as many have noted, a sign bearing "GOD HATES FANGS" is prominently featured in the show's opening credits sequence, with the show drawing critical attention for its representation of homosexuality, gothic Southern Louisiana, and voodoo-like mythologies.<sup>11</sup> Vampires are hated and feared in the show as some hate and fear gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders; those who sympathize with the vampires are deemed "fangbangers." The vampires' blood, conversely, is highly desired and sold on the black market in Bon Temps ("Good Times") by a black gay man named Lafayette (later nicknamed 'La La,' a real-world colloquialism for marijuana [Cortés 2005, 25], and played by Nelson Ellis). This commodity is called 'V' and produces hallucinatory effects with a single drop on the tongue. The scenes dramatizing V's effects "are intentionally reminiscent of sixties ideas about the mind-altering benefits—and the horrific side effects of bad trips and flashbacks—of LSD and similar drugs" (McClelland 2010, 84-85).

In the episode "Sparks Fly Out" (1.5), Lafayette (who later learns he is a medium) sells V to Jason (Kwanten), Sookie's alpha dimwit of a brother, calling it "pure, undiluted, 24-karat life." Jason then experiences utopian visions with his granola girlfriend Amy (Lizzy Caplan)—producing what she calls "the deepest connection to Gaia" in "Burning House of Love" (1.7)—before she makes Jason help kill a gay vampire for more V. But the show is indeterminate about whether viewers should revel in the excess or recoil: "Here, the tones of the show become darkly dissonant. Is the viewer supposed to bliss out with the couple and recognize the vampire's subhuman or ex-human status," or is the viewer to feel remorse for their careless and torturous treatment of the vampire as victim? (Tyree 2009, 34). Later, the series finds Lafayette and his new beau Jesus (Kevin Alejandro) tripping off the same substance with vivid and disturbing hallucinatory effects. Even hard-ass cop Andy gets addicted to the stuff in Season 4, eventually hitting "rock bottom" in "Burning Down the House" (4.10). So, is vampire blood just autochthonously evil, as a sub-stance, while vampires themselves are not?<sup>12</sup>

Complicating matters throughout Season 1 is the mixing of marijuana with other stimulants and addictions: now we have vampires getting high off humans (human blood), humans getting high off vampires (vampire blood, V), and still other humans getting high off marijuana. But Bill's initial abstention from feeding off Sookie separates his pleasure/desire from his consumption/need. As J.M. Tyree notes, Bill "enjoys the pleasures of Sookie Stackhouse's neck as much as she enjoys his fangs, but he gets his sustenance out of a bottle" (2009, 37). With Sookie's permission, he later feeds from her, calling her super-

natural faerie-alien blood “delectable and intoxicating.” Sookie’s friend Tara (Rutina Wesley) indulges in pot, but her alcoholic mother often destroys any peace she might have, with Tara eventually getting an ‘exorcism’ (under the influence of the drug peyote) and conversing with her child self. Marijuana comes and goes in Season 1, though vampires do not desire it over other substances.

In Season 2, Tara moves on from the awkward shape-shifter Sam Merlotte (Sam Trammell) who is also her boss. Instead, Tara partakes in the smoking of marijuana with the handsome and mysterious Eggs (Mehcad Brooks) in the lavish surroundings of newcomer MaryAnn’s (Michelle Forbes) orgy of food, marijuana, and sex: as shapeshifting Daphne explains in “Release Me” (2.7), “it’s really just a kind of energy. Wild energy, like lust, anger, excess, violence. Basically all the fun stuff.” At one point, all of the town’s hung-over inhabitants cannot remember anything from the previous night. Tara and Eggs entertain the idea that the marijuana they had smoked the night before may have caused them to black out and possibly do bad things. Tara comes to doubt that that is the case, but Eggs persists: “MaryAnn’s weed is some serious shit.” Their bodily performances unknown, Tara and Eggs anxiously seek out what they have done in the night.

Indeed, MaryAnn is later revealed to be a maenad deriving from Dionysus and is responsible for turning the entire town of Bon Temps into a marijuana-fueled, carnal bacchanalia where the excess construction is [abstinence < consumption < addiction], almost to the point of performative animalism. In “Beyond Here Lies Nothin” (2.12), the guilt-ridden town succumbs into scapegoating (*pharmakos*), blaming anyone and anything besides themselves—aliens, pharmaceutical companies, the liberal media, mind control experiments involving LSD—for their excessive ways and pleasures. The scapegoating becomes literal as Sam almost becomes MaryAnn’s sacrifice to her deities. A ludicrously outfitted Jason eventually confuses the mesmerized townsfolk into thinking he is the God MaryAnn summoned and subsequently requests their submission. They finally break MaryAnn’s hypnotic hold over them, but Season 3 finds werewolves, higher-up vampire kings and queens, shamans, and faeries all playing roles as marijuana, human blood, vampire blood (V), and even locally-run methamphetamine operations (by a pack of were-panthers) all coalesce around various supernatural tropes and mythologies connecting rhetorics of performative, carnal, pleasurable, and sexual excess. As one character puts it in “And When I Die” (4.12), marijuana is “Mother Nature’s Valium.”

By Season 4, witches enter the picture, whom Sookie calls “hippies” in “I’m Alive and On Fire” (4.4). Head witch Marnie (Fiona Shaw) wreaks havoc on Bon Temps from a secret headquarters (one that bears a pot leaf-covered screen) protected through sorcery and sows the anti-vampire insurgency during the Festival of Tolerance and its drug-like slogan of “Just Say No to Hate” in “Run” (4.9). Witchcraft bears connections to marijuana as well. As Michael Pollan explains, “witches and sorcerers cultivated

plants with the power to ‘cast spells’—in our vocabulary, ‘psychoactive’ plants. . . . [The] ingredients would be combined in a hempseed-oil-based ‘flying ointment’ that the witches would then administer vaginally using a special dildo. . . the ‘broomstick’ by which these women were said to travel” (2001, 119). As Pollan continues, “the fact that witches and sorcerers were the first Europeans to exploit the psychoactive properties of cannabis probably sealed its fate in the West as a drug identified with feared outsiders and cultures conceived in opposition: pagans, Africans, hippies. The two stories fed each other and in turn the plant’s power: people who smoked cannabis were Other, and the cannabis they smoked threatened to let their Otherness loose in the land” (174).

In their bodily Otherness, vampirism and marijuana both problematize the binary of matter/spirit: “As the sorcerers, shamans, and alchemists who used them understood, psychoactive plants stand on the threshold of matter and spirit, at the point where simple distinctions between the two no longer hold” (Pollan, 152). Indeed, “drugs bring out the intricate complexities of a vast chemical economy, a meshwork of reactions and syntheses connecting humans and animals with the most innocent molecular processes of plants” (Plant 1999, 215). Additionally, they “shape the laws and write the very rules they break, they scramble all the codes and raise the stakes of desire and necessity, euphoria and pain, normality, perversion, truth, and artifice again” (266). Marijuana is but one substance that can lead to epiphanic enlightenment or addictive excess: “What’s interesting about a plant like marijuana is that it takes us right up to that frontier and may have something to teach us about what lies on the other side” (Pollan, 152). It also teaches us about what lies on this side, ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

### The Paradigmatic/Consumptive Vampire: *The Lost Boys* Trilogy

In the three *Lost Boys* films (1987, 2008, 2010), abstinence turns into consumption which turns into addiction.<sup>14</sup> In the first, teens become initiated into a cult of *paradigmatic vampires*, while others choose to become vampire-hunters instead. The *paradigmatic vampire* might be romantically inclined as is the *sensitive vampire*, but consumes human blood for the most part, rarely resembling the *animalistic vampire*. The moral dilemmas of the 1980s conservative platform concerned itself with what it deemed excessive in America: youth drop-outs, juvenile delinquents, and drug-users, let alone vampires. Indeed, “beginning in the 1980s, the vampire became the symbol of choice for ‘issues’—feminism, drug addiction, and AIDS” (Jensen, Amoroso, and Yi 2009, 24), evident especially in Tony Scott’s *The Hunger* (1983) based on the book of the same name by Whitley Strieber (1981).

Yet, as Nina Auerbach informs us, this drug-vampire metaphor, made commercially viable in *The Lost Boys* (dir. Joel Schumacher), was long-brewing. In 1958, “Peter Cushing’s Van Helsing noted slyly that vampirism was ‘similar to addiction to drugs,’ a titillating possibility in the psychedelic age that was dawning. The lost boys of 1987,

dull-eyed, stunted, and pale, . . . are so burned out that the antidrug message of official culture seems to have stifled *all* transformations [such that] the metamorphoses of 1980s vampires are a cautionary warning, not an expansion of possibilities” (1995, 167, emphasis original). It is easy to cast *The Lost Boys* as conservative, especially, as Auerbach notes, considering its valuation of the traditional nuclear family in lieu of the nomadic vampires and delinquents. Indeed, the film, directed by Joel Schumacher, follows the exploits of a group of troublemaking teenagers with nothing much better to do (Nicola Nixon 1997). As Rob Latham writes, the film presents “a confused and confusing domain of fun and danger, of surveillance and subversion, and the teens peopling it a volatile mix of hybridized subcultures, parading around to the discomfiture of the baffled adults” (1997, 146). In fact, it may seem that while the “blood-junkies” (Nixon 1997, 126) demonstrate how having “bad fun may *seem* distinctly tempting,” it is an “appeal [that] is transitory,” and “we should not succumb to its addictive allure. Nancy Reagan’s advice was, after all, ‘Just Say No’” (128).

However, the lines of good and evil are not as stark and immovable as first appears in the world of *The Lost Boys* as Nixon would have it. Here, vampires can be returned to their normative human state if their pack’s head vampire is killed. This enables a gradation of evil/sin that is always foreclosing finality: salvation may shine through for these addicts [abstinence < consumption < addiction]. Still, sunlight is a problem, so the night serves as the backdrop for most of the film and its tagline: “Party all night. Sleep all day. Never grow old. Never die. It’s fun to be a vampire.” And in this nightlife, as Auerbach points out, “the newcomer Michael [Jason Patric] is initiated into hallucinations like those of a bad drug trip” (1995, 167). With irony, Michael’s plight reaches an end when his hippie grandfather takes down the dreaded undead: the disestablishmentarianism of the counterculture ultimately thwarts vampirism.

That conflation of vampirism and drugs’ bohemian edge is made more explicit in the second film, *The Tribe* (dir. P. J. Pesce), in which all of the excessive shenanigans in the narrative are comically misinterpreted by the boys’ mother at the end of the film as being the natural results of messing around with marijuana. Thinking quickly, the boys allow her to believe exactly that, since the punishment for cavorting with vampires would naturally be worse than that for smoking marijuana. On the spectrum of evil, the boys internally reason that any mother would tolerate pot-smoking adolescents over blood-sucking ones. Comically, then, accepting the authoritarian response that invokes the rhetoric of marijuana as a ‘gateway drug’ is less intolerable for the boys than accepting a more apocalyptic, fire and brimstone type of response. Here, the boys have to settle for the middle position on the evil of excess spectrum: [abstinence < consumption < addiction]. They are not addicts, but they no longer have the option of claiming abstinence, so they neutralize the mother’s accusation by validating its premises, however untrue they may be.

Finally, in the third film in the series, *The Thirst* (dir. Dario Piana), Edgar Frog (Corey Feldman), smoking marijuana from a pipe while driving in a marijuana T-shirt, finds out that a far more sinister threat—a “designer drug” made from vampire blood known as “the thirst” (like *True Blood*’s ‘V’)—is being disseminated at emo-goth-punk raves worldwide. Seeing ‘the thirst’ as more socially destructive than his own marijuana ab/use, Edgar asks, “Why would I care about a bunch of drug addicts with glow sticks?” The vamps’ performative desires, however, are soon staked after the alpha of the pack, while monologuing about *I Am Legend*, is finally killed. The gradation of evil excess represented in *The Thirst* as an irresistible designer drug has therefore moved this series forward yet again: [abstinence < consumption < addiction]. It appears there is no turning back for the truly evil addicts: vampires.

### The Animalistic/Addicted Vampire: *30 Days of Night* and *I Am Legend*

Two 2007 dystopian horror-thrillers feature marijuana tropes in their *animalistic vampires* [abstinence < consumption < addiction], the first based on a popular graphic novel by Steve Niles (2002) and the second on Richard Matheson’s four-time-adapted post-apocalyptic novel (1954). Starring Josh Hartnett and Will Smith, respectively, *30 Days of Night* and *I Am Legend* conceptualize the *animalistic vampire* and supernatural dystopia as performatively connected in different ways to the potentially liberating forces of drugs, implicitly yet significantly specifying marijuana as the substance of choice and the bodily plague of cancer as more dangerous.<sup>15</sup> Marijuana plays a seemingly tangential yet actually pivotal role in these films.

*30 Days of Night* (dir. David Slade) is set in Alaska during one of its legendary annual dark periods. It features *animalistic vampires* as posthuman, cannibalistic hunters who roam darkened corners of the world in packs and speak in a guttural clicking language that evokes nearly alien physiognomy. This kind of vampire certainly resides on the addictive end of the spectrum and is therefore the most evil. As the vampires continue to pluck the protagonists off, an elderly character’s medical marijuana grow-lamps temporarily stave off the attack. This affords the others a few precious moments to escape, and while the use of marijuana in the film is limited to this seeming plot convenience, it actually highlights the strong synecdochic irony of using a dying woman’s marijuana grow-lamps lights on a pack of invading vampires. A plant and its accoutrements have briefly trumped the excessively abominable undead; it is a particular performative structure that seems fleeting but actually binds much of the narrative and scenes together, showing us how versatile marijuana is and how much work it can do even within just this one genre of media.

*I Am Legend* (dir. Francis Lawrence) takes place in post-apocalyptic New York City, where one scientist, Dr. Robert Neville (Will Smith), believes himself to be the last remaining human among the zombie-like *animalistic vampires* that prowl in the night. Dr. Neville, accompanied

only by his faithful dog Sam (an intertextual tie to *True Blood*), enjoys listening to Bob Marley, whose Rastafarian-inspired racial utopianism provides him strength and encouragement in the lonely desolation of a post-outbreak world that only echoes its previous vitality.<sup>16</sup> This marijuanatopian invocation, called upon directly through the use of five Bob Marley songs in the film's soundtrack, also helps create a sense of metonymic nostalgia for the hopefulness of the past, a past that featured Dr. Neville's family (including a daughter significantly named Marley played by Smith's real-life daughter Willow), a pre-Fall era, and an entire countercultural ethos that now seems like a long-forgotten dream. That world was one in which the progress of science had not yet backfired on humanity, a material irony made palpable in the film's opening moments as we learn that the original virus was a side effect of a cancer-curing synthetic pharmaceutical drug.

In the face of evil abominations, a simple green plant has triumphed yet again; this results in the synecdochic spiritual consumption of marijuana through music, along with the political ethos therefrom, which enable the protagonist to mentally get away from the post-human landscape he believes covers the entire Earth, remembering instead the hopefulness and beauty of a dream of racial harmony, a *utopic* developed alongside marijuana. Explaining Marley's Rastafarian vision to another person he finally comes across, Dr. Neville says:

He had this idea. It was kind of a virologist idea. He believed that you could cure racism and hate... literally cure it, by injecting music and love into people's lives. When he was scheduled to perform at a peace rally, a gunman came to his house and shot him down. Two days later he walked out on that stage and sang. When they asked him why, he said, "The people... who were trying to make this world worse... are not taking a day off. How can I? Light up the darkness."

### Conclusion: "Delectable and Intoxicating"

These artifacts demonstrate how marijuana has gone from barely one-liner status in media to the full-on bodily excess of *True Blood* and its ilk. Gradations of evil allow audiences to enjoy multiple types of vampire with various levels of sin, fear, or transgression. Along with marijuana, other drugs (some real, such as heroin or meth, and some fantastical, such as 'V' or 'the thirst') have been invoked or invented according to theme, genre, and tone. This has led to a performative outlet whereby invoking marijuana is now not only a means of calling upon its propagandistic history and utopian characteristics, but is also a discursive, metonymic capacity for drawing in other kinds and levels of drugs, excesses, addictions, and pleasures. The voracious discourse of vampirism, so popular in today's media, has demonstrated how even a sub-stance as socially and politically polarizing as marijuana can become co-opted and absorbed into a larger rhetorical frame within the social imaginary as a meaningful performative articulation of narrative or thematic stances for multiple audiences.

These changes—which have broadened the rhetoric of addiction to re-consider the body, desire, pleasure, and excess—portend a volatile, and potentially limitless future for marijuana's representation in the public imagination.

Indeed, vampirism's contemporary ties to marijuana have created a cultural outlet whereupon the drug has the potential to shed its historical legacy of moral panic and instead be utilized as a handy and meaningful articulation of various narrative and thematic stances. That the pleasures and excesses of drugs line up nicely with those of vampiric addictions to blood is more than convenient; it is a salient and often-used device in the development of compelling narratives that enact the monstrous and connect with pop culture consumers. Audiences' savvy relationships with marijuana make the current vampire trend in film and TV a particularly visible site of their comfort with this drug's utopian/dystopian signification. In this way, the pleasures of marijuana are invoked and smoked—at times explicitly over-the-top and at others made nearly invisible by the drug's omniscience—as a master trope available for work within larger rhetorics of the representation of vampirism and bodily excess in the modern social imaginary. In Stuart Hall's words, "the body has become the site of a new kind of disciplinary regime" (1977/1997, 51).

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the input of his Dissertation Committee Advisor, Dr. Nathan Stormer, whose input was essential in the transformation of this chapter into a stand-alone article. He also thanks the other four members of his Committee, especially Dr. Laura Lindenfeld, in whose course this essay was born. Finally, he thanks the editor of *Proteus* and the anonymous reviewers who aided in its completion, as well as his wife and children for their undying support and encouragement.

### END NOTES

1. All heading quotations are taken from dialogue in episodes of HBO's *True Blood* (2008-present).
2. See M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984, originally published 1965; M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977, originally published 1975; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 2, trans. R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978, originally published 1976; J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 4th ed. New York: Routledge Classics, 1990; Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993; R. Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997; Butler, *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004; and J. Loxley, *Performativity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
3. See K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950; and W. B. Durham, "Kenneth Burke's Concept of Substance," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 no. 4 (1980): 351-364.
4. See L. Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. R. A. Vollrath. Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press International, 1984.

5. See J. Derrida, "The Pharmakon," in *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1981, originally published 1972, 95-119.
6. See R. Krishnaswamy, "The Economy of Colonial Desire," in *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, ed. R. Adams and D. Savran. Malden MA: Blackwell, 2002, 292-317.
7. See K. A. Ono and J. M. Sloop, *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002.
8. Other current media with varying levels of vampirism not analyzed here include the CW's *Supernatural* (2005-present), SyFy's *Moonlight* (2007-2008), the CW's *The Vampire Diaries* (2008-present), SyFy's *Being Human* (2011-present), and MTV's *Death Valley* (2011-present), while the CW's *The Secret Circle* (2011-present) connects drugs to witchcraft in "Witness" (1.12) and "Medallion" (1.13), in which witch Faye is tempted by a "dealer" to try an illicit substance called "Devil's Spirit" to increase her individual powers over the shared power of the connected Circle members. Especially in *Supernatural*, entire rhetorics of addiction, intervention, and absolution are called upon and utilized as realistic-yet-fantastic elements of this supernatural melodrama. Such use is convenient, entertaining, and possibly transgressive in its construction of pleasure, desire, and drug-related excess as it relates to the place of pot in the social imaginary. The overarching storyline arc of the seven seasons of *Supernatural* thus far is that twenty-something brothers Sam and Dean Winchester (Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles) fulfill their slain father's role of hunting demons, ghosts, witches, angels, and vampires.

There are several episodes of *Supernatural*, in fact, that deal specifically with vampires (1.20, 2.3, 3.7, 4.21, and 6.5, a *Twilight* parody of sorts [see note 13]). As just one extended example demonstrates, marijuana becomes tightly associated with subversive post-apocalyptic dread, zombism, and irony in "The End" (5.4) wherein the popular character of cantankerous and awkward angel Castiel (Misha Collins), who joins Sam and Dean in the fight against Armageddon, enjoys a striking change of personality. In the episode, Dean is transported to 2014 where the world has succumbed to a Croatoan virus transferred through contact with blood. All this, the angel Zachariah tells Dean, will not have to come to pass, if only Dean would forgive Sam his druggy (bloody) transgressions and rejoin the fight to stave off the End of Days in the present time. It is in this rubble-strewn dystopia that the angel Castiel has taken up a lifestyle and personality altogether different from his usual uptight angel shtick. He is now a stoner leader of a small coven of spiritual and sexual groupies, complete with beaded curtains and mystical mumbo jumbo about "shared perception." It is through such contemplation, Castiel says, that we might grasp our small role as "one compartment in that dragonfly eye, the group mind." The women are then excused to "get washed up for the orgy," and Dean, thrust into this possible but preventable future, is understandably confused. "What are you, a hippie?" he asks. Castiel supplies a knowingly cliché disestablishmentarian stoner response: "I thought you'd gotten over trying to label me." Dean explains the dire situation to Castiel, but the angel-turned-druggy just laughs and says "no dice." Dean responds, "what are you, stoned?" The response: "Generally, yeah. . . . That's just how I roll."

Finally, Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows* (2012), an update of the 1966-71 gothic soap opera, has his staple star, Johnny Depp (Barnabas Collins), arisen from the 1700s to the 1970s, comically confusing "being stoned" (on drugs) with "being stoned" (by way of hurled rocks). Interestingly, with this series, its two '70s film adaptations, its failed '90s revival, and this re-imagining all being set in Maine, the franchise joins the other vampire media artifacts studied here as all being geographically placed at the absolute edges of the nation: *True Blood* (Louisiana), *The Lost Boys* (California), *30 Days of Night* (Alaska), and *I Am Legend* (an empty New York City).

9. *True Blood's* ratings have risen considerably since its modest debut of 1.44 million viewers. The average viewership for the show's four seasons is as follows: S1: 2.00 million, S2: 4.28 million, S3 and S4: 4.97 million. Its high point was "Let's Get Out of Here" (4.9) at 5.53 million viewers (all figures available at TVbytheNumbers.com). At the end of one of S3's episodes, known marijuana connoisseur and hip hop artist Snoop Doggy Dogg unveiled his "Oh Sookie" video, which contained more than a few witty-yet-still-gangsta analogies between "true blood" and "true bud."
10. See J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton, and P. Beitchman. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1983; and Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S. F. Glaser. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1994, originally published 1981.
11. See Dyer, "Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism," in *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender, and Popular Fiction*, ed. Susannah Radstone. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988, 47-72; Dyer, "Dracula and Desire," *Sight and Sound* January, 1993:8-15; H. M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*. New York: Manchester UP, 1997; Benshoff, "Secrets, Closets, and Corridors Through Time: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender Through *Dark Shadows*," in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*, ed. C. Harris and A. Alexander. Cresskill NJ: Hampton, 1998, 199-218; P. Brace and R. Arp, "Coming Out of the Coffin and Coming Out of the Closet," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 93-108; J. Culver, "Dressing Up and Playing Human: Vampire Assimilation in the Human Playground," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 19-31; W. M. Curtis, "'Honey, If We Can't Kill People, What's the Point of Being a Vampire?': Can Vampires Be Good Citizens?," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 65-78; R. Hirschbein, "Sookie, Sigmund, and the Edible Complex," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 123-135; and McClelland, 2010.
12. See A. Blayde and G. A. Dunn, "Pets, Cattle, and Higher Life Forms on *True Blood*," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 33-48; K. J. Corn and Dunn, "Let the Bon Temps Roll: Sacrifice, Scapegoats, and Good Times," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 139-155; S. Peppers-Bates and J. Rust, "A Vampire's Heart Has Its Reasons That Scientific Naturalism Can't Understand," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 187-201; and A. Terjesen and J. Terjesen, "Are Vampires Unnatural?," in *True Blood and Philosophy*, 157-173.
13. Another popular vampire series I cannot explore in depth here is *The Twilight Saga* (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012). Here, the *sensitive vampire* Edward tells protagonist Bella that he is so magnetically addicted to her that he cannot control his bodily impulses, telling her that "you're like my own personal brand of heroin," supplying a ready-made drug-blood simile for uninitiated viewers. Similarly, Bella has obsessive pangs for Edward and later Jacob to the extent that she can barely function otherwise, hardly a feminist role model (see D. Lavoie, "No, Not That *Twilight*": The Comic Critique of Gendered/Raced Identity, Politics, Pedagogy, and Performance," *Feminist Media Studies* 10, no. 3 [2010]: 364-367). The storyline eventually culminates in *Breaking Dawn: Part I* and *Part II* (dir. Bill Condon), finally having Bella a) accept Edward's old-fashioned wedding proposal; b) end their abstinence in proper Christian fashion; c) spawn a vampire/human hybrid known as the *dhampir* (J. Taylor, *Vampires*, 71-73) whom they name Renesmee (after its grandmothers); and d) convince Edward to turn her to a vampire lest she die from the abnormal childbirth. Additionally, the wedding invitation in *Breaking Dawn: Part I* reveals that the Cullens reside at 420 Woodcroft Ave. ("4:20," of course, is the time of day notoriously indicative of pot-smoking [see B. Mikkelsen, "420," <Snopes.com> {13 June 2008} <http://www.snopes.com/language/stories/420.asp>]). Finally, *The Twilight Saga* has proven very popular at the box office, with a current worldwide gross of \$2.5 billion with one installment left.

14. *The Lost Boys*, released around the same time as another vampire flick, *Near Dark* (dir. Kathryn Bigelow), made \$32 million in 1987, equivalent to about \$65 million in 2012 dollars. The sequels, rather fittingly, were direct-to-disc.
15. Worldwide, *30 Days of Night* made \$76 million, while *I Am Legend* took in \$585 million.
16. Rastafarianism, Dick Hebdige writes, is a form of spirituality in which an “essentially religious perspective is transmuted into a utopian-existentialist one [in which] ganja is sacred.” He argues that “reggae resists definition [and] is inherently subversive.” Hebdige, “Reggae, Rastas, and Rudies,” in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson. London: Hutchinson, 1976, 137-9, 147.

## REFERENCES

- Auerbach, Nina. *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995.
- Ball, Alan, dev. *True Blood*. LA, CA, MI (USA): Your Face Goes Here Entertainment; Home Box Office, 2008-present. Television series.
- Callen, Anthea. “Ideal Masculinities: An Anatomy of Power” In *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, 603-616. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Carter, Margaret L. “The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction.” In *Blood Read*, Gordon and Hollinger, eds., 27-44.
- Cortés, Robert. *It’s Just a Plant*. Brooklyn NY: Magic Propaganda Mill, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. “. . . That Dangerous Supplement. . . .” In *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997, originally published in 1974.
- Dunn, George A., and Rebecca Housel, eds. *True Blood and Philosophy: We Wanna Think Bad Things With You*. Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
- Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Gilroy, Paul. “British Cultural Studies and the Pitfalls of Identity.” In *Media and Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, 381-395. Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006.
- Gordon, Joan, and Veronica Hollinger, eds. *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- Hall, Stuart. “The Work of Representation.” In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. S. Hall, 13-64. Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE, 1977/1997.
- Haraway, Donna. *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Jensen, Jeff, Christina Amoroso, and David Yi, “Hungry for Vampires.” *Entertainment Weekly* 1059 (7 August 2009): 23-33.
- Latham, Rob. “Consuming Youth: The Lost Boys Cruise Mallworld.” In *Blood Read*, Gordon and Hollinger, eds., 129-147.
- Lawrence, Francis, dir. *I Am Legend*. NY, CA, NJ (USA): Warner Bros. Pictures, 2007. Film.
- McClelland, Bruce A. “Un-True Blood: The Politics of Artificiality.” In *True Blood and Philosophy: We Wanna Think Bad Things With You*, ed. George A. Dunn and Rebecca Housel, 79-90. Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
- Nixon, Nicola. “When Hollywood Sucks, or, Hungry Girls, Lost Boys, and Vampirism in the Age of Reagan.” In *Blood Read*, Gordon and Hollinger, eds., 115-128.

- Pesce, P. J., dir. *Lost Boys: The Tribe*. CA (USA), Canada: Warner Home Video, 2008. DVD/Blu-ray.
- Piana, Dario, dir. *Lost Boys: The Thirst*. South Africa: Warner Home Video, 2010. Blu-ray.
- Plant, Sadie. *Writing on Drugs*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
- Pollan, Michael. *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World*. New York: Random House, 2001.
- Redfield, Marc and Janet Farrell Brodie, introduction to *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*, ed. J.F. Brodie and M. Redfield. Berkeley. Univ. of California Press, 2002.
- Schlosser, Eric. *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Schumacher, Joel, dir. *The Lost Boys*. AB, CA (USA): Warner Bros. Pictures, 1987. Film.
- Senf, Carol A. *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular Press, 1988.
- Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Norton, 1976, originally published 1974.
- Slade, David, dir. *30 Days of Night*. New Zealand: Ghost House Pictures; Columbia Pictures, 2007. Film.
- Stack, Tim. “There Will Be Blood.” *Entertainment Weekly* 1107 (18 June 2010): 41-47.
- Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. London: Duke UP, 2004.
- Taylor, Joules. *Vampires*. New York: Octopus Books USA, 2009.
- Tyree, J. M. “Warm-Blooded: *True Blood* and *Let the Right One In*.” *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 2, 2009, 31-37.
- Williamson, Milly. *The Lure of Vampire: Gender, Fiction, and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. London: Wallflower, 2005.

# DOCILE CHORISTERS AND THE “CHOIR MACHINE”: A SEARCH FOR AGENCY IN “CHOIR”

JULIET HESS  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

*Choral pedagogy is more interested in the production of music, than in those who produce it.* (Patricia Ann O’Toole)

As a long-time chorister, the above statement both resonates with me and deeply troubles me. I encountered O’Toole’s work for the first time while pursuing my Master’s, having spent twenty odd years participating in choirs by that time. Choir was always a place where I felt a part of something bigger than myself. It was also a place where I often felt completely restrained and frequently erased as an intelligent musician, my will subjugated to that of the conductor’s. After years of operating under that oppressive conductor/chorister power relation, I began to wonder how “choir” as it currently stands might be interrupted. Throughout my years in choir, there were always interpolated glimpses of other possibilities—possibilities where the music became something that contained an “I,” possibilities of agency in choral music education. My musician self craved more of those moments. It was at that point I discovered the work of Patricia O’Toole.

Patricia O’Toole is a feminist poststructuralist in music education. Her dissertation, *Redirecting the Choral Classroom: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis of Power Relations within Three Choral Settings* (1994), was groundbreaking work in the area of choral music education. She uses Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977) to both analyze power relations in the choral setting and to experiment with ways of breaking traditional notions and structures of “choir.” Her dissertation examines power relations in three choirs, focusing specifically on the exterior forms of power and the way that they function in the choral classroom. My task with this article is to extend O’Toole’s project, directing my attention away from the exterior forms of power that she identifies and focusing on the interior forms of power. I begin with an introduction of the forms of power that O’Toole identifies in traditional choral pedagogy. I then explore Foucault’s (1994a) concept of governmentality and its functioning within choir. Following this investi-

gation, I critique the three projects O’Toole undertook in her dissertation and continue her work by incorporating Foucault’s (1994a) notions of governmentality. From there, I experiment with possibilities for extending her project and thinking through alternative approaches to “choir,” approaches that foster agency in choristers. Ultimately, I suggest the potential for disrupting the notion of choir altogether—a notion in which I remain deeply invested. The choir to which I refer here is that of the Western European tradition of choral music: the choral music of notation and choral scores, conductors and choristers, and late “great” composers.

O’Toole identifies several tenets of traditional choral pedagogy which she aims to trouble in her three projects. She makes a particularly compelling argument comparing the “architecture” of choir to Bentham’s Panopticon whereby the situating of the director induces in choristers a “state of self-conscious and permanent visibility that assured the automatic functioning of power” (O’Toole 1994, 68, citing Foucault 1977, 201). Aside from the architecture, O’Toole (1994) also addresses a number of other prevalent features of traditional choral pedagogy that tip the balance of choral power relations away from the choristers. She identifies the hierarchical system of music that places someone with a conducting degree, for example, ahead of someone who loves to sing. This hierarchy is based solely on the conductor’s possession of “institutionally valued skills” such as sight-reading and ear-training (O’Toole 1997, 132). This valuing system ultimately privileges the director’s knowledge above the singers’ knowledge, grants him/her the power and authority to make all of the musical decisions, and also unilaterally control the use of rehearsal time. This privileging of knowledge affirms the director’s central location in the choir and his/her role as the primary decision-maker. Additionally, the Foucauld-

Juliet Hess is currently enrolled in the PhD program in the department of Sociology and Equity Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, where she focuses on music education that challenges dominant paradigms. She teaches music to generalist teachers in the pre-service program at the University of Toronto and a course on issues in world music at Ryerson University.

ian notion of “individualization,” which “maintains power by sorting individuals according to the demands of the system” (O’Toole 1997, 132 citing Foucault 1979, 141),<sup>1</sup> applies to the choral sorting of individuals by voice type, voice quality and musical skills, with little or no attention to their needs or social histories. Finally, the majority of choral programs concern themselves more with the final performance than the process, which reinforces traditional notions of choral pedagogy about efficient uses of time and unilateral decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

These structures of traditional choral architecture, the central location and privileging of the director’s knowledge, individualization, and product-orientation are those that O’Toole (1994) identifies as the structures of traditional choral pedagogy, but how are these structures enacted? Liz Garnett (2005) suggests specific rehearsal practices maintain them and it is choral conducting texts that disseminate these rehearsal practices. She examines in detail the way that choral conductors’ texts provide technologies to choral conductors to discipline their choristers in particular ways across a range of categories, disciplining the choral conductors to conform to a set of expectations in the process. According to Garnett,

[t]he taxonomy of choral craft centres on a handful of key categories: vocal production (posture, breathing, placement); diction (vowel shape, enunciation of consonants, accent); choral ensemble (blend, intonation, precision); and performance (visual presentation; stage decorum). (2005, 252)

All of these categories require disciplining. Garnett suggests this disciplining takes place through specific boundaries between choral behaviour designated as “correct” and conversely “incorrect.” The first category she identifies is that of bodily control: the desirable and undesirable attributes of the choral singer—what is, quite literally, physically acceptable choral behaviour. The second category refers to social identities such as class, educational level, and regionality. This category particularly manifests in diction and in the ways that actions, such as using the “King’s English” in choir, foster a middle class sensibility. Finally, she examines the way that texts define acceptable choral practices in relation to other genres (i.e. popular music, “world music,”<sup>3</sup> musicals). Terminology in choral methods texts that identify “world music” as an “influx” into choral repertoire is value-laden terminology that clearly indicates a bias towards the Western classical canon (261). Aligning oneself as a chorister within these categories involves presenting yourself in a particular way. Bodily control involves physically sitting straight on the edge of your chair, one foot slightly ahead of the other, with your feet flat on the floor, holding your music folder up, shaping your vowels a certain way in order to blend into the choir, among other things. Performing an acceptable social identity requires forming your diction in a specific way; dialects are not welcome in choir and only so-called “pure” vowels will be tolerated. Finally, one must be willing to recognize choral music as superior to “Other” forms of music. The texts that Garnett examines instruct the cho-

ral conductors in rehearsal techniques to ensure the strict policing of these boundaries and the operation of what I term the “choir machine.”

O’Toole’s analysis reveals a study of power relations from above. She has begun the important work of problematizing the naturalized concept of choir and the functioning of previously unquestioned power relations (1994). Her strategies, however, do not speak to why these power relations function as they do. Garnett’s work begins to address their functioning through exposing one of the ways in which these relations are imposed on choristers. According to Garnett, it is the conducting methods texts that provide rehearsal techniques to police the boundaries of “good choral behaviour.” Reflecting back on O’Toole’s concern with the architecture, individualization strategies, the valuing of the choral “product” (the music) over the process, and the privileging of the musical knowledge of the director above that of the choristers, it appears that both O’Toole (1994) and Garnett (2005) focus largely on the exterior mechanisms of power and their role in choir. It is the interior mechanisms of power that interest me; that is, I’d like to focus on how choristers discipline themselves in ways that ensure the functioning of the “choir machine.”<sup>4</sup>

Foucault examines the idea of “docile bodies” (1977). Reframing this idea, I focus on the technologies that form “docile choristers.” In order to investigate this concept, I think through the idea of governmentality as the “conduct of conduct” (Dean 1999) whereby individuals govern themselves in particular ways. What power structures are in place that ensure the self-governing of these “docile choristers”? How does the format of “choir” discipline choristers to perform in a particular way, or, more specifically, to perform themselves in particular ways that facilitate the functioning of the “choir machine”? What is it that makes a chorister align him/herself with the tenets of “good choral behaviour”? How does the governance provided by the conductor guarantee that choristers will ultimately govern themselves as desired by the conductor? How can this specified self-governance be interrupted? Is this interruption desirable, and if so, to whom? When I consider my own experience, choir is a system in which I am deeply invested; I have spent years learning to produce “good choral behaviour” and perform this “docile chorister.” I understand thoroughly how to play the role. However, the moments in “choir” where I was not seen as part of a monolithic identity—those moments where the conductor encouraged laughter and camaraderie, the moments where the conductor honoured my musicianship—those are the moments that make me desire a choral interruption. If there have been glimpses, there must be other possibilities.

However, for an established conductor, relinquishing control in a system in which you have achieved that accreditation that privileges your knowledge over that of the choristers may be extremely difficult (O’Toole 1994, 132). That system depends on docile choristers and restructuring the choral classroom to foster chorister agency is

indeed an uphill battle. As choral musicians, conductors, and choristers alike, we are deeply embedded in the current production of choir.

### Modelling “Acceptable Choral Behaviour”: Foucault’s Governmentality in Choir

So where does the Foucauldian concept of governmentality intersect with the current conception of choir? Governmentality is the hybrid result of two terms, “government” and “mentality,” where government is essentially defined as the “conduct of conduct” and mentality is defined as a collective not readily examined by those who inhabit it (Dean 1999). If we consider government as the “conduct of conduct,” thinking specifically of the dual meaning of the French word “conduire” as both “guidance” and “behaviour,” we might think of governmentality as the “guidance of behaviour” (Masschelein & Quaghebeur 2005, 54) within a naturalized collective. How do choral conductors govern their choirs in such a way that choristers ultimately choose to govern themselves? Certainly, Garnett’s choral methods texts play a role. Examination of these texts centres on an aspect of discourse analysis that Hook identifies as a focus on discourse-as-knowledge (2001, 37, citing McHoul & Grace 1997)—how certain statements come to be circulated as “true.” In conducting a textual analysis, Garnett was able to assemble a taxonomy of choral craft or the characteristics of “acceptable” or “appropriate” choral behaviour. These texts agree upon these characteristics for the most part, but why these behaviours and not others? Reflecting back to the boundaries that Garnett identifies, I suggest that shades of colonialism color the so-called “natural” proliferation of these particular discourses over others. In his provocative article, “The Class and Colour of Tone” (2004), Olwage suggests that race can, in fact, be heard palpably in the voice. He identifies two distinct voice types that he defines as essentially diametrically opposed: the “bourgeois” singing voice and the “black” singing voice. His purported “bourgeois” singing voice uses head voice, a refined “oo” vowel, “soft” singing techniques, and is relatively disembodied. Adjectives used to describe this type of voice include words like “resonant,” “sweet,” and “pure.” Conversely, the “black” singing voice uses a heavy chest voice and a loud and nasal “ah” vowel (related also to “cockney”). “Black singing,” according to Olwage (2004), is embodied, loud, and expressive, and can be described using words such as “guttural,” “chesty,” and “nasal.” The descriptors for the two voice types are deeply value-laden. When we place words like “pure” and “guttural” at opposite ends of the spectrum, is it surprising that traditional choral methods align themselves with the cultivation of this so-called “bourgeois singing voice”? Olwage contends that the bourgeois singing voice originates from the Victorian choral tradition and was associated with middle-class, European sensibilities. Vocal training and the notion of choir came to South Africa (as examined by Olwage) in the form of a “civilising” mission that attempted to develop the bourgeois singing voice among black singers in South Africa.

Returning now to the categories of Garnett’s (2005)

taxonomy and the characteristics of Olwage’s (2004) “bourgeois” and “black” singing voices, why do choristers choose to position themselves within the category of the “bourgeois” singing voice? If conductors instruct choristers in what acceptable and unacceptable choral behaviour looks like, what makes them perform in an “acceptable” manner? If conductors naturalize this bourgeois choral “mentality” through rehearsal techniques propagated by choral methods texts, is there a possibility within this mentality to choose an alternative singing style? I turn once again to the boundaries identified by Garnett. The category of bodily control clearly delineates the boundary between the desirable and undesirable attributes of the choral singer that discipline the body down to the most minute detail, even going so far as to regiment the act of breathing. Social identities, specifically class and regionality, manifest through diction. The desirable diction—strictly controlled vowel shape and consonant pronunciation—aligns itself with the bourgeois subject. Choral methods texts praise this high-class diction while regional dialects and cockney English are cast pejoratively towards the bottom of the hierarchy. Garnett’s final boundary is between Western choral music and its so-called “Others,”<sup>5</sup> privileging the former. Given these boundaries established between choral practices aligned with bourgeois sensibilities and the Victorian choral tradition (Olwage 2004), both of which are framed positively in relation to their less desirable “Other,”<sup>6</sup> is it any wonder that choristers choose to discipline their bodies into what Garnett terms a “bodily regime” (2005)? A bodily regime of choral singing ensures the chorister refuge from the “undesirable” side of these boundaries. According to Scheurich, “[g]overnmentality is a kind of governmental rationality that equates the well-being or happiness or productiveness of individuals with behaviors that reinforce the social order” (1994, 306). Choir, in its own way, presents a microcosm of the desired social order. Choral subjects discipline themselves in order to be a part of the bourgeois sensibility presented by choir, reinforcing at the same time the bourgeois place in the hierarchy of populations.

The key here is the choices seem natural; perhaps they do not even present as choices at all. As Scheurich reminds us, governmentality is like “a monster, without a conscious master, a headless monster, that must consume everything, that must bring all social reality within its taxonomical or descriptive regime” (1994, 306-307). If we consider governmentality as the guidance of behaviour within a naturalized collective, there is no puppet-master pulling the strings. Rather, some discourses proliferated over time and gradually consolidated into a naturalized “way that choir is done.” I cannot remember, for example, where I learned appropriate posture or vowel placement. I do not know when I mastered the ability to remove all vibrato from my sound when required.<sup>7</sup> Why are the skills so much a part of me that I cannot identify their origin? I do know that I have disciplined my body as an instrument from which I exact choral music. I internalized long ago the physical requirements and the appropriate diction, as well as notions of hierarchy of music to be a choral musician.

This governmentality, this self-discipline, is truly a headless monster (Scheurich 1994). I cannot identify where it originates; I only know its presence is all-encompassing. It proliferates through all the choral actors—from conductors to methods texts to choristers to adjudicators to publishers to music itself. As Scheurich notes,

[t]hough individual governmental agents apply this mentality to their areas of responsibility, they typically are not conscious that they are proliferating a social regularity. Their individual actions are commonsensical given the grid of social regularities that is constituting social life. These individual agents do not have bad intentions; they are, instead, inscribed by and, in turn, inscribing governmentality. (1994, 307)

The Victorian choral tradition retains its naturalized status, and aligning oneself with its tenets becomes no less than commonsensical.

However, this governmentality is not the only reason choristers discipline themselves to ensure the functioning of the “choir machine.” There are a number of other factors at play. We cannot underestimate the power of the music. As Bradley (2007) notes, music and choral singing can be intoxicating.<sup>8</sup> As choristers, it pulls us in and allows us to feel a part of something greater than ourselves. Over the years, I have truly experienced “that magic feeling” that Bradley identifies. When choosing so-called “appropriate” choral behaviour that allows us as choristers to experience pure magic, why would we choose otherwise when doing so would destroy the sense of ensemble? Performing as a diverse group of voices that remain apart does not allow for that powerful feeling of functioning as a unit. Doing so flies in the face of what Charles Keil identifies as the “urge to merge” (2005, 98)—to physically be a part of something larger.

However, being a part of something larger does not tell the whole story. As Foucault notes,

[i]f power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as the force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. (1994b, 307)

Although membership in a choir requires a strict “bodily regime” (Garnett 2005), it is, in fact, productive. Disciplining oneself into a choral subject produces a unified body sound according to the standards of practice naturalized by the choral conducting profession. The satisfaction derived from being in an ensemble that performs “quality” repertoire is immeasurable. Performing beautifully with others has always drawn me in and invoked a desire to continue to make music.

We are now left with two further concepts to unpack. What is this “quality” repertoire and who defines it? What is performing “beautifully” and once again, according to

whom? “Quality” repertoire is commonly understood in the choral conducting profession as the standard Western classical repertoire—Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Haydn's *Creation*, and pieces and works from the “great” composers—those people who I refer to as the DWMs—dead, white men. Singing these works “beautifully” involves enacting Garnett's (2005) “bodily regime” and performing without a regional accent or dialect in the four languages of art song—English, German, French, and Italian.

But how did this conceptualization of “quality” repertoire and performing “beautifully” come to be? As noted previously, Olwage (2004) correlates the Victorian choral tradition with the colonial civilising mission. Edwards and Hewitson cite Western education systems as “one of the fundamental ways used by colonial agents to support the ‘civilising mission’ agenda” (2008, 96). Western classical music education was (and is) indeed a colonial project. Western classical music was the colonizers' music, specifically the bourgeois colonizers. They marked the Indigenous music they found in the countries they colonized as “Other,” in much the same manner as they marked Indigenous people as “Other” or less-than-human. Educational institutions then reified Western classical music and propagated it throughout both colonial countries and the empires themselves.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the less desirable “Other” constitutes the superior “quality” and “beauty” of Western classical music, which the educational institution perpetuates through systematically devaluing “Other” music.<sup>10</sup> Institutions socialize us to recognize the value of their chosen subject matter—Western classical music—and we recognize this music as privileged music in the hierarchy of musics, whether or not we enjoy it. To be in a choir allows choristers to align themselves with institutionally-sanctioned notions of beauty and other virtuous qualities positioned on the left side of the Self/Other virgule and receive institutional credit for this “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1973).

What other factors breed conformity among choristers with “appropriate” choral behaviours? I turn now to Foucault's notion of “gratification-punishment” (1977, 180)—a system of both positive and negative reinforcement. Both can motivate young choristers. The power of creating what one perceives as “good” music according to the boundaries previously laid out can never be underestimated. The praise or recognition of a respected (and possibly feared) director is also immeasurable. Conversely, the fear of being singled out as “that chorister” who destroyed the sound is a powerful deterrent. I once had the experience of singing for<sup>11</sup> an acclaimed guest conductor—one who we very quickly discovered was capable of isolating the one person who sang a wrong note. He also had no qualms about identifying that person in front of the choir. The experience was, quite frankly, terrifying. Peter Høeg also paints a picture of a situation in his novel *Borderliners*, which unfortunately is not atypical of choir:

Karin rø [the choral conductor] sometimes leaned over, behind those who sang, on her rounds of

the singers. And then she would say, quite softly, so that only the one to whom it was addressed should hear it, “Excellent.”

It is called praise. It is supposed to be a small act of kindness. Next time she came past, and was right behind you, you could feel the fear from the one she had praised. Not a big fear, physical punishment did not enter into it. But a subtle little fear that would perhaps only be obvious to someone who had never received much in the way of praise. The fear of not being just as good as last time; of not being worthy this time as well. You knew that, always, when Karin rø came up behind you, so, too, came a judge. (1994, 50-51)

The promise of gratification and the fear of punishment or reprisal or simply “not being good enough” are potentially powerful enough to control the timing of a breath and precise functioning of the body. Choristers discipline themselves to achieve the desired sound. Receiving praise and recognition for “appropriate” choral behaviour provides a strong motivation to replicate such behaviour in the future. Durrant's methods text demonstrates perfectly the internalized functioning of power within the cycle of choral feedback and the ensuing performance of “acceptable choral behaviour.” According to Durrant,

[b]y far the most valuable feedback for choral singers is that perceived by the singers themselves. As singers learn how to detect their own feedback, intrinsic reward is increased with that self-mastery, conductor feedback becomes less necessary. . . and emotional attachment to singing is intensified. (2003, 33, as cited in Garnett 2005, 267)

Choristers internalize “appropriate” choral behaviour to reproduce when required, although the requirement is often implicit rather than explicit. Given the naturalization and the internalization of these choral behaviours, it is clear through listening to choirs such as the Toronto Children's Chorus (TCC)<sup>12</sup> or the Elmer Iseler Singers<sup>13</sup> that choristers do, in fact, remain inside of the boundaries that Garnett identifies.

### Disrupting the Choir: Examining O'Toole's Project

O'Toole offers five strategies in her dissertation to breakdown the traditional definition of choir: altering the use of time, de-centering the director, acquiring knowledge differently, changing choral architecture, and revealing of pedagogical politics (1994, 300). She explores the strategies through three projects in her doctoral thesis that aim to create ownership, cooperation, and teamwork in the choral classroom.

“What's My Role?” was the project that took place with O'Toole's own youth choir. Its goal was to orchestrate more student involvement within the choir. Some of these activities included having students lead warm-ups, conduct, interpret text, be members of various committees, and write articles for the newsletter. This active participation of students in rehearsals reflected her philosophy that choral music should be more about the stu-

dents than the music.

The other two projects in her dissertation do not address the question of power relations as directly because the projects themselves were initiated out of the interests of the two choir directors involved. “What Should This Choir Be About?” is the second project and the goal was to answer the director's concern of how to meet the needs of his diverse women's ensemble. This choir was characteristic of the school choir model identified by O'Toole in a later article that is structured to accommodate the 3:1 ratio of girls to boys in choir by providing a women's chorus as an alternative to the top, auditioned, mixed-voice choir (1998). The director felt that most literature on choral music deals with technical aspects and ignores the idea of relationships, which he centred in this project.

The final project, “Where's the Thrill?,” attempted to determine what “thrilled” the students in the average choral rehearsal, in order to replicate this feeling in every rehearsal. Once again, it seemed that more active student involvement in the rehearsal process was the key to making rehearsals “thrilling.” The students ended up initiating the entire learning process of a work by Brahms beginning with work on German Romantic poetry and discovering the music from there.

In the final chapter of her dissertation, O'Toole outlines some strategies for the subversion of traditional power relations in the choral setting. She discusses the use of time within choral rehearsals. In each of the three projects, O'Toole and her colleagues diverted the focus from the final “product” to allow rehearsal time to include discussion, group decision-making, and a focus on the affective content in the music. O'Toole found that this different use of time actually resulted in increased motivation to study technical elements of music (1994, 302). The second strategy focused on the de-centering of the director. This allowed the learning to be driven by the students, empowering them to be active in their own education and valuing their individual needs and identities. However, we must apply caution here as O'Toole does not critique the pseudo-ideology of student participation as an unquestionably “good” thing. Within her second suggestion, there is the possibility of fostering the neoliberal subject.<sup>14</sup> Her third strategy was the notion of differently acquiring knowledge. She notes that the students participated in activities that traditionally “belong” to the director. This process challenged how choristers traditionally acquire knowledge and who is licensed to impart knowledge in choir (1994, 308). This speaks directly to the idea of de-centering the director. O'Toole's fourth strategy was the process of reconfiguring the traditional “architecture,” or using the space differently, to encourage individuality, although once again we must consider how facilitating individuality may help to foster the neoliberal subject.<sup>15</sup> This fact aside, this notion also relates to the de-centering of the director. Her final strategy involved the revelation and critique of the politics of choral pedagogy. She exposes the fact that choir directing is not a “neutral act of imparting factual knowledge about music” (1994, 310). She

advocates throughout her work for the constant critiquing of music, context, and power relations with the students in order to expose the underlying politics. According to O'Toole, these five strategies can be used to subvert traditional power relations in any music education setting.

### Breaking Garnett's Boundaries: Extending O'Toole's Project

O'Toole's (1994) project aimed to foster increased student participation in musical decision-making and invert the traditional choral pedagogical focus from the music to those who produce it.<sup>16</sup> In the various projects, O'Toole and the choristers found ways to share the tasks of the choral setting. However, although students had a more active voice in the decisions made in choir, the traditional notion of choir remained undisrupted. In fact, through redistributing but not changing any of the tasks to be completed in choir, O'Toole essentially reified the current choral structure with her work, adding shades of neoliberal participation discourse (Masschelein & Quaghebeur 2005) into the mix. Her notions about the use of time and acquiring knowledge differently, for example, do not challenge the structure of choir in a deeper way. Additionally, I wonder if the redistribution of choral tasks among choristers does not further cement the position of the director in the process.<sup>17</sup>

Foucault speaks of cutting off the head of the king and formulating a political philosophy not based on the problem of sovereignty (1994b, 309). However, even without the sovereign, society functions in much same way due to the mechanisms of governmentality. The population governs itself. Applying this idea to choir, I wonder how one might go about figuratively cutting off the head of the conductor (the proverbial "king") in such a way that alternative forms of self-government might be possible outside of those mandated by the conductor. How can we reconceive the notion of "choir" itself in such a way that power circulates differently? How can we liberate the "docile chorister?" The figure of the conductor and the standard model of a choir with a conductor is a domination model of power whereby power functions from the top down. However, as Lemke (2002) notes, power does not necessarily equal domination, echoing Foucault's thesis that power does not solely repress; it also produces (Foucault 1978, 94). I wonder how I, as a music educator, can construct with my peers a choir with a different basis than the domination model? Can we disrupt notions of the so-called "product" (the music) and think through the idea of a potential shift from product-based to process-based learning? Can we alter the Eurocentric nature of the concept of choir altogether? Perhaps we can consider alternative practices of musical transmission, while keeping in mind ways in which they are fixed or fluid, or perhaps equally (differently) dominating.

So what might be another way to do choir? Is there a way to do choir where students do not sit in rows or in a circle, with one foot in front of the other—music folders held high with the head up in the eyes towards the director? Is it desirable to think choir differently? Perhaps the

current structure of choir is perfectly satisfactory. However, let us consider first Garnett's (2005) arguments about the way that certain disciplining technologies such as diction requirements force a middle class sensibility that sometimes goes so far as to literally exclude bodies from the choir and second Olwage's (2004) thoughts on the European choral tradition as a bourgeois tradition that cultivates a voice that is distinctly classed and raced. With those contentions in mind, I believe it might be useful to revisit the concept that I currently understand as "choir," through my interaction with music education and choral conducting discourses. Is it possible to reconfigure "choir" in such a way that it is not such a strikingly white and middle-class phenomenon? One has only to look at pictures of choirs such as the Toronto Children's Chorus or the Elmer Iseler Singers to understand that this demographic is the rule and not the exception. This model of choir featured in these two choirs and identified in choral methods texts such as Bartle's *Sound Advice* (2009) is distinctly classed and raced. If the disciplining technologies currently used in "chorister formation" produce this elite group of singers, might there be another way to engage in group singing without excluding anyone with the desire to participate? This leads to further questions. Would the satisfaction from the so-called "product" of this choir, this unified musical experience, be the same? Would a different kind of satisfaction be as valuable and valued? If we change these architectures and values, would it lead to a better distribution of resources?

How might we begin to break down the boundaries that Garnett lays out? She argues that we can identify "acceptable" choral behaviours by the ways in which certain behaviours present in relation to their inferior "Other." She cites, for example, the "appropriate" characteristics of bodily control (i.e. "good" posture, vowel shape, etc.) versus "inappropriate" choral behaviour, diction that aligns with the bourgeois class and a higher education level as opposed to a lower class sensibility, and the ways in which the institution frames Western classical choral music in relation to other genres. How can we blur these boundaries so that what is "appropriate" no longer stands staunchly in opposition to its excluded "Other"?

Institutions socialize us to abide by these boundaries, but what if this socialization occurred differently? Musician John Bird recounts a story of an experience he had as a grade one student where the teacher gave him a guiro to play in his class "rhythm band." As the class found their "groove," John experienced a "glimpse of paradise" (2008, 74) before the teacher called an end to the music, after no more than a dozen or so bars. For this five-year-old, this was the ultimate in music-making. The institution had not yet socialized him into understanding the boundaries of so-called "good" music—at least not in the same manner that the teacher understood the music to be of little consequence as demonstrated by the fact that she cut them off after only a "glimpse" and did not take out the instruments again for the rest of the year (see 2008, 73-77). How do we return to the magic that vocal musics

outside of the boundaries of "good choral music" hold before institutions socialize us to understand otherwise? How do we find ways to validate "all kinds of beautiful" in the institution or to depend less on the institution's validation altogether? This problem certainly applies to far more than just music.

Can power relations in choir circulate differently than those present in the model presented by Jean Ashworth Bartle (2003) (among others) in her book on children's choir conducting? What would this new choir look like? Would there be a choir? How can we reconceive the notion of "choir" in such a way that power circulates differently? The conductor model is a domination model, but if power does not equal domination (Lemke 2002), how can we think beyond the domination model? O'Toole's project emphasized the importance of musical decision-making. A discussion with several musicians<sup>18</sup> confirmed the notion of satisfaction that comes with the feeling of musical collaboration—a feeling which was present in some orchestral playing, chamber playing, and choral conducting, but not in choral singing. I am struck by the idea of a drum-circle, a pseudo-Westernized concept of West African rhythms<sup>19</sup> enacted in an improvisatory style where players build on each other's rhythms, self-selecting their own musical ability level and challenge—acting independently, but within a larger unit. As choral musicians, can we create a vocal equivalent to this drum circle? Can we create a musical activity, instead of a performance, where everyone is an active collaborator and self-directed within a larger collective? Can we focus on listening to each other and building what others contribute to the whole? Without the musical score to dictate, there are still rules, but no "wrong notes"<sup>20</sup>—something incredibly desirable to me given my years of training in fear of performing wrong notes. To take away the possibility of "wrong" also takes away the fear. So how might we enact this musical activity?

Perhaps choral conductor and composer Nick Page provides us with a starting place. In a workshop sponsored by St. John's Music that I attended a number of years ago in Toronto, Nick Page introduced a concept he called "No-Fault Harmony"—a term he coined along the same lines as "No-Fault Insurance." The basic idea is to sing a note in harmony with the main melody until it does not sound "good" anymore, at which point you change the note to something that "fits." Although notions of what sounds "good" or "fits" are tied to Western music in this case, there is something in this approach that is very liberating.<sup>21</sup> It is a simple approach to harmony that allows for musical decision-making within a set of parameters that promote success within them. We could perhaps apply this idea to a collaborative vocal improvisatory exercise.<sup>22</sup>

Going with this model, we totally disrupt the current notion of the so-called "product," which is, in this case, the music. Does the product matter? Who defines what the product is? As established earlier, it is largely institutions and methods texts that propagate this idea that the product of choir (which is a Western European institution)

should be Western classical music. However, music can just as easily be a collective improvisation or a discovery of musical styles outside of the Western classical sphere.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that a certain amount of posturing does not occur in improvisation, but it still may open up different possibilities. While O'Toole alters her use of rehearsal time, assigning greater chorister responsibilities, she does not actually reconfigure the final product or even allow the choristers to choose the repertoire. In fact, she found that using rehearsal time differently increased the choristers' motivation to study technical elements of music, completely reifying classical music (1994, 302). If the current product of choir is Western European and we aim to disrupt standard choral practice, are there other traditions to examine that do not structure group singing in this stringent manner? The documentary *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* (Hirsch 2002) provides a history of South African Apartheid in song. The film speaks of the ways in which the black population in South Africa (who were largely Zulu, in this film) used music to resist Apartheid. The point of interest for this article is a discussion of the nature of group singing on the front lines. During mass singing, certain songs self-select within the group, other songs are begun and then abandoned. According to freedom fighter Manala Manzini, the people created other songs in the moment (Hirsch 2002). They followed a common structure of call-and-response and new music evolved from this basic understanding. The resulting song is an entirely different product—a result of creative collaboration. Songs that people deemed unsuccessful were not judged as failures, but simply abandoned after a few lines for a new collaboration or left for a more appropriate time and place. The call-and-response parameters allowed for the easy creation of new works. Given similar structural parameters in other genres, group composition and collaboration seems possible.

However, what happens in a Eurocentric choir structure when you bring in non-Western or less-Westernized practices of singing? If I, as a Western-trained music educator, work within a Western choral tradition and a Western choir, should I attempt to work outside of the Western repertoire or is doing so simply appropriation? Can I and other classically-trained music educators explore other traditions of group singing ethically and respectfully without essentializing or exoticizing "different" musics? If we approach all musics respectfully, we may choose to consult musicians, taking care not to expect one musician to represent the interests and thoughts of all people with a similar cultural background.<sup>24</sup> This idea is one possibility. However, instead of potentially coopting "Other" musics into choir, can we push beyond the idea of distinct cultures towards Walcott's conception of creolization? For Walcott, creolization is a state that results from the "fusing and mixing of cultures forced to cohabit together to render something else possible" (Walcott 2009, 170 citing Hall 2003, 193). The encounters we experience make us creole subjects, particularly in highly diverse urban spaces (Walcott 2009). If we think of group singing as creative collaboration, does this musical cohabitation together ren-

der something more possible—a creole or fused music?<sup>25</sup> If this creole music is born out of the collaboration of a multiplicity of subjectivities, then the question of cooptation and appropriation shifts towards the outside of the picture, although I believe we must keep it on the horizon.<sup>26</sup> Thinking of group singing in this manner provides an entirely different outlook on the potential for choir.

We must also address the current product-based orientation of choir. While O'Toole shifts her choral pedagogy towards a more process-based orientation, the final performance remains (1994). The pressure of a final performance greatly limits an ensemble's time and ability to play with music—to explore it, to investigate the context,<sup>27</sup> take time with it, understand it, and enjoy the learning. Is it possible to shift a choral product-oriented approach towards a more process-oriented one? A recurring theme throughout Solís's book, *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles* (2004), spoke to the nature of the obligatory term-end concert inherent in the concept of the world music ensemble. Performance in an ensemble is mandatory, but it also limits exploration and the potential for creative collaboration. What happens if we restructure the final concert model? A number of authors in Solís's book point to Mantle Hood's original model of performance-based study in ethnomusicology—the study group (see, for example, Sumarsam; Trimillos; and Trimillos & Hood 2004). Although we often consider choir to be quite distinct from a world music ensemble, the study group model is interesting. The intention of the study group in ethnomusicology was to facilitate the performance of music to gain familiarity with the context and engage with more than just book knowledge when studying ethnomusicology. Even though it would certainly be possible to engage in a study group without a critique of power relations that brought such a group into the academy in the first place, the study group model is significant because it is not about public performance. Can we reconceptualize “final concerts” as open workshops or teaching experiences for the student participants? In the course I taught at Ryerson University this past term, our last class was an open class—a class where students could invite guests and we shared food and music with each other in an informal setting. Although this was certainly a culminating project, it had a different emphasis than a final performance. There was no agenda of music to perform; rather, we sang the music they chose that day. Perhaps pursuing the study of *any* music, including Western classical music, in the study group model with an open community workshop might begin to shift the emphasis away from product and performance.

So what if there is no conductor? How can choir be conceived without a conductor? Would the role of the conductor simply fall to a chorister? Would choristers self-govern without a conductor sovereign?<sup>28</sup> The majority of musical practices seem to have a leader, but the leader does not necessarily have to remain the same throughout. O'Toole experiments with this concept through the assignment of student conductors, although there is evidence

in the dissertation that there were times where she was not able to fully relinquish control of the choir. Even student conductors can perpetuate the choir-as-domination model of power (1994). However, are there times within the Western classical notion of choir where everybody collaborates as an equal? I look to a performance of Paul Halley's *Freedom Trilogy* (1997) in which I participated in 2003 with the *Bell'Arte Singers* in Toronto. The piece is an interesting fusion of two South African freedom songs, “Amazing Grace” and a beautiful setting of the Christian liturgical Kyrie text. It is a “thrilling” piece to sing.<sup>29</sup> For this piece, we were undirected. The concert was a cappella for the most part and our director played the piano for the few pieces that required it, including this one. This meant we all worked as creative musicians. *Cassava*, an amazing Toronto Latin ensemble joined us for the dress rehearsal and the concert and they took the piece to a whole new level. Having the conductor step away from the podium reconfigured the choral architecture. Instead of a choir on risers facing a director, we were singers gathered around a fabulous group of percussionists<sup>30</sup> and a grand piano. The energy in that performance represented a group of over sixty diverse individuals coming together both as equals and as creative musicians to create something magical—a creative collaboration. Given certain collective understandings in both fixed and improvisatory music to which circulating discourses socialize us as musicians, as choristers there is potential to exercise musical agency.

What does this new choir actually look like? This choir is a creative collaboration between equals without a definitive leader. It is a collaboration with the leader implicit in the pre-existing repertoire—a negotiation rather than a dictation. It is a deemphasis of the product and a product-based, performance-oriented approach. This choir focuses on reconfiguring the institution's judgment of our music-making and not rigidly marking it as “good” or “bad” music. It is not in any way restrictive or coercive. Choristers work together aurally, applying strategies within mutually agreed-upon parameters where there are no “wrong answers.”<sup>31</sup> Music-making will be creative and the nature of the resulting music may not be fixed or replicable.

But what do we gain or lose by reconsidering and reconstructing “choir” as it is known today into a creative collaboration or improvisatory exercise? In a way, to collaborate and deemphasize the final product in this manner is to dismiss the Western classical canon. However, the canon includes beautiful music; we must simply acknowledge that it is only one kind of beautiful among many. Shifting the focus from choir as the performance of a Western canon of repertoire to collaborative group singing practices allows us to participate actively in music-making. O'Toole ultimately concludes that it was active participation that choristers were seeking in their music-making (1994). Is it possible to sing the canon in a meaningful and gratifying way that does not reify the domination model of power? My experience with Halley's *Freedom Trilogy* tells us that it is in fact possible. However,

in standard Western classical music, can choristers share in the decision-making in a system where there are “right answers” and where certain things are simply not open for interpretation? The musical score limits us in that respect, as it contains specifications for the performance of the work. Will shared decision-making in the aspects that are open for interpretation be enough for choristers to feel that they have agency within their music-making? Does rethinking choir along the lines of Mantle Hood's ethnomusicological study group (Trimillos & Hood 2004) allow for that agency? To think choir collaboratively outside of Western choral compositions unquestionably denies the magic that takes place when some of these works come together. However, active musical collaboration offers agency to choristers and magic occurs when creative and improvisatory works come together—much in the same manner that John Bird never forgot his grade 1 rhythm band experience (2008, 73-77). As classically-trained music educators, can we find a balance between these two radically different approaches? As participants in those creative collaborations—the “not docile choristers”—can we begin with the goal of choral agency and actively construct a new choir that features a creative collaboration that honours a whole multiplicity of voices? This choir would not operate on a basis of gratification and punishment imposed by the “conductor-king,” but rather from a firm foundation and belief in choral agency—a place where “not docile choristers” make music together and where the music is based on creative interaction.

### Choir and the Body: Liberating the “Docile Chorister”

What does this democratic model of choir mean for the body of the “not docile chorister?” Considering both the so-called “traditional” model of choir—what I term the “choir machine”—and the democratic model of choir I explored in the latter half of this article, what are the implications of these models on the body? Painting a picture of the “docile chorister” required by the Western classical notion of choir reveals a body that is both physically and creatively restricted—her very breath self-governed into submission by longstanding discourses of “appropriate” choral behaviour. Her will, agency, creativity, and the physical actions of her body become merely a cog in the “choir machine.” When we look instead to the democratic model of choir that encourages participation and agency, how is the body of this “not docile chorister” distinct from that of the “docile chorister”?

A choir of democracy and participation liberates the body from the requirements exacted from years of choral discourse. The suggestions I put forward in the second half of this article do not privilege either the will of the “sovereign” director or the self-perpetuating “mentality” aspect of “governmentality”—where “mentality” is defined as a collective not readily examined by those who inhabit it (Dean 1999). Rather, they emphasize the agency of the choristers as engaged participants. In the model of the “vocal drum circle,” Nick Page's approach to “No-Fault Harmony,” Hirsch's (2002) depiction of the way that

songs were composed on the front lines of South African Apartheid resistance, Mantle Hood's (Trimillos & Hood 2004) study group, and my experience with Halley's *Freedom Trilogy*, choristers are not as restricted for the most part by convention. However, with the freedom not to follow “tradition,” the body may nonetheless conform to what has come before in certain ways. Within the study group model and the Halley experience, for example, a singer approaching the music may find that conventions of posture that allow space for the lungs to expand facilitate making music. The distinction here is the manner in which choristers determine their posture to encourage the breath. In both the study group and the Halley performance models, posture is not simply a common-sense ideal of “good singing” imposed mindlessly from above or even from self-governance below; there is an element of self-discovery. In the study group situation singers have the freedom to approach the music with agency. It is a journey of self-exploration that determines the sound. A singer may very well discover that sitting on the edge of the chair with her feet flat on the floor and music held up in front of her produces her very best sound, or the sound that she values. However, other singers may find other physical positions allow them to experience the sound they desire just as easily or perhaps even better. In any case, with the “not docile choristers” making decisions about what is best for their particular bodies, “choir” loses its militarized appearance. These liberated bodies have musical, physical, and creative agency.

In the models where the repertoire is Western classical music, uniformity may be something that the musicians deem desirable. Singers may advocate for consonant endings that occur in unison or like vowel shapes. However, in the study group model, these decisions occur in a collaborative manner. The study group, with its decentered approach to performance, may in fact privilege the quality of the experience over the nature of word endings and vowel shape that the pressure of traditional performance models necessitate. In some of the other models I put forward, the body is quite free. In the Nick Page model of “No-Fault Harmony,” there is no particular physical focus on uniformity, no specified place for consonants or vowel shape per se. The “vocal drum circle” also functions with agency to make decisions about the body and about the very nature of the musical contribution to the group. The approach taken by resistance fighters shown in Hirsch's *Amandla!* (2002) revealed songs that were freely composed in the moment that were taken up by the people or cast aside as appropriate in the situation. Leaders stepped forward and fell back. The music was embodied and in turn, it embodied resistance. It was an intrinsic part of the liberation battle of black bodies in South African Apartheid.

The democratic model of choir reformulates the body of the “docile chorister” as a creative being with musical agency. “Docile choristers” are frequently erased as intelligent musicians, their will and their very physicality subject to the desires of the director/“sovereign” and

“common-sense” ideals long-ingrained in choral music. Conversely, the participatory approach to choir is liberatory. Singers engage their bodies with agency in order to make musical meaning in ways that honour their own subjectivities. A collaborative approach to choir allows singers to consider their own physical needs: how best to sit, to breathe, to make music. This new-found concept of choir is one where music comes from encounters between people and self-knowledge. It is no longer music imposed from above or through self-perpetuating discourse. “Choir” is now an organic concept where music emerges from agency. Self-governance remains, but there is a distinction. Governmentality as “conduct of conduct” (Dean 1999) whereby individuals govern themselves according to long-established discourse is intrinsic to participation in traditional notions of “choir.” The self-governance in this case is guided and imposed by external norms. The self-governance that occurs within a democratic model, however, originates from self-advocacy and the needs of the body. Rather than following external guidelines of conduct imposed by discourse and self-regulation, the music, in this case comes from careful enactment of agency of the individual in relation to the group and the music. At the beginning of this article, I cited Patricia O’Toole’s contention that, “[c]horal pedagogy is more interested in the production of music, than in those who produce it” (1994, 300). Choral pedagogy within a democratic model, conversely, privileges the physical and social needs of the individual above the music and values singers as creative beings, eschewing “docile choristers” in favor of engaged, intelligent musicians.

## ENDNOTES

- O’Toole used the 1979 edition of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books).
- There are also discourses of production circulating here where the chorister performs as a neoliberal subject producing *for* the conductor.
- I use quotation marks around the term “world music” to indicate its problematic nature. A term like “world music” ought to encompass all music of the world. However, “world music” does not include Western music in its scope; it is, in fact “Other,” which is the problem with the terminology.
- In many ways, what I reference here is Foucault’s notion that power works from the bottom-up, in this case through the internalisation of power structures. See Foucault (1978, 94).
- See Born and Hesmondhalgh, eds. (2000).
- The “Other” here could be undisciplined physical characteristics, diction or an accent that belies attachment to a specific region or a lower class sensibility, or music marked as inferior to Western choral music.
- Also, why are there discourses that *require* that I sing without vibrato in the first place?
- Bradley’s (2007) thesis in this article operates on the assumption that choral music can be intoxicating or “magical.” However, her argument actually centers on the potential for fascism that arises when choristers are swept away by “that magic feeling.”
- See Akrofi (2008) who offers a discussion of the problems of imported state and school systems in four countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The program at the Faculty of Music includes an ethnomusicology department and an extensive world music ensemble program. Despite a wealth of course offerings, Indigenous music still holds marginal place in the academy. Examining the course requirements for non-ethnomusicology majors, the only required course is the first year survey of so-called “Other” musics. Additionally, end-of-term concerts for world music ensembles take place in the lobby, rather than in either of the two concert halls, which also serves to marginalize their status. This devaluing of Indigenous musics does not take place in Western institutions alone. Institutions in postcolonial countries often feature curriculums that privilege Western classical music (see Akrofi 2008).
- What an interesting word choice. You sing “for” or “under” a conductor. You do not sing “with” a conductor. The hierarchy prevails even in language choice.
- See <http://www.torontochildrenschorus.com/> for details on the choir.
- See <http://www.elmerisellersingers.com/> for details on the choir.
- See Masschelein & Quaghebeur (2005).
- I define the neoliberal subject here as the subject who subscribes to the meritocratic nature of the market economy and looks to present and market him/herself accordingly, without recognition that the structures of society such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism may limit precisely how far certain people can rise on “merit.” Goddard actually finds Foucault’s notion of governmentality and his methodology of genealogy to be dependent on the notion of a subject embedded in neoliberalism (2010).

- Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) argue that there is the potential for the discourse of active participation to foster a neoliberal subjectivity.
- This thought came from a discussion with Lori-Anne Dolloff.
- This discussion took place informally in a graduate seminar with Lori-Anne Dolloff, Shih-Ren Lu, and Andrea Czarnecki. Cited with permission.
- The fact that the drum circle is a pseudo-Westernized concept presents tensions in multiple ways. Addressing them is beyond the scope of this article, but I will make that note here.
- As the jazz idiom says, “There are no wrong notes—only accented passing notes.”
- It is interesting also to think about how long the process of “manufactured dissonance” and conversely the process of “changing to fit” might be. In my experience, the latter is practically instantaneous. How do these processes compare? How does the singer feel during moments of dissonance and what implications might this dissonance have on us both as participatory citizens and on our literal internal preferences for “harmony”?
- I note here that this collaborative vocal improvisatory exercise does not necessarily need to be pitched. Spoken rhythms can be equally exciting and perhaps provide a more approachable starting place than working with melody and harmony immediately. In addition, if we branch into a tradition based in West African rhythms, imposing Western elements of music is not necessarily appropriate.
- However, we must be careful not to exoticize or essentialize these “Other” musics. See Hess (2011).
- See Vaugeois (2009, 16-17).
- See Hess (2010).
- However, even though I argue that a creole music is formed from a collective of subjectivities, I believe it is important to keep the issues of co-optation and appropriation at the forefront of our thinking in order that we not tumble down their slippery slope.
- With the pressure of the looming final performance, the context of the music is often left to the imagination of the choristers which potentially encourages essentialization in the case of “world musics” and naturalization in the case of Western European classical music. See Bradley (2003), who offers an interesting discussion on the inventing of the “Other” in choral music.
- A problem beyond the scope of this article is that there is another form of sovereign here—the absent composer embodied in the repertoire. A great deal of the power embedded in choir revolves around the figure of the composer.
- I will not unpack why it is “thrilling” at this time. Certainly the colonial implications of combining a Christian sacred text with South African freedom songs are staggering. Most likely, there are also shades of exoticism and consumption of the “Other” within this particular “thrill,” but addressing this fact is beyond the scope of this article. See hooks (1992), particularly Chapter 2.
- I note the contradiction here. I have made a value judgment about these percussionists. They are “fabulous” and became so through intense discipline and practicing their craft. In this scenario, so did all of the singers and the conductor. However, we did come together as creative musicians. There was no privileging of certain bodies.
- In practice pedagogically, choristers would have to come to a mutual understanding that there truly are no “wrong answers.”

## REFERENCES

- Akrofi, Eric A. “Major Problems Confronting Scholars and Educators of the Musical Arts in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Action for Change in Music Education*, no. 1 (2008), <<http://www.maydaygroup.org/php/ecolumns/comparativemusiced-reports/africa-akrofi.php>>.
- Bartle, Jean Ashworth. *Sound Advice: Becoming a Better Children’s Choir Conductor*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Bird, John. *The Spirituality of Music*. Kelowna BC, Canada: Northstone, 2008.
- Born, Georgina, and David Hesmondhalgh, eds. *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*. Los Angeles: U of California Press, 2000.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction.” In *Knowledge, Education, and Social Change: Papers in the Sociology of Education*, edited by Richard Brown, 71-112. London: Tavistock, 1973.
- Bradley, Deborah. “Oh That Magic Feeling! Multicultural Human Subjectivity, Community, and Fascism’s Footprints.” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 17, no. 1 (2007): 56-74.
- . “Singing in the Dark: Choral Music Education and the Other.” Paper presented at *The Fifth International Symposium on the Philosophy of Music*, Lake Forest College, Illinois, 2003.
- Dean, Mitchell. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: Sage, 1999.
- Durrant, Colin. *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Edwards, S., and K. Hewitson. “Indigenous Epistemologies in Tertiary Education.” *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 37, no. Supplement (2008): 96-102.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- . “Governmentality.” In *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, 229-45. New York: The New Press, 1994a.
- . *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*. Vol. 1. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- . “Truth and Power.” In *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, 300-18. New York: The New Press, 1994b.
- Garnett, Liz. “Choral Singing as Bodily Regime.” *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 36, no. 2 (2005): 249-69.
- Goddard, Roy. “Critiquing the Educational Present: The (Limited) Usefulness to Educational Research of the Foucauldian Approach to Governmentality.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42, no. 3 (2010): 345-60.
- Hall, Stuart. “Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity in the Context of Globalization.” In *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta 11 Platform 3*, edited by O. Enwezor, C. Basualdo, U. M. Bauer, S. Ghez, S. Maharaj, M. Nash and O. Zaya. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003.
- Halley, Paul (Composer). *Freedom Trilogy [Choral Work]*. Pelagos Music, 1997.
- Hess, Juliet. “Musical Exclusions: Indigenous Musical Knowledge in the Academy.” Paper presented at *The 7th International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education*. Michigan State University, 2011.
- . “Musically Creolizing Subjects: Re(Envisioning) World Music Education.” *Encounters on Education* 11, no. Fall (2010): 155-66.

Hirsch, Lee. "Amandla!: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony." 1 hr 43 min. Canada: Alliance Atlantis, 2002.

Høeg, Peter. *Borderliners*. Translated by Barbara Haveland. New York: Dell Publishing, 1994.

Hook, Derek. "Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis [Online]." *LSE Research Online*. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/956> (2001): 1-46.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

Keil, Charles. "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music." In *Music Grooves*, edited by Charles Keil and Steven Feld. Tuscon AZ: Fenestra Books, 2005.

Lemke, Thomas. "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique." *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 3 (2002): 49-64.

Masschelein, Jan, and Kerlijn Quaghebeur. "Participation for Better or for Worse?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 39, no. 1 (2005): 51-65.

McHoul, A., and W. Grace. *The Foucault Primer*. New York: New York UP, 1997.

O'Toole, Patricia Ann. "A Missing Chapter from Choral Methods Books: How Choirs Neglect Girls 39(5), 9-32." *Choral Journal* 39, no. 5 (1998): 9-32.

—. "Redirecting the Choral Classroom: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis of Power Relations within Three Choral Settings." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1994.

Olwage, Grant. "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (2004): 203-26.

Scheurich, James Joseph. "Policy Archaeology: A New Policy Studies Methodology." *Journal of Educational Policy* 9, no. 4 (1994): 297-316.

Solis, Ted, ed. *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2004.

Sumarsam. "Opportunity and Interaction: The Gamelan from Java to Wesleyan." In *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*, edited by Ted Solís, 69-92. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2004.

Trimillos, Ricardo D. "Subject, Object, and the Ethnomusicology Ensemble: The Ethnomusicological "We" and "Them"." In *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*, edited by Ted Solís, 23-52. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2004.

Trimillos, Ricardo D., and Mantle Hood. "Afterword: Some Closing Thoughts from the First Voice." In *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*, edited by Ted Solís, 283-88. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2004.

Vaugeois, Lise. "Music as a Practice of Social Justice." In *Exploring Social Justice: How Music Education Might Matter*, edited by Elizabeth Gould, June Countryman, Charlene Morton and Leslie Stewart Rose, 2-22. Toronto: Canadian Music Educators' Association/L'Association canadienne des musiciens éducateurs, 2009.

Walcott, Rinaldo Wayne. "Multicultural and Creole Contemporaries: Postcolonial Artists and Postcolonial Cities." In *Postcolonial Challenges in Education*, edited by Roland Coloma, 161-77. New York: Peter Lang, 2009.

# THE CHRONIC PAIN CONVERSIONS

ZACH SAVICH  
SHIPPENSBURG UNIVERSITY

## Clouds Birds Have Been

I write you from the afterlife / My body now is verse & yet  
to be felt as such must have breath beneath / A flesh  
once sensed & had  
now had in every sense / As dune grasses sharp  
on the foot all vision is / Or clouds the color of clouds  
birds have been in / I rest in shade from leaves  
the window lets in / (There is no window I can open  
without touching the leaves) /  
Darker in the mornings & at dusk /  
Stranger to the touch / The xylophone sun through branches is  
insists that anything seen  
being outside the body  
is plainly ecstasy /

## Look of a Bright Thing

My body now is verse / It turns /  
I wished for the excesses of my age / & I wished  
for more eternal excesses / & wanted to be  
implicated more / & warmed my hands indefinitely  
in fists / & felt like something else again / Heart  
hardened to move swifter in the sluice / By a hedge held  
straight by bent branches / I guess my body also is /  
It's taken on the distinguished look  
of a bright thing roughed / In sun like a pear on a paused  
board game cut / Sun stuck like gum on a dislocated  
brick / That's the look I'm for / The flesh inside whiter /  
Like a shade that softens as it magnifies the light /  
Like mortar /

Zach Savich is the author of three collections of poetry, including *The Firestorm*, and a book of prose, *Events Film Cannot Withstand*. His work has received the Iowa Poetry Prize, the Colorado Prize for Poetry, and a New American Poet honor from the Poetry Society of America. He teaches at Shippensburg University and serves as an editor with *The Kenyon Review*.

**Fritz the Chainlink**

Bits of hedge still fritz the chainlink /  
 Brown snips after the clippers' purge /  
 Preserved by the goddamn voluptuous  
 laundry steam sneaking past  
 an antique plastic watering can / To this pear  
 trunk where some myth once said  
*Do you know this tree?* & some myth said *Maybe*  
*if you shake its leaves* / Today can write its own vows / It  
 touched me here / Easy as a gate  
 latched by a length  
 of weathered yarn /

**Habitat Blushes Into**

My body now is verse / It burns  
 if any wind cares to /

As the right appetite  
 turns excess  
 into abundance / Difficulty  
 into a kind of ease  
 because total /  
 Where I have been run through  
 there is no wound / Only open air / The taste on my tongue  
 is not too sweet / It's simply sugar / It's how it is  
 & so are you / Also  
 the day looks lovely on you / It looks like what  
 in landscape  
 they call the *advantage* / Where one habitat  
 blushes into another  
 & birds there can storm the meadow  
 or sing / Also / I've heard nothing is free  
 & lasts forever / It's how it is & so are you / & nothing is all  
 one will regret  
 in the style of this morning  
 I have been imagining forever /

**The Snow Gets Younger**

Before forever / Say it to me / In this life /  
 If not sooner / Eros is a child / & the child the alley is  
 is snow /

The snow gets younger every month /  
 & health is a yellow raincoat  
 folded in a box / You won't need it / Eros is any word  
 one tries to hold  
 by saying nothing for a time /

**Invisible Yet**

Waiting for you I watched a woman wash each article in turn  
 in the light of the fountain /  
 In this life if not sooner / Thinner than any eventual

clinic's gown / Surrounding us when we walk into the  
 little light  
 froth at the edge of the river / Though we're invisible  
 when we're swimming /  
 We're not invisible yet /

## THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

HAYLEY HUGHES

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

*Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble. (Hélène Cixous)*

I went to the opera last night for the first time in five years. It wasn't a conscious decision. It wasn't some brilliant revelation, either, my subconscious alerting me that I finally needed to confront the deep crag in my psyche excruciatingly created by divorcing myself from music simply because being around it hurts too much. Instead, the chair of the English Department sent me an email, knowing a tiny fraction of my passion for classical music—like the tip of an iceberg that's visible above the churning depths—and needing a volunteer to make sure any undergraduates who wanted to see Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* safely made it onto the bus to the theatre. There were two free tickets included in the deal, and the promise of champagne and dessert, so I accepted—who wouldn't? The strange thing is that I felt more uneasy than excited. It's a response that might seem downright weird to anyone else, but not to me, knowing, as I do, the ways of my heart: how my pulse speeds when I hear an aria I studied so intensely I can still feel the shape and sound of it in my bones; the way certain notes and chord progressions burrow so deep inside me that I can feel myself unravel without understanding why. These emotions and reactions—like the complex mechanisms of a lock guarding the inaccessible reaches of my spirit, the things I don't talk or think about for fear of reopening the wounds—wait only to be understood. For as shameful and debilitating as they've been for me, they are also *beautiful* and *part of me*, but I sometimes fear I can no longer maintain the partitions.

Once I found my seat with John, my boyfriend who continually assures me that "it's never too late," I leafed through the program, feeling my stomach turn at the familiar names. *Five, no, six people are in the chorus that I've performed with, including one mezzo soprano who studied with my teacher at the university. There they all are, I thought, and here I am, in row K, seat 12.* I teased John about the tears that were likely to come. "Of course," he said. "It's opera, it's in French, and it's Shakespeare. Don't worry. I'm prepared." But even as Juliet sang "*Je veux vivre*," an

aria I first heard in high school when a girl in my studio performed it in recital, and Romeo sang "*Ah! lève-toi, soleil!*," I felt nothing. Only in the opera's final scene—a staging slightly different from the original play, with the two lovers crawling across the stage toward each other, collapsed on the floor of the Capulet crypt and dying as their fingertips touch for the last time—did I tear up. Those meager, controllable emotions, I knew, were connected to the plot, the poignancy of the story finding its way inside me if for just a moment. It wasn't the strange but familiar mix of agony and ecstasy, and there weren't the visceral sensations that are all inextricably linked to how music has moved me since I was a little girl. Missing was the way the pitches resonate at exactly the right frequency to make me feel absolutely caught up in my body; how the little hairs on my arms and on the back of my neck stand on end; the pressure I feel beneath my ribcage; the chills that race up and down my legs, arms, and spine; the shaking that predicts the tears. *Maybe I've finally tamed it*, I thought that night as I wrung the flimsy program between my sweaty palms. *Maybe, at last, I'm numb to its power.*

I feel I must explain at this point that the way I react to music is *rarely* connected to the words, and when it is, it's a different reaction entirely—one more akin to the way I react to a book or a good movie, a response that's rational, predictable, and for the most part, emotionally-driven. The way music usually affects me, though, is, and I can't stress this enough, a *physical* reaction. I can be in the best of moods—driving fast with the windows down; out with John somewhere, enjoying his company—and if I am confronted by a piece of music that moves me, I'll inevitably be overcome with the throat-clenching, tight-chestedness and the crying that's been a hallmark of the way I've perceived music since I was a little girl. When I was a child, these bodily reactions caused me to seek out music and to learn as much as I could about it. When I was a teenager and a young adult, these reactions were

---

Hayley Hughes, a graduate student in English Literature, writes and teaches from the suburbs of southwestern Ohio. Currently working on a travel memoir about a 2008 solo road trip to Québec, Hayley was recently awarded a full-tuition scholarship to the New York State Summer Writers Institute at Skidmore College, where she will work with Phillip Lopate and James Miller. In addition to *Proteus*, Hayley has been published in *The Fogdog Review*, *Cobalt*, *The Eunoia Review*, and the upcoming *Best of Antioch Writers' Workshop 2011*.

largely the reason that I devoted all my time and energy—thousands of hours, countless heartbreaking voice lessons and auditions, myriad successes, and all the courage I could muster—to singing. Now, the twenty-six-year-old me largely avoids classical music, particularly opera, a genre which is easily the love of my life, because these feelings are too much for me to bear. Despite all that I've accomplished and the intense joy I find in writing, facing down the ghostly version of me that was hell-bent on becoming a professional singer—a proposition that has required, until this point, avoiding the music I love altogether—is the one thing in my life that threatens to unhinge me, from the inside out. It's just *too damn painful*, and not just emotionally. It is a bodily longing too, an overwhelming ache that affects me as instinctively as if I'd struck the fibers of a raw, exposed nerve or laid my hand on a hot stove.



I was very young when I first realized the power music has over me. I remember lying down on my mom's bed one bright afternoon, the sun streaming in so hot through the white gauze curtains that tiny droplets of sweat collected on my hairless forearms. I laid flat on my back, my limbs splayed in the shape of a snow angel or a jumping jack on top of the quilt my grandmother made with her rough, gnarled hands. My mother was likely doing dishes or clipping coupons and I'd found my way into her cassette tapes. I chose one, though I can no longer recall whether it was at random or not; perhaps the seven-year-old version of me was attracted by the photo on the cover of a blonde man and a woman, with hair as dark as my own, sitting in a field with a sunset behind them. *Out of Africa Motion Picture Soundtrack*, the side of the tape read—*never heard of it*, I thought. I put it into the Walkman I'd likely gotten for Christmas that year, not sure what to expect, and let my eyes focus and unfocus on the tiny red and blue flowers on the wallpaper. The music began to play.

The first thing I noticed was that there were no words. I thought it was strange that there were no lyrics one could sing along with, but I soon and suddenly realized that music doesn't need *words* to express its meaning. It was an amazing revelation to my young mind, like a key turning in a lock or the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle. In that moment I understood that I possessed some things that the other kids at school and some of my less imaginative cousins didn't: the ability to construct a world from sound instead of sight; the capability to understand the subtle in a world that values only the overt; and the tendency to be moved to tears without a story, or any *language at all*, to prompt me. I was startled when I realized I was crying. Maybe I thought something was wrong at first, that I was hurt, and when I wiped the wetness from my round little face it was with a mix of fright and awe. I felt the chills for the first time, too, and the sensations running up and down my spine were so intense that I cried out softly, putting a hand on the slight curve of my lower back. I

felt a profound sadness, too, the dizzying sense of smallness one gets when faced with something of overwhelming magnitude. It was a feeling that is difficult to put in words since words were not its genesis, but with it came the prickling in the palms, speeding heart, the collective tension of the muscles that I've sought out every moment of my life since then. It was on that day, the unremarkable afternoon in my mother's bedroom so far behind me now, that I discovered music is its own language. It places me firmly—and embarrassingly, sometimes—in my body, and yet it has the ecstatic and transcendental power to give the illusion of removing me completely from it.



Even though I didn't conceive of the idea of actually becoming a musician myself for many years, music has always been a part of my life. Because we sometimes didn't have enough money to eat, let alone money enough to entertain ourselves, my mom and I went to Middletown Public Library several times a week, checking out as many cassettes and videotapes—later CDs and DVDs—as we were allowed. There was one summer when we focused on old musicals, particularly Rogers and Hammerstein, Rodgers and Hart, Lerner and Loewe, Cole Porter, and Fred and Ginger. I learned about the flute from James Galway, and had a huge crush on Ringo Starr by the end of fifth grade. My mom's favorite, though, and what I still associate with her to this day, is jazz. When she was only eighteen or nineteen, my mom decided to leave home after my grandparents gave her a hard time about having too many black friends—it was the late 1960s, after all. She spent two years in New York City after running off with a musician more than twice her age, and while she was there she had the chance to sit in on sessions with some of the jazz greats, like Dizzy Gillespie, Les McCann, and Eddie Harris.

Since jazz reminded me of my mom so much, I listened to jazz radio stations often when I was little, especially when I went to my dad's house for the weekend. I had a tough time being away from my mother when I was young. I almost always cried before I went to sleep, thinking each night would be the one when she'd have to go to the hospital again, or the night when her diverticulitis, mitral valve prolapse, or depression—I knew the names of those diseases, but had no idea what they were except that they were scary—might kill her. To comfort me, my dad would play the smooth jazz station that my mom and I listened to in the house, in the car, and everywhere in between before it shut down when I was a teenager. Even though those long nights were still difficult, the bass and saxophone were cathartic for me: the notes echoed in my ears, slowing my pulse and lowering my blood pressure. The little plastic AM/FM radio alarm clock soothed away the worries of the scared little girl I was then, terrified by the failings of her mother's heart, stomach, and her profoundly rattled nerves, each ailment dripping with heredity in all its fearful permutations.



I began taking private voice lessons at fifteen with Deborah Conquest, which is when everything—my dreams, my hopes, my life—began to rearrange itself. Deborah was a petite, blonde, perky woman, married to an Adonis-like Italian husband. In her presence, my 5'8" frame made me feel less like a protégé and more like a lumberjack. During the first lesson, Deborah took my young, inexperienced vocal mechanisms for a test drive: I sang long strings of notes in a single phrase—*arpeggios*—to see how long my breath would last, and she began to pinpoint where my *passaggio* is—the problematic part of a singer's range where she shifts from the seductive throatiness of chest voice to the light, ethereal head voice. She placed her hand just beneath my ribcage to estimate how engaged my diaphragm was in taking deep, subtle breaths instead of conspicuous, shallow ones. Of course, I didn't know any of this at the time; it seemed to me, instead, that Deborah was performing witchcraft; the pure Italian vowels I sang were hexes, her touch some elusive kind of black magic. She told me to relax as she put her small hand with its French-tipped fingernails on my stomach for the first time. My entire body tensed up in embarrassment and surprise, my face turning a furiously embarrassed shade of crimson. I'd never been touched by a music teacher before, unaware, then, of the impossibility of a public school teacher doing so because of the liability involved, despite touch being a most powerful teaching tool. Mostly, though, my rigid shoulders and clenched jaw were a result of how profoundly ashamed I was of my body, the softness of it, the curves it took while others' bodies stayed straight, narrow, small, and unobtrusive. I didn't know that Deborah was gauging the natural shape of my ribs—luckily I'm barrel-chested, as virtually all opera singers are—to see how fully my lungs were filling with the air I was nervously gasping in. "Imagine a beach ball," she said as she applied pressure to my belly.

"A beach ball? Where?" I said, confused. Analogies were a pretty foreign concept to me then. Little did I know that they're a staple of the voice teacher's arsenal, because it's not like we singers are learning to play the guitar or the trombone. The human voice is the only invisible instrument. Singers have to learn to use their voice while being blinded to its shape and inner workings, what makes it function the way we need it to, what hurts it. Those first five years of voice lessons were like a marvelous mystery, and I soon learned why singers are such a superstitious group of people. *Don't go out without a scarf*, some say, *suck on lemons*, *suck on ice*, *don't drink coffee*, *sleep with a humidifier*. To me, all these rituals exist because our instrument, our moneymaker—our way of life—is as frustratingly intangible as "art," "love," or "beauty."

"Okay, let's start somewhere else," Deborah said. "Picture a baby, sleeping. Do you know how their bellies move up and down, and not their chests?"

I thought about the image, and I could immediately picture the assured up-and-down motions of the way a newborn breathes as it kicks its tiny legs through the ineffable dream-realm. "Yes—and?"

"A baby's breaths are deep and full because they're from the stomach"—she paused, for emphasis—"the diaphragm. As we grow up, we become more aware of our breathing. We begin to breathe from our chests, exaggerated, like this"—here, she made her chest quickly rise up and down—"and these are shallow breaths that don't make use of how big our lungs can be. You have to learn to breathe in all directions, not just your stomach moving out, but expanding through the lower back, sides, and belly." She touched each place on my body as she listed it, as if she were rousing them from sleep and into being. "Like an inflated beach ball," she said, smiling, her eyes unusually blue in their lucidity.

From that point on, and through a long line of voice teachers, I was taught to be hyper-aware of my own breathing. Each teacher had her way of drawing attention to it, her knack for fine-tuning its workings with infinitesimal adjustments. Breathing is the thing that people tend to screw up the most in classical singing, and something that separates good singers from the exceptional. Breath control was (and still is) a source of intense frustration for me, something I was consistently critiqued about and that incited self-doubt on a near-daily basis. Looking back, it's amazing that, for a long time, something as seemingly innate as breathing was the central focus of my life, and yet now, as a writer, my goal is merely to express myself, to convey my meaning—an endeavor which is a similar mix of the simple and the complex, the assumed and the impossible.

Less than a year after that first lesson with Deborah, I began to perform with the adult chorus of The Sorg Opera, the same professional company where my best friend Kate was performing as one of the spirits in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) before she could even do long division. The person nearest my age was a graduate student at Miami University, and even though I always felt a little silly as I waited outside the opera house for my mom to pick me up on rehearsal nights, being in the opera made me feel ridiculously grown-up. I had costumes fitted to my body (an experience I was always ambivalent about as the seamstress's hands measured and poked), applied cake makeup in the dressing room before performances, and finally learned to sing in foreign languages. The first opera I ever did, Bizet's *Carmen*—still my very favorite—required me to learn French, a language I've had an inexplicable love affair with for as long as I can remember. Even though I had no idea what I was doing, I became more convincing with every hour in the practice room, learning the vowels and consonants not by what they meant but rather how they *felt*: the way they resonated in what singers call the 'mask,' that is, the space behind the cheekbones and between the eyes; the arch of my soft palate on the nasal ones; the tight, round shape of my lips when I said "*coeur*" or "*fleur*." I listened to the French pronunciation tape the chorus master made me while I got dressed, while I studied, and while I slept, the words—no, the *sensations*—filling my mouth like balloons.



Once I reached Wright State University as a scared but ambitious vocal performance major, the adrenaline high of talent scholarships and successful auditions quickly began to wear thin. Even though I was generally considered one of the most promising new voice students in the program—a designation I never got used to, never felt remotely comfortable with—the unrealistic expectations I had of what my body should look like began to influence how I sounded. After about a year of studying voice at the college level, I started to become afraid of and embarrassed by my dark, rich, powerful sound, the very thing that had always distinguished me from everyone else. In my private lessons, I got into the subconscious habit of altering my voice to be more airy, light, and agile. In short, I tried my best, without meaning to, to produce a sound more like that of the slim, willowy sopranos whose bodies I envied but whose voices I didn't. I flinched more often when Dr. Warrick touched me to adjust my posture or to point out the tension in my jaw and shoulders, and I eventually spent less and less time in the practice room. For the first time in my life, I no longer *wanted* to be on the stage, just so I could be invisible, so I could more easily imagine that I didn't exist at all. I believed, more than I ever had before, that my body was the cause of every problem I had and ever would have; I'd never be happy while I was entombed inside it. I trained myself to believe that my mind was some noble, long-suffering entity trapped inside a cesspit, a bird with tiny, hollow bones, singing in its lightness, but doomed to fly on damaged wings.

As must be apparent by now, my body and I have had a long and sordid past. I was in only third or maybe fourth grade when I went on my first diet, and the strange thing is that I put myself on it, not my mother or our stern family doctor. I wasn't all too overweight then, weighing perhaps one-hundred-and-twenty pounds, but as I kept getting taller and taller, and a little thick around the middle, I started envying those lithe, tan girls in my class, the blonde ones, the ones with blue eyes, and the ones who played soccer on the weekend. With my pale skin and the sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of my nose, my stick-straight, ink-black hair, and my tendency to lose myself in imagination, I stuck out like a spectacle. I was young—*too* young—when my breasts appeared one day, and my hips not long after. For the first time, my body was beginning to reflect that solemn little grown-up that had always been trapped inside a child's body, but it was *too soon*. My hatred for my body was bred early and tended like a hothouse orchid.

After my sophomore year in college I had weight-loss surgery, an operation called a “roux-en-Y gastric bypass,” so named for the new Y-shape configuration of my insides. The idea was to save my life, and it did, though things are never that simple. Losing weight was like a two-year-long high, and I clearly remember the order I discovered the parts of my body I never knew I had: first was the small, knobby bone on my wrists, always buried and out of sight

before. Then came my collarbone—and boy was I excited about that one—and for a while, it protruded so much that it bruised whenever a seat belt crossed it. I still point to the day I first noticed my hip bones as the day that I first felt like a *woman* instead of the undesirable, asexual being that the very obese often imagine themselves to be. I came to the terrifying realization, however, after losing one-hundred-and-ninety of my shameful extra pounds, and finally looking, on the outside, more like everyone else, that it wasn't enough. I still had problems, and I still felt acutely self-conscious and fundamentally unlovable. Where was the magic wand that was supposed to pass over me once I lost my weight? Despite how much I demanded of my body, how hard I pushed it in the practice room and how far it had gotten me, I was still miserable. When would I finally stop hating my body—hating *myself*? It was then I decided that I wanted—no, *needed*—to write. Not long after, I began attempting poetry, experimenting with the sounds and shapes of rhyme and meter and trying my hand at using words to tame the emotions that brewed inside me like a storm.

I knew that I could never go on to be a professional singer when I didn't care enough to go to my check-ups or to take the vitamins that keep me alive, since my body can no longer absorb nutrients, but I was stubborn. Through no fault of the surgery, but rather my own stupidity, I became weaker by the day, clumps of my long hair falling out and collecting in the bathtub drain. I was perpetually covered in purple and green anemic bruises. I occasionally turned to astringent red wine instead of food—never drinking much, but with my tiny stomach, it didn't *take* much—a tendency that many weight-loss surgery recipients are all too predisposed to. Photographs of me from this time show a girl with dark circles under her eyes, a startlingly prominent collarbone and cheekbones, and an expression of perpetual tiredness. I didn't understand just how unhealthy I'd become until one day I realized that I couldn't even sing in the car anymore without getting winded. What had *happened* to me? Singers are unique in that their body *is* their instrument—why was I trashing mine?

Back then, I didn't see just how much I had to live for and to look forward to. It's something I still forget, sometimes.



I was incredibly lucky to find Nolan, a voice teacher who was suitably stern with just the right amount of encouragement and smiles. When he got me, my voice was in fairly bad shape, and what terrified me was that I had to completely relearn everything I'd ever known to be true about my instrument. I no longer weighed almost four-hundred-pounds, so my diaphragm could move much more easily, something that took a lot of getting used to. As crazy as it sounds, I had a neck again, so I could see more of my instrument's workings, though most of it was still, of course, shrouded in mystery. Most shocking, though, was how my voice actually changed registers—that is,

before my surgery, I was undoubtedly a mezzo-soprano whose highest aspiration was to sing the role of Carmen. When I began studying with Nolan, I discovered—in a reaction that blended delight and horror—that I'd become a dramatic soprano virtually overnight.

Soon I was singing Mozart and Handel for the first time, composers I'd never considered for my voice, and Nolan concentrated his efforts on making my voice more agile. Something that many people don't realize is that the vocal mechanism is made of muscles like any other, so I had to 'get back in shape.' The exercises I spent my time on in those days were like yoga or Pilates, stretching and lengthening as my range reclaimed each note, until my vocal cords were once again as limber as a gymnast. Breath control was the biggest problem I dealt with, as always, so Nolan regularly had me lie on the floor of the recital hall where I had my lessons and sing my pieces with a stack of books on my stomach. When I got nervous or stopped thinking about my diaphragm, the books would stop moving up and down, signaling that I'd screwed up. Whenever those books were rising and falling with my breath, though, my voice swelled to fill the entire hall, reverberating against the walls and ceiling. When my breathing was right so were my pitch, my timbre, and my tone; everything seemed to be falling into place.



It seems ironic that my last lesson with Nolan was the most successful one we had. It still keeps me up at night, these five years later, wondering if that afternoon was the best my voice will ever sound, some unattainable, sentimentalized ideal that I can never get back to.

I was trying to perfect a piece called “*Gretchen am Spinnrade*,” or “Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel,” by Franz Schubert. The pressure mounted with each lesson as the date of my final recital—the one I never had—got closer and closer. After working on the piece for over a month, I was beginning to feel like I finally had it down pat—the vowels and consonants were in the right place, my diaphragm was fully engaged so that the high notes sounded free and effortless instead of pinched, and I knew the meaning of the text so well that I could communicate it with my eyes and my comportment. The syllables and the curve of the melody were so ingrained in my muscle memory that I no longer had to think about them; I only needed to *trust* my body to execute what I'd spent a lifetime training it to do.

We were in a large practice room—always dingy, cinder-block spaces, never with any windows—and as the piano accompaniment began, I tried to let the familiar tension between my shoulder blades melt away. I unclenched my jaw in anticipation. As I started to sing, I had one of those moments that every student of singing yearns for, the sensation of everything clicking into place: the intonation was right because the breathing was correct; the timbre was warm, and not too throaty; the melodic line was smooth and even. All the elements of what we

call *bel canto*—Italian for ‘beautiful singing’—were there. Even though singers are virtually always hyperaware of the workings of their voice, constantly checking and re-checking all its minute movements and oscillations, at that moment, I didn't have to. Instead, I just enjoyed the way my voice caught on the emotional passages in just the right way: when Gretchen remembers Faust's noble gait, the way he proudly holds his head, the touch of his hand to hers, the feeling of his kiss.

Meine Ruh' ist hin,  
Mein Herz ist schwer,  
Ich finde sie nimmer  
Und nimmermehr.

Mein Busen drängt sich  
Nach ihm hin.  
Ach, dürft ich fassen  
Und halten ihn,

Und küssen ihn,  
So wie ich wollt,  
An seinen Küssen  
Vergehen sollt!

[My peace is gone,  
My heart is heavy,  
I will find it never  
and never more.

My bosom urges itself  
toward him.  
Ah, might I grasp  
And hold him!

And kiss him,  
As I would wish,  
At his kisses  
I should die!]

It was one of those rare moments of true success: for me, it was always the sensation of being removed from mind *and* body, transcending and rising above the cage, and finding in my artistry a meaning for my life.

As I sang the sustained, final high A of the song, I closed my eyes, drinking up the intoxicating light-headedness like a drug. The relentless, driving piano accompaniment—meant to emulate the sound of the spinning wheel in its rotations, slowing down or gaining momentum as Gretchen experiences euphoria and sadness—came to a close, and the final notes, even after they'd stopped sounding, lingered in the room, seeming to permeate the very cement walls themselves. I opened my eyes.

Nolan, who I'd never seen get emotional before, was crying. His eyes—like mine had been that day so long ago in my mother's bedroom—were wet and shining. He didn't speak; instead, his gaze said, *See what you can do? I can't make this happen. You did this. You are more powerful than you realize. I wish you'd just believe it.*

It must have been a shock to Nolan when I started canceling lessons and making terrible excuses. At the time, I thought that I just had 'too much going on'—I was going through an awful break-up, one that would eventually propel me on a road trip that has changed my life. I think back on that trip almost daily, even now, four years later: as I work to finish my memoir; when I catch a glimpse of the Québec fleur-de-lys I've had tattooed on my back as a reminder; when I kiss John goodnight, the man I met in a gas station in Bedford, Massachusetts on the last day of the journey and who has gone on to share my life. Looking back I realize, with disturbing, stomach-turning clarity, what was *really* happening when I divorced myself from singing—*I was afraid of my own power*. The power of sound, the power of emotion, the power I had to make my listeners *feel*. I was scared of allowing my voice, that precious extension of my body, to get *too* big—after all, hadn't I spent my entire life trying to take up less space? Isn't that why I blended in, laid low, lost nearly two-hundred pounds? My body strove every day to see just how powerful it could be; with every hour in the practice room it grew stronger, fuller, and more beautiful, like a flower in the sun. But my *mind*—the part of me that always saw my body as damaged and ugly, a flawed container—wouldn't let me. It had seen too much pain, been told too many times '*You'd be so pretty if you lost weight.*'



John surprised me a few years ago, when we were in his hometown of Boston, by suddenly pulling up and parking on the street outside the New England Conservatory of Music. I could feel the conflict churning in my belly at the mere mention of the place, and as we found a side door to go into, the hair on the back of my neck stood up and my pulse quickened. Wandering down one of the labyrinth-like hallways that branch out from the lobby like roots, we heard the sound of the orchestra finishing their tuning—my favorite sound in the world—before they began to play. As the familiar notes of one of the late Beethoven string quartets began to wash over me, I could feel the gates inside me being ripped open, the partitions crashing down. I started sobbing, so violently and unexpectedly that little spots appeared in my vision from lack of breath, and I ran from the lobby, leaving John

standing there feeling guilty and terrible, to lock myself in the women's bathroom. I remember thinking for the first time, as I hid inside the stall for almost half an hour, that the regret of it all, the raw, overwhelming *ache*, might push me over. I eventually talked myself down from the emotional ledge, but since then, I've been cautious, preferring to forget how much I loved to sing.

Five years later, as I write this, I listen to an old, low-quality recording of the first and only time I ever sang "Gretchen" in recital, which I found among the cassette tapes of dozens of my voice lessons. At the time, it wasn't perfect yet—there are breaks in the line, the high notes are thin, and I can recall the terror of getting out of breath in the middle of a phrase. Despite how self-critical I am, though, I cling to that recording with all my strength, as it is a relic, a totem, a reminder of my past life like the tattoo of two bass clefs linked to form a heart that I had etched onto my wrist: my penance, my lifelong reminder. The muscle memory I developed over hundreds of hours practicing the song remembers everything: the patterns and curves of the melodic line still live in the hidden folds of my vocal chords; deep in my belly, my diaphragm remembers breathing the way I trained it to by lying on the floor with a book on my stomach, sitting in a chair with my head between my knees, and by a dozen voice teachers pressing on my belly to coax it to life; the weighty shapes of the German consonants remain, these five years later, and Goethe's words are still heavy with meaning in my mouth.

Only recently have I begun the slow road to healing, and the fact that I can even bring myself to listen to that recording is a sign of progress. I still largely censor classical music and opera from my life, but I'm getting better about it, occasionally allowing myself a bit of Debussy, Chopin, or Rachmaninoff like crusts of bread slipped beneath the door of a prison cell. I'm also beginning to understand the gravity of the question that looms over me: is it better to be numb or to *feel*, even if doing so risks exposing the fragile, delicate part of my psyche that threatens to shatter the thin veneer of control I have over my life? It often stings when I recall the words of John, my mother, and countless other people in my world—"*It's never too late, Hayley*"—because I'm not sure that I'll ever be able to believe it. These days, though, I try to tell myself that I don't have to only be writer *or* musician, mind *or* body, because each part of me has worked to shape and inform the other.

It is then I remember, with cautious optimism, that I *am* a singer.



# SHIPPENSBURG UNIVERSITY

1871 Old Main Drive  
Shippensburg, PA 17257-2299

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
P A I D  
Permit No. 12  
Shippensburg, PA