

The Ashen
Egg

A Journal of Undergraduate English Scholarship

Department of English
Western Kentucky University

Vol. 2 (2014)

The Ashen Egg

Editor

Alison Langdon

Editorial Board

Lou-Ann Crouther • Jane Fife

Walker Rutledge • Judith Szerdahelyi

Submission guidelines: *The Ashen Egg* is an annual journal publishing critical essays on literature, rhetoric, linguistics, film, and popular culture. Any current Western Kentucky University undergraduate student may submit scholarly work for consideration. Submissions must be endorsed by an English Department faculty member who confirms the submission as a piece produced for one of the faculty member's courses and approves it as worthy for publication. Manuscripts may range from 750 to 3000 words, though exceptions may be made for submissions of stellar quality. Essays must follow the Modern Language Association style guidelines as defined in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (latest edition). All submissions must be in Times or Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and be free of typographical and grammatical errors.

Deadline: Submissions must be received in CH 135 no later than May 31, and must be accompanied by the cover sheet and nomination form to be considered.

Contents Vol. 2 (2014)

Note on Contributors	1
Sweet and Bitter Waters: Religious Themes and Imagery in Chrétien de Troyes' <i>Yvain</i> <i>David Gifford</i>	4
Comparing Themes of Familial Relations and Feminist Sentiment in the Brothers Grimm's "Rapunzel" and Disney's <i>Tangled</i> <i>Anna Beth Gillon</i>	13
Immigrant Southerners in Cynthia Shearer's <i>The Celestial Jukebox</i> <i>Ben Hussung</i>	23
Sporting Silence: The Complicit Language of Violent Masculinity <i>Tracy Jo Ingram</i>	33
Myth and Memoirs: A Young Writer's Inquiry into the Nature of Memoir and Anti-Memoir <i>Abby Rudolph</i>	39
"The Prioress's Tale": A Matter of Redemption <i>Susan Taylor</i>	45
The True Facts of a Lying Memoir <i>Rebecca Thieman</i>	56
"Black Milk," "Goldenes Haar," and the Death-Dance: Threads of Allusion and Perversion in Paul Celan's "Todesfug" <i>Maggie Woodward</i>	63

Note on Contributors

David Gifford, a Bowling Green native, is currently a junior at WKU pursuing a degree in English literature and a minor in Spanish. After graduating, he plans to continue working toward a doctorate degree in hopes of fulfilling his dream of teaching literature at the university level. In his spare time, David enjoys reading a varied selection of literature, pretending he can speak fluent Spanish, and shirking his homework in favor of pursuing far less productive activities.

Anna Beth Gillon is a senior at Western Kentucky University studying film and creative writing. She is a student in the Honors College and has had the privilege of presenting at WKU's Undergraduate Literature Conference. She has a passion for travelling and spent a semester abroad at Harlaxton College in 2012. It is her dream to return to England on a more permanent basis very soon.

Tracy Jo Ingram, a Spring 2013 graduate, takes keen interest in literary analysis that focuses on dissecting the concepts of American Masculinity and gender binaries. She also has a particular passion for writing creative nonfiction. The work included is a marriage of both. Tracy Jo was the WKU English Department's Gordon Wilson recipient in her graduating year, as well as a two-time recipient of the Dr. Karen Pelz Creative Writing Scholarship. She is currently serving an AmeriCorps term in San Francisco. Regardless of where she lands, TJ's heart

will always belong in Bowling Green among the classrooms of Cherry Hall.

Ben Hussung is a senior at Western Kentucky University studying religion and creative writing. His fiction has won the 2013 Ann Travelstead Fiction Award of WKU's publication, *Zephyrus*, and his poetry has been named Honorable Mention in the Flo Gault Student Poetry Competition of Sarabande Books. He presented a paper at WKU's Undergraduate Literature Conference, and he was the recipient of an English-Speaking Union scholarship to study literature at the University of Cambridge's Literature Summer School. After graduation, he plans on pursuing graduate studies in New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Abby Rudolph is a senior Literature major and Creative Writing minor in the English department. She is a native Kentuckian and is devoted to the environmental and cultural health of the state. Her time in Bowling Green has deepened her commitment to her home and she plans to continue her education and use writing as a supportive force for endeavors in social justice.

Susan Taylor, originally from Kansas City, MO, is in her first year of the MPA program at Western Kentucky University. She graduated from WKU in 2013 with a BA in English and a minor in Communication Studies. She is currently a graduate assistant for WKU's speech and debate team.

Rebecca Thieman is a senior at Western Kentucky University double majoring in Creative Writing and Psychology. She has had work published in *The Susquehanna Review* and *The Zephyrus*. The topic of factual truth versus emotional truth has been of interest to her since she first delved into creative nonfic-

tion and is one she believes every writer should consider. When not in school she likes to rock climb, stumble upon poetry and cook gluten free food. After she graduates, Rebecca plans to pursue a career in Clinical Psychology with a focus in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Maggie Woodward is a senior Creative Writing major with minors in English Literature and Gender & Women's Studies. She graduates this May and hopes to attend a Masters of Fine Arts program in Poetry Writing next fall. She tutors WKU's Student-Athletes and loves it. She hopes to eventually obtain a PhD in Literature, teach at the university level, and write poems from a rocking chair on her front porch.

Sweet and Bitter Waters: Religious Themes and Imagery in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*

David Gifford

In comparison with the texts of the years prior to it, the medieval romance is relatively secular in its scope. While it is safe to assume that most medievals considered themselves to be Christians, the romance, with its sweeping quests and courtly love, denotes a stark departure from many of the overtly religious texts that preceded it. Yet, the ubiquity of Christianity in medieval times seems inescapable, as is evinced particularly well by Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Yvain*. Though it is a firmly established romance, the poem still draws upon Christian imagery and themes to convey its meaning. The poem appears to be relatively simple, with its quests of grandeur and the courting of a beautiful lady; and many of its themes are relatively easy to decipher, even ignoring the religious allusions. Yvain, fallen from his lady's good graces, must redeem himself in order that she might forgive him. In addition, Edward Schweitzer says that "the two-part figure of the Chevalier au Lion—Yvain with his lion—dramatizes the restoration of ideal order within Yvain" (145), so that Yvain's redemption is not only with Laudine, but with himself, as he is eventually restored to his former glory. Particularly in a Christianized society, any religious or liturgical elements would clearly emphasize this point. Christ's death brought redemption to his people, so any reference to Christ or his religion would fit this theme aptly. Chrétien draws upon several Christian symbols and motifs to emphasize and underscore this theme of redemption in *Yvain*.

Before venturing further, some clarification may be in order regarding the secular status of the romance. As Helen Cooper says, the distinguishing characteristic of the romance is that it was written in the common vernacular (often French) rather

than in Latin, which was the official language of the Church (Cooper xiii). Cooper explains that this was not merely a difference of language; being written in vernacular "suggested a work deeply involved in the concerns of those of sufficiently high status to have access to book" (Cooper xiii). The romance marked a type of literature "with its central interests different from those of the Church," though "not necessarily at odds with it" (Cooper xiii). Instead, the romance's main concerns are those of "dynasty and reproduction" and "the warrior ethic," both of which lay outside the Church's concern (Cooper xiii-xiv). From its very inception, the romance marked a departure from literature of clerical concerns to literature that could be interpreted as secular.

Yvain begins his quest by visiting a magical fountain, which becomes a key symbol throughout the poem, particularly in the first sections. However, the fountain itself is not of so much importance to Chrétien as the images it evokes. Specifically, the main image Chrétien intends is that of a baptismal font, which had strong restorative connotations. He also uses the fountain to create an allusion to Pentecost, which refers back to and enforces the baptismal symbolism. Pentecost was particularly important to the early church. Guglielmus Durandus says that it was "hardly less celebrated" than Easter (qtd. in Luria 577). Part of the reason that it was so important is that, as Luria points out, "[d]uring the second to fourth centuries, baptism was given only at Easter and Pentecost" (576). Given this, there naturally exists a strong tie between Pentecost and baptism (Luria 576). Recounting his story of the fountain, the knight Calogrenant tells Yvain that the storm the fountain caused "was so terrible and severe that a hundred times I feared I'd be killed" (300). After this, he tells Yvain that "God brought [him] swift comfort" (300); once the tempest had ceased, a great flock of birds gathered on the tree so that "not a leaf or branch could be found that was not completely covered with birds" (300). The birds, Calogrenant says, then began to sing "in perfect harmony" and "the tree was more beautiful because of them" (300).

Such a description hardly sounds religious on a purely surface level; Maxwell Luria, however, proposes that the fountain is portrayed in highly liturgical imagery (565), suggesting that many traditional readings of the fountain are "excessively ab-

stract" (569). According to Luria, there are multiple details in the text that insinuate a religious undertone, not only with the fountain itself, but in the entire episode leading up to it. Beginning with Calogrenant's story, Chrétien tells readers that his story begins on Pentecost (295). As Luria points out, many assume this to be "entirely arbitrary" (576). However, the Holy Spirit, who descended on the apostles at the feast of Pentecost, is invoked numerous times throughout the poem (576). Not only is that the case, but the repetition of the number seven seems to indicate Pentecost as well: Calogrenant's story took place seven years before, and Laudine was married to Esclados for seven years before Yvain kills him (577). Once again, these could be said to be merely circumstantial, except that the number seven is highly associated with both Pentecost and the Holy Spirit: Pentecost lasts seven days, and the Holy Spirit was said to have seven gifts (578).

When Calogrenant arrives at the fountain, he pours water on the stone, causing an enormous storm (300). Such a storm would naturally have strong winds, and Chrétien mentions lightning (which causes thunder) several times. As Luria points out, this again reinforces the Pentecost theme. The Book of Acts 2:2-3 says that, when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples at Pentecost, it came as "a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming" (*Douay-Rheims Bible* Acts 2.2-3). With that, two more similarities become evident: the winds of the storm mimic the rushing wind of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the thunder echoes the sound that accompanied the wind (Luria 577).

After the storm, Calogrenant says that the tree became filled with "so many birds" that no "branch could be found that was not completely covered with birds" (300). Again, this harkens to Pentecost. Doves (symbols of the Holy Spirit) were, at one point, presented in churches during Pentecost (577). The Book of Acts also states in chapter 2 that, after the Holy Spirit descended, "they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2.4), and that "every man heard them speak in his own language" (2.6). This account sounds very similar to Calogrenant's tale of the birds, when he says that "each sang a different song, so that I never heard one sing what another was singing" (300).

Clearly, there are at the very least numerous insinuations of Pentecost in Calogrenant's story. It should be noted, however, that Chrétien uses the Pentecost motif in order to highlight the baptismal imagery. Pentecost itself, it appears, is not as important to Chrétien as are the connotations it would suggest to his medieval readers: namely, baptism, which in turn suggests Chrétien's theme. Even on a purely ritualistic level, baptism denotes redemption, simply by the fact that if one becomes a Christian (i.e., redeemed), then they should be baptized. Thus, if one is baptized, that person must be redeemed. Beyond this, however, the very action of baptism is symbolic of redemption. Tom Artin says that baptism is an "imitation of the Harrowing [of Hell]" (163). Just as Christ's descent into (and ascension from) Hell redeemed those in it, so too does one's descent into (and ascension from) water symbolize this redemption (164). Further, Artin says that baptism is representative of a "spiritual descent into hell and struggle with the forces of darkness" (164); Esclados becomes representative of the evil with which Calogrenant and, more importantly, Yvain must overcome during this baptism (164). Should one of them prevail in his struggle, as Yvain does, he will emerge from the struggle redeemed. Yvain, it seems, does emerge redeemed (at least for the time being), as he wins Esclados' kingdom and his wife. It should be noted, however, that this episode's figurative baptism is not Yvain's final redemption; rather, it acts as a precursor to the redemption that is to come later.

Just as the fountain episode is a kind of baptism, *Yvain* as a whole takes on a sort of baptismal quality, which further reinforces the redemptive aspects the poem. As Z.P. Zaddy points out, there is much debate over the structure of *Yvain*, though the most supported views are that it has either two or three parts (523). In the "bipartite" view, the first section regards Yvain's marriage and separation with Laudine, and the second deals with his atonement (Zaddy 523). The "tripartite" view maintains that there are three sections: 1) from the beginning to Yvain's marriage, 2) Yvain's schism with Laudine, and 3) Yvain's redemptive quests (Zaddy 523). Either view is admissible, but the bipartite view is particularly compatible with the baptismal motif. The stages of a baptism are, first, immersion followed by a raising, or ascension. As posited above, immersion is symbolic of one's struggle with the "forces of darkness"

(Artin 164). This mirrors Yvain's story quite well: the first part (immersion) involves his battle with his inner struggles, namely, his split with Laudine; while the second part (ascension) deals with his reconciliation with Laudine.

The fountain is likely the key image in the first sections of *Yvain*, but it is soon supplanted by what becomes the main symbol of the entire poem: the lion. After having regained his reason, Yvain comes upon "a dragon holding a lion by the tail and burning its flanks with its flaming breath" (337). Yvain decides to save the lion and kills the dragon. Anticipating a fight with the lion, Yvain is shocked that it bows "in an act of total submission" (337). The lion, Chrétien says, "stayed by his [Yvain's] side and never left him" (337). Yvain evidently thinks quite highly of his lion, as does Chrétien, who alludes to him in the title of this poem (*Le Chevalier au lion*). Trying to preserve his anonymity, Yvain eventually comes to call himself the "Knight of the Lion" as he goes on his adventures. According to Artin, medieval bestiaries indicate that lion cubs "are born dead, and remain lifeless three days, after which time their father breathes in their faces, making them alive" (222). As such, lions are to be reminders that "Our Heavenly Father restored His Son [Christ] to life after three days in the tomb" (222). Given that, it seems reasonable that a lion symbolizes both resurrection (Artin 222) and Christ himself. Thus, giving Yvain the title of "Knight with the Lion" is more a statement about said knight's character than his choice of company. Instead of being simply Yvain, he is now a Knight of Christ or, at the very least, Resurrection.

As the lion is symbolic of Christ, being called the Knight of the Lion is a clear insinuation that Yvain is no longer a knight concerned with his own honor, but with God's. In the early episodes with the fountain, Yvain seeks out adventure primarily for his own benefit and prestige; but as the Knight of the Lion, he does quests not out of pride but, ultimately, out of submission to God. And if, as Artin says, the lion is a symbol of resurrection, this adds yet another element to the redemption theme of the poem. The episode in which Yvain meets the lion is central to the poem, both chronologically and thematically. It acts as a segue between the Yvain of the first half of the poem and the new, "resurrected" Yvain of the second half. Urban T. Holmes says this quite succinctly: "Yvain succeeds at first, then

fails through lack of Grace of some kind. He acquires this while in the company of the grateful Lion" (113). The lion marks the erasure of the old, prideful Yvain and brings in the new, redeemed version. This makes the lion, in Christian terms, Yvain's salvation; it is his metaphorical acceptance of grace.

During the second portion of the story, Yvain attempts to prove himself to Laudine by undergoing several daring quests. All of these adventures (with one notable exception) require the lion's intervention in order to be successful. Yvain becomes overwhelmed as he fights the giant Harpin, Lunete's attackers, and the demons of Dire Adventure. In each of these battles the lion must intervene to prevent Yvain from losing the battle. Seen through the religious lens, Yvain is incapable of winning his battles (which, in turn, prevents his being a great knight) without the lion's (Christ's) help. With the help of the lion, Yvain "has become the perfect knight of Christ, whose obligation is no longer to glory, but to love" (Artin 250). His quests are also redemptive to a point, as they generally involve him righting one of his past wrongs. For instance, he must save Lunete from a punishment which she incurred on his behalf; and each of the quests requires him saving or assisting a woman, in the same way that he betrayed several women like Lunete and Laudine. Yvain's quests are not simply for Chrétien to fill a dead space in his poem. They, along with most things in it, serve to enforce the redemptive theme throughout.

As the protagonist of the poem, Yvain naturally should embody the theme of the poem to some extent. However, he is more than simply a vehicle for redemption; Yvain himself becomes a symbol as well. On one level, he can be said to be symbolic of an unconverted soul, redeemed to glory once he has experienced the redemptive power of grace. Yvain's episode in the forest seems like ample evidence for this argument. Having gone mad at his dishonor and the loss of his love, Yvain wanders around aimlessly. Julian Harris says that "[p]ractically speaking, his activities were, for a while, those of a wild animal" (1145), bitterly ironic considering that he will soon become the Knight of the Lion. In any case, he is saved by a damsel who has been charged by her lady to apply healing ointment to Yvain. This ointment is to be applied only to his temples and forehead, as his malady is in his brain. The damsel, however, applies it to

his entire body, using up all of the ointment in the process. Naked and covered in ointment, this episode seems to allude to Christ's words in John: "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter unto the kingdom of God" (John 3.5). The ointment is naturally a wet substance, and therefore similar to water; this and his being naked suggests that Yvain is perhaps being reborn, which again supports the resurrection theme. This episode also points to the fall in Genesis. Upon awaking, Yvain realizes his nakedness in a similar way that Adam and Eve did: "And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves aprons" (*Douay-Rheims Bible* Gen. 3.7). Like Adam and Eve, Yvain now realizes his wrong-doing, which sets him on a path to correct it.

There is, moreover, at least one more Biblical allusion in this episode: In the Book of John, near Passover, Christ washes his disciples' feet as they enter somewhere to eat. Christ tells them that "[i]f I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me," to which Peter replies, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head" (John 13.8-13.9). Jesus answers by telling Peter that only his feet need to be washed, and that it would be a waste for him to wash the rest of his body (John 13.10). Chrétien says that the damsel "was foolish to anoint his body, for it was of no avail to him" (333). This seems to be a parallel with Peter's washing; just as Peter wished to have "more grace" by being washed more, so the damsel wishes to make Yvain "more sane" by applying the ointment to his entire body.

Yvain, however, plays another important role, particularly when viewed in conjunction with Gawain. Tom Artin suggests that "Chrétien sets up Gawain as a foil for Yvain; taken together, they represent opposing, although complementary ideals" (232). Yvain, Artin says, has become the "knight of Christ," while Gawain represents the "knight of this world" (233). As such, Gawain, in the final conflict between sisters, foolishly takes the side of the elder daughter because he has been "too occupied with the foolish business of the worldly court" (233). Artin further says that, traditionally, the dispute between the "Old Law and New" was generally "represented figuratively by two women" (234). The two sisters that Gawain and Yvain rep-

resent, he says, are representative of this ideal, the elder sister being Old Testament Law, for whom Gawain fights, and the younger sister being New Testament Grace, for whom Yvain fights (234). Yvain, then, is not a knight fighting simply for a maiden but for the central Christian ideal of grace and, consequently, redemption. Douglas Kelly takes this even further. He suggests that Yvain is, like Lancelot in Chrétien's *Charrette*, a "knight inspired by love" and is therefore more successful than Gawain (Kelly 456). Though Gawain exhibits all of the chivalric qualities of a knight, he falls short in the category of love (Kelly 460). Through his virtual victory over Gawain, Yvain proves that "all that is done in the name of love is good" (Kelly 459). Kelly means this with respect to Yvain's love for Laudine and the courtly love sentiment; however, this applies equally well to the more religious aspects of the poem. Yvain, motivated by love (i.e., for God, as has been shown) is superior to a knight that fights solely for chivalric reasons, which in this case would be Gawain. Again, this supports the overall theme: Yvain, once a prideful, purely chivalric knight like Gawain, has been not only restored to his position of knight, but actually made into a better knight because of his situation. This is perhaps an allusion to the "fortunate fall" ideal, that humanity's fall was actually fortunate in that, though Paradise was lost, Grace was gained—which, as the medieval perceived it, was the more preferable of the two.

James 3:11 asks, "Doth a fountain send forth, out of the same hole, sweet and bitter water?" For Chrétien at least, it seems that the answer is yes: both secular and religious waters can indeed come from the same literary spring. An exemplary synthesis of secular form and Christian ideals, Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* is a testament to the didactic potential of literature. As religion tends to percolate into every facet of one's life, literature makes for an excellent tool for teaching, particularly when placed in the hands of a master such as Chrétien. *Yvain*, though certainly a romance, nonetheless offers readers a glimpse into how religion was treated and viewed in medieval times. Chrétien's works are complex, and pigeonholing them into simply religious fables is unwise and naïve; still, he clearly included religious motifs in his work, if for no other reason than to highlight his themes. For Chrétien, the question does not seem to be about religion. He

was more concerned with people: their motives, their sins, and, most importantly, their redemption.

Works Cited

- Artin, Tom. *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's Erec and Yvain*. Cranbury, N.J.: Associated UP, 1974. Print.
- Chrétien de Troyes. *Arthurian Romances*. Trans. William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll. Ed. William W. Kibler. London: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.
- Cooper, Helen. Introduction. *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*. Ed. Rosalind Field Cooper, Phillipa Hardman, and Michelle Sweeney. Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2010. Print.
- Harris, Julian. "The Role of the Lion in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*." *PMLA* 64.5 (1949): 1143-1163. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 March 2013.
- Holmes, Urban T. *Chrétien de Troyes*. New York: Twayne, 1970. Print.
- The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*. London: Baronius Press Limited, 2003. Print.
- Kelly, Douglas. "Gauvain and 'Fin' Amors" in the Poems of Chrétien de Troyes." *Studies in Philology* 67.4 (1970): 453-460. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2013.
- Luria, Maxwell S. "The Storm-Making Spring and the Meaning of Chrétien's 'Yvain'." *Studies in Philology* 64.4 (1967): 564-585. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 March 2013.
- Schweitzer, Edward C. "Pattern and Theme in Chrétien's *Yvain*." *Traditio* 30 (1974): 145-189. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 April 2013.
- Zaddy, Z. P. "The Structure of Chrétien's *Yvain*." *The Modern Language Review* 65.3 (1970): 523-540. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 April 2013.

Comparing Themes of Familial Relations and Feminist Sentiment in the Brothers Grimm's "Rapunzel" and Disney's *Tangled*

Anna Beth Gillon

According to Robert Stam's introduction to *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, the theory of anteriority and superiority refers to "the assumption...that older arts are necessarily better arts" (4). However, in Disney's animated adaptations of classic fairy tales, this is not always the case. Many people can give in-depth descriptions of Disney renditions of centuries-old fairy tales, yet few have read the original versions written by authors such as the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. Part of this familiarity with Disney animated features certainly derives from the marketing and overall quality of the films, but perhaps it also stems from the complexity and context Disney films add to their characters. Disney's *Tangled* (2010), directed by Nathan Greno and Bryon Howard, is an excellent example of said complexity. The film is an adaptation of the story "Rapunzel," which Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm originally published in 1812, but *Tangled* is more than just a retelling of the story. The film adds new details and relationships to the life of the long-haired maiden named Rapunzel and also fleshes out the story with new elements of feminist subtext.

There exists persistent criticism that Disney's princess films perpetuate gender stereotypes, damage the self-esteem of young female viewers, and deliver, as Henry Giroux writes, "the optimistic message that faith in commodities will solve their problems and help define who they want to be" (Giroux 123). In opposition to these criticisms, *Tangled* focuses on em-

powered female characters and rises above the pressure to conform to simplistic gender standards. The Rapunzel of *Tangled* is a much more forceful, modern young woman. Unlike the character in the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, she not only remains pure and innocent, but she also knows what she wants. She has dreams, and she follows those dreams determinedly, but this difference does not necessarily make her the “better” character. After all, there should not be what Robert Stam calls dichotomous thinking when it comes to “Rapunzel” vs. *Tangled*. The stories are just too radically different to “presume a bitter rivalry between film and literature” (Stam 4). They were simply written within different contexts, with “Rapunzel” reflecting the values of nineteenth-century Germany while *Tangled* reflects twenty-first-century American ideals.

All in all, *Tangled* is a very different story from the Brothers Grimm tale, “Rapunzel.” While several aspects are similar, such as the whimsical fairy tale setting and the magical properties of Rapunzel’s tears, the story and the film are products of different eras and cannot be effortlessly compared. Though they revolve around the same basic plotline, their subtextual messages are quite distinct. “Rapunzel” focuses on feminine beauty and purity, whereas *Tangled* deals with liberation, both in the sense of women and in the sense of youths coming of age and leaving their parents. Above all, I will argue that *Tangled* is an adaptation that appropriates. Rather than simply restating the plot, the film gives its own slant to the tale, highlighting certain elements and downplaying others until it has formed just the right composition to send the intended messages. It marks a new step in the evolution of the Disney princess story that challenges gender roles and comments on parent/child relationships through its presentation of Rapunzel and the villain Mother Gothel as strong and intricate women.

In 2010, Rapunzel became Disney’s tenth official princess, joining the positive progression of Disney film heroines. From *Snow White* of the 1930s, Disney films revolving around female protagonists have developed with gender stereotypes. The earlier films, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) centered around women who filled very predictable, obedient, “little woman” roles, like cleaning the house and thinking only of dancing with

the prince. In 1989 came Ariel, the heroine of *The Little Mermaid*, who had more of an adventurous spirit, but who still focused mainly on finding a man she obsessed over. The ‘90s brought in a more heroic standard for Disney princesses. Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*), Pocahontas, and Mulan are all women who end up saving the day rather than succumbing to damsel-in-distress mentality. Furthermore, with the 2009 introduction of Tiana, the career-driven heroine of *The Princess and the Frog*, Disney showed that they could continue to update their standards for princesses to adapt with women’s ever-increasing roles in society. Rapunzel in *Tangled* is no exception to this model. She is a character who very much subverts the spirit of the original “Rapunzel” story by running away to pursue her own independence rather than to marry the first man she meets. Then, when she does fall in love, it is with a thief and rogue, not a prince, subverting again the very common fairy tale trend of the prince coming along and miraculously falling in love with the damsel in distress.

The original Brothers Grimm fairy tale, on the other hand, perpetuates gender stereotypes. The fairy tale opens with a pregnant woman desiring to eat plants from a witch’s garden, even going so far as to say, “If I can’t eat some of the rampion, which is in the garden behind our house, I shall die” (Grimm). True, she is pregnant and having cravings, but it seems that she is also a stereotypical overreacting female. Her husband fetches the plant and gets caught by the witch; as a result, the witch makes him a deal: the rampion (also known as rapunzel) plant for his child. In Disney’s version, Rapunzel’s birth mother is presented as a very normal, rational woman, who simply needs the powers of a magical flower to heal an illness. The parents, therefore, are absolved of guilt when the witch, Mother Gothel, steals their child (who has magical hair linked to the flower). Perhaps this change came about to simplify the story for children, as is often done in fairy tale adaptations. They often push aside the gray areas of morality to give children more concrete ideas of which characters are good and which are evil. This can be useful in lessons of morality for very young children. However, some critics, such as author Bruno Bettelheim, argue that these “prettified and simplified versions . . . subdue their meaning and rob them of all deeper significance” (Bettelheim 24). Indeed, it would have been interesting to see Rapunzel’s parents,

the king and queen, as more morally ambiguous characters, but they are not major characters in the film, so it is understandable that their part of the story is glossed over.

In contrast, the film does not portray Mother Gothel as a simple character in the least. In "Rapunzel," little is mentioned on the subject of how the witch raised Rapunzel, other than her initial promise to the parents that the child "shall be well treated and I will care for it like a mother" (Grimm). In *Tangled*, though, much of the conflict stems from the perceived love between Rapunzel and Mother Gothel. In most Disney films where a parental figure is a villain, there is no real attachment between the villain and the victim. Such is the case between Cinderella and her stepmother. *Tangled* complicates the matter. Though Mother Gothel slips up at times and makes comments that let the audience know she is just using Rapunzel, most of the time she behaves affectionately toward her. For instance, their habit of repeating, "I love you more. I love you most" to each other is a touching and realistic portrayal of a close mother/daughter bond, which makes Mother Gothel's inevitable betrayal more heartbreaking.

Furthermore, the film alters the motives behind Mother Gothel's betrayal to shift the focus away from pigeonholing women into strictly domestic roles. The added element of Rapunzel's hair having healing powers affects not only her character, but also Mother Gothel's character, because it changes her desire from motherhood to everlasting life. The knowledge that Rapunzel's hair possesses the power to keep her eternally young prompts Mother Gothel to steal the child in the film, whereas in the fairy tale, the witch gains Rapunzel through a trade for some vegetables. The Brothers Grimm do not delve into the witch's motives, but the way the witch promises to care for the child as her own gives readers a clue. It seems that her true desire is to be a mother, even if it means taking another family's child and holding her in captivity. The maternal desire is consistent with many other classic fairy tales and early Disney adaptations that present children and domestic life as the defining goals for women. In fact, family therapists Litsa Renee Tanner, Shelley A. Haddock, Toni Schindler Zimmerman, and Lori K. Lund took an interest in the issue of couples, marriage, and family as depicted in Disney animated features, and they con-

cluded from their study that "on one hand, marriage and children are presented as the ultimate goal of life. On the other hand, women are often depicted in marginalized and powerless roles once married with children" (Tanner et al. 369). *Tangled* subverts the stereotype by presenting Mother Gothel as an independent, single woman who only uses motherhood as a means of achieving her goal of eternal youth. Though she is a villain and her motives are by no means admirable, she represents a more realistic and human mixture of good and bad qualities that make her a complex and interesting opponent for Rapunzel.

The mother/daughter issue in *Tangled* also raises questions of obedience and complicates the plot in terms of Rapunzel's conflicting desires. She yearns to be free from the tower, but she does not want to defy her mother's wishes, not merely out of fear of consequences, but also out of respect and affection for Mother Gothel. Through this mother/daughter relationship, the subtext of *Tangled* deals with themes of independence and growing up. It raises difficult questions about when to give children more freedom, when parents should rein their children in and when they should let go. The theme of adolescent independence also runs parallel to the theme of women becoming more independent. As Rapunzel learns to break away from the norms she has always known at home, she becomes a more proactive and self-sufficient heroine. She is a symbol of the new Disney princess and the new woman: one who takes action rather than waiting around for a prince and sticking to the norms.

Yet the original story of "Rapunzel" fits with the societal norms of its time very well as a cautionary tale rejecting young women's independence and promoting feminine purity. In the story, Rapunzel is not locked up for the first eleven years of her life, but, "when she was twelve years old, the enchantress shut her into a tower in the middle of a forest" (Grimm). The emphasis on the age of puberty proves to be quite blatant evidence that sexual purity is a key theme in the tale. As beauty is an element of sexuality, it is only logical that Rapunzel's appearance comes into play. By describing Rapunzel as "the most beautiful child under the sun" (Grimm), the authors highlight a common element of centuries-old fairy tales that has carried

over into modern culture: the obsession with feminine beauty. Authors Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz studied this beauty obsession in various original fairy tales and found that “feminine beauty is a dominant theme and that tales with heavy emphasis on feminine beauty are much more likely to have survived” (711). The findings show that society has considered physical attractiveness an indicator of worth for centuries. In fact, it is one of the most consistent standards of worth that spans across different cultures and people groups, much to the detriment of those who have more to offer than simply looks.

Tales of attractive heroines have indeed thrived, and they have passed on the beauty obsession to subsequent generations. This era’s issue is with Disney princesses. As feminist author Peggy Orenstein has complained, “Maybe [Disney] Princess is the first salvo in what will become a lifelong struggle over her body image, a Hundred Years’ War of dieting, plucking, painting and perpetual dissatisfaction with the results.” Because *Tangled*’s Rapunzel does not fit the mold of the beauty obsession, the film marks a step in the right direction for the image of the Disney princess. Rapunzel’s freckled complexion, her slightly disproportionate teeth, and her awkward stance are small indications that the clichéd yet unrealistic perfection of earlier princesses is a fading trend. Still, the Grimm version defines Rapunzel almost singularly by her external beauty. With so great a concentration on physical appearance in the literature and culture of the times, it is not surprising that women were viewed as sexual objects needing to be locked up to be protected.

Yet when a prince climbs her hair in the original fairy tale, the protection of the tower does no good, and Rapunzel is soon impregnated by literally the first man she lays eyes on. As the fairy tale says, “at first Rapunzel was terribly frightened when a man, such as her eyes had never yet beheld came to her” (Grimm), but once the prince talks to her a bit, she has no reservations about accepting his all-too-sudden marriage proposal and tainting her perfect feminine purity. Sexual foreshadowing appears in the form of Rapunzel’s imprisonment. The tower is clearly a phallic symbol indicating that once a man comes onto the scene, Rapunzel’s life will always be joined to him and his dominance over her as a woman. As Carolyn Lawrence writes

in her article “How the Brothers Grimm Ruined the Female Character”:

It symbolizes [Rapunzel’s] impending sexualization, as she is situated at the top of the tall tower, implying her eventual sexual encounter with the prince. Rapunzel is imprisoned within a penis, a station that women are affixed to: the female is and will forever be locked to the penile form. Her life will continuously circle and focus on her lack of a penis and her desire to be filled by such.

In true cautionary form, the tale sees Rapunzel punished for her sexual exploits, as she is cast out of the tower and her lover is blinded and stranded in a desert. Suddenly, Rapunzel becomes a single mother of twins, saddled with domestic responsibility all because she chose to exercise her sexual curiosity.

Tangled turns the original story on its head by allowing Rapunzel to capture her eventual love interest (in a non-sexual way) upon his entry into the tower. Despite his efforts to woo her, she strikes a deal with him instead, providing her with a guide to the kingdom so she can achieve her dream of seeing the floating lantern festival. The 1812 Grimm hypertext originated within a context of strict expectations for women’s behavior. Society considered women subordinate and helpless compared to men, which is why Rapunzel’s life only begins to change once she finds a man to help her, and why the trope of the dashing prince rescuing the damsel in distress has become such a tradition and a cliché in our culture. As Marcia Lieberman writes in her article “‘Someday My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale, “the sexes of the rescuer and the person in danger are almost as constantly predictable; men come along to rescue women who are in danger of death, or are enslaved, imprisoned, abused, or plunged into an enchanted sleep which resembles death” (391). As far as original fairy tales go, “Rapunzel” ranks alongside “Sleeping Beauty” in this category, but the Disney adaptations of these two stories differ greatly.

Tangled exemplifies gender equality in the fact that Rapunzel and the male hero, Flynn Rider, save each other over and over, and there is a give-and-take relationship between them. In the end, though, Rapunzel is the one to save Flynn, bringing him back from the brink of death with her magical tears. Also,

the fact that tears—traditionally seen as a sign of weakness and stereotyped with femininity—turn out to be Rapunzel’s asset may suggest that nothing has changed in terms of gender roles and that women are still viewed as overly emotional, but the contrary is true. Part of the film’s feminist impact lies in the statement that Rapunzel can be herself; she can express her feelings however she chooses. She does not have to act tough and macho to be a hero, because her heroism is in her determination and compassion.

In the film, Rapunzel’s strength also lies in her independent spirit. In the fairy tale, Rapunzel’s willingness to marry literally the first man she meets indicates an attitude that ending up with any man is better than being an unmarried woman. *Tangled* subverts male-centric ideology once again with Rapunzel’s confidence in herself and her dreams. While in the fairy tale, readers learn that Rapunzel has long hair and can sing well, viewers of the film learn much more about Rapunzel’s personality. She has developed many different hobbies and interests during her eighteen years of captivity, but she wants nothing more than to leave the tower to see the festival of floating lanterns that occurs annually on her birthday. When Flynn Rider appears in the tower, she responds by hitting him over the head with a frying pan (a nice subversion of the stereotype that women belong in the kitchen) rather than falling in love with him. She then negotiates with him in order to get to the festival. Although Rapunzel and Flynn do eventually fall in love, their love story is much less abrupt than many fairy tale and Disney romances.

In the Grimm fairy tale, “when [the prince] asked her if she would take him for her husband, and she saw that he was young and handsome, she thought: ‘He will love me more than old Dame Gothel does’; and she said yes, and laid her hand in his.” It is clear that the Rapunzel of the fairy tale has shallow criteria for a husband, and that she only accepts the prince on the basis of his ability to provide for her both physically and emotionally. Writing in a time when women were much more concerned with a potential husband’s capacity to satisfy their basic needs, it is no wonder that the Brothers Grimm chose to present Rapunzel as a woman who chooses a husband simply because he is the better alternative in the situation. The writers

of *Tangled* take events in a different direction—one in which there is a legitimate story behind the love story. Through a series of adventures together, Rapunzel and Flynn actually get to know one another, rather than falling in love at first sight. Contrary to the characterization in the hypotext, the Rapunzel of the film provides for her own needs. She is not too proud to ask for Flynn’s help, yet at the same time, she does not need his status (he is a thief rather than a prince in the adaptation), his good looks, or his affection to complete her. Thus, this Rapunzel veers far from the Grimm version in order to adapt to the standards of current times and to continue blazing the trail for strong, independent female characters as role models.

Tangled may be the most popular adaptation of “Rapunzel” at this day and age, but it is by no means the only one. There are various other animated versions of “Rapunzel,” including one featuring Barbie characters. Several young adult novels also exist as retellings of the classic story. But the Brothers Grimm may not have even been the first to tell this story. Intertextuality runs rampant in the world of fairy tales, and it is said that “Rapunzel” was highly influenced by a couple of similar French and Persian fables. Many times with fairy tales, there is no way of knowing which of these early tales is the “original,” but perhaps that is not so important. What is important is that filmmakers continue to adapt these stories, not only to preserve them for the generations to come but also to continue appropriating them into films that raise relevant questions and produce cultural commentary.

Works Cited

- Baker-Sperry, Lori and Liz Grauerholz. “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children’s Fairy Tales.” *Gender and Society* 17.5 (2003): 711-26. Web. 29 Oct. 2012.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976. Print.
- Giroux, Henry A. and Grace Pollock *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999. Print.

- Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "Rapunzel." *Short Stories*. East of the Web, n.d. Web. 7 October 2012.
- Lawrence, Carolyn. "How the Brothers Grimm Ruined the Female Character." *Yahoo! Voices*. Yahoo! Inc., 24 Sept. 2008. Web. 12 Dec. 2012.
- Lieberman, Marcia R. "'Someday My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale." *College English* 34.3 (1972): 383-395. Web. 3 Dec. 2012.
- Orenstein, Peggy. "What's Wrong with Cinderella?" *The New York Times Magazine*. New York Times, 24 Dec. 2006. Web. 29 Oct. 2012.
- Stam, Robert, and Alessandra Raegno, eds.. *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. Print.
- Tangled*. Dir. Nathan Greno and Bryon Howard. Perf. Mandy Moore and Zachary Levi. Disney, 2010. DVD.
- Tanner, Litsa R., Shelley A. Haddock, Toni S. Zimmerman, and Lori K. Lund. "Images of Couples and Families in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films." *The American Journal of Family Therapy* (2003): 355-73. Web. 29 Oct. 2012.

Immigrant Southerners in Cynthia Shearer's *The Celestial Jukebox*

Ben Hussung

In his book *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*, James C. Cobb, history professor at the University of Georgia and a former president of the Southern Historical Society, explains that the cultural divergence of the American North and South had already begun "by the midpoint of the seventeenth century, as institutionalized reliance on slave labor and plantation-based production of tobacco for export combined to send the South 'down a path never followed in temperate colonies in the North'" (Cobb 9). This began a slow and natural progression wherein the Southern colonies, and then states, became more and more distinctive by their cultural emphasis on place, family, and community (Cobb 337). Even now, one does not need to be a cultural scholar to notice the differences in culture when one crosses the Mason-Dixon Line.

Cobb goes on to show that, like the United States as a whole, the American South is quickly changing and that people invested in Southern identity generally fall into two categories: those who clutch onto long-held ideas of Southern identity, and those who try broadening their scope to meld the South with the rest of the nation and world (Cobb 336-339). Neither of these are viable options, though, because the first promotes isolationism and the second abandons Southern distinctiveness. He shows, however, that there is a middle row to hoe. George Tyndall, former history professor at UNC and a former president of the Southern Historical Society, writes, "To change is not necessarily to lose one's identity, to change sometimes is to find it" (Cobb 338). Thus, we are not faced with an ultimate

choice of either keeping our Southern identity or losing it. Those are two options, but surely they are not the wisest. On the contrary, we should allow the distinctive indicators of the Southern identity—place, family, and community—to flow naturally down the stream of time and mix with other interpretations of these ideas that come from the people who are settling into the South (Cobb 337). The quintessential Southerner, one who holds place, family, and community at the forefront of his or her identity, is no longer the Southern gentleman or belle.

In Cynthia Shearer's *The Celestial Jukebox*, she contends for this kind of fluid Southern identity. Yes, the South is a distinct place with distinct characteristics, but as more and more different people become part of the South, its makeup and perspectives will continue to change, just like it is forced to by Shearer's two immigrant characters, Boubacar from Mauritania and Angus Chien from China. Furthermore, it is certainly true that the demographic of the South is quickly transforming. According to Carl L. Bankston III, "The foreign-born populations in Alabama and Mississippi [the state in which Shearer sets her novel] approximately doubled and experienced a higher rate of growth than did the nation as a whole during the 1990s" (Bankston 40). This statistic is shocking and should goad us on to try and understand how we should react to our changing region.

In his article, "Narratives of African Immigration to the U.S. South," Martyn Bone looks at Dave Egger's *What Is the What* and Cynthia Shearer's *The Celestial Jukebox*, trying to make a case for why it is important to understand Southern culture from perspectives other than those traditionally used. He writes,

These texts, I propose, can help U.S. Southern studies to move beyond the "Quintessential fallacy"—the nativist view advanced by Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) that "You can't understand it [the U.S. South] unless you were born there" (see Bone 2005, 191–92)—and to "think globally and comparatively about the region" and its literature. (Bone 67)

While I have not read Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and therefore have no right to comment on his message therein, I do agree with Bone's proposal. Southern literature has largely been written from the perspectives of white or African-American South-

erners born and raised in the South, maybe occasionally delving into an outsider's Yankee perspective, but in *The Celestial Jukebox*, Shearer peers at the South from inside the minds of Boubacar, a teenage Mauritanian boy "straight off the boat" (Shearer 26) and Angus Chien, the aging Chinese owner of The Celestial Grocery. The story follows the collision of their lives and the lives of others in the small Mississippi Delta town of Madagascar, where the cultural differences are stirred together and examined. Throughout the story, Shearer shows the way in which the South must adapt to its new members by presenting Boubacar and Angus as importing their own individual interpretations of place, family, and community.

The ideas of place expressed in Boubacar's and Angus's characters are quite different from the traditional Southern sense of place because of the simple fact that they are immigrants. While they do find their sense of place at some level in Madagascar, they both ultimately identify most directly with their homelands. Boubacar is from Mauritania, a small West African country bordering Mali and Senegal. He moves to the American South to live with his uncles in Madagascar, where they work in the casino (Shearer 17). We see glimpses of his previous life throughout the novel, like when he sees women in the airport wearing lipstick: "Their mouths were painted reds and corals and sapphire pinks. The men in Mauritania would be required to curse them or to confine them indoors for the protection of their immortal souls" (Shearer 17). One of the main ways we see Boubacar's sense of identity in his homeland is when he describes his love for its music:

He had been a human jukebox in Nouatchkott, cycling the streets with his father's little library of cassettes in a French wicker picnic basket, and a silver Sony boom box strapped to tall steel rods welded to the bicycle by a relative of his grandmother's, the way it was done in Dakar.... For the nominal fee of about one penny, Boubacar would play a song for pedestrians or lovers or tourists, Ali Farka Toure, Thomas Mapfumo, Baaba Maal, Papa Wemba, Maryam Mursal. (Shearer 116)

Boubacar's nostalgic feelings toward the music of West Africa are constantly flowing through his character, and these feelings are also expressed when he is around the enigmatic Wastrel,

who used to own his family as slaves in Mauritania. Shearer writes, "The Wastrel turned off the Traore music and brought out his Wolof drum and sat with it between his knees in the kitchen. He played a tentative rhythm that seemed to ask questions of the air, and then ripple into three streams at once" (Shearer 151). The Wastrel alongside Boubacar's memory of West African music serves as a symbol of Boubacar's sense of place.

Angus Chien is also constantly reminded of his homeland in China. His was a troubled past in Nanking, the city where, between December 1937 and February 1938, the Chinese claim that the Japanese killed over three hundred thousand and raped over eighty thousand (Fogel 5-6). It was this horrific massacre that sent Angus Chien and his father to America so that they could move on from the deaths of Angus's mother and sister. Yet even though this terrible event loomed heavily in Angus's memory, associating itself with the place he called home, he still thinks about it sometimes with fondness. Lying in bed, he remembers his homeland: "Big pots of red flowers in Foshan pots, innocent hours in the sun lining up his tin English soldiers, under the watchful stares of stone lions. Soap bubbles with his little sister, swordfights with his father's long-stemmed pipes" (Shearer 95). Again, he remembers Nanking with nostalgia: "It made him remember, with sweet pain, the way the serving-class women carried water in Nanking. He could still see them clearly, a lifetime ago, quiet women moving with elegant precision through the streets, carrying big earthen jars as regally as if they were the crowns of empresses. They had seemed like moving flowers, too" (Shearer 121). Angus's pain wrought by the horrors he faced in Nanking was coupled with his kind memories of his childhood there.

Moreover, Angus not only thinks back to those times, but as Karyn H. Anderson notes he leaves physical reminders of his homeland around The Celestial Grocery:

Angus retains many physical reminders of his Chinese heritage that intimate his own hybrid identity in the community of Madagascar. Items such as a red lacquer abacus next to the cash register and the bamboo-printed shower curtain that separates his living space from the store exist side by side with the "wedding and birth an-

nouncements, obits, and local engagements" and other clippings of local events taped to the store walls, which document the "whole history of Madagascar." (Anderson 204)

Angus's entire life is pulled between these two places he calls home: Madagascar and Nanking. He refuses to let go of either one and, by so doing, both brings to the South and receives from the South a new sense of place.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Boubacar and Angus's senses of place is that they do not simply bring them to the American South without changing them at all. Rather, as the story progresses, they are changed so that they are not only a boy from Mauritania and a man from China. Boubacar learns to love American music, and Angus becomes an integral part of the Madagascar community. They grow into Southerners, and while they still hold their homelands dear to their hearts and key to their identities, their senses of place are tweaked to be more Southern, just as they have modified what it means to be Southern.

In addition to bringing their own senses of place to the South, Boubacar and Angus also bring their own senses of family. We see this in Boubacar's perspective by his uncles in America, the Wastrel, and his memories of his family back in Mauritania. The most obvious of these relationships is his uncles because they are the ones he comes to live with in America. At different points in the novel, Boubacar brings his uncles food from The Celestial Grocery because he gets paid partly with groceries. Toward the end of the novel, Boubacar, his uncles, and the Wastrel go into Memphis together to buy a car. They do this together and split the money as a family. The Wastrel is also an interesting part of what Boubacar sees as family. Since the Wastrel's family owned Boubacar's family as slaves in Mauritania, the Wastrel is seen as an almost father figure to Boubacar. He is always offering him advice and telling him how he should think about "L'Américain," like when they see a sign that reads "CLEAN DIRT FOR SALE" and the Wastrel says to Boubacar, "L'Américain will sell anything" (Shearer 331-332).

Boubacar also experiences family through his memories of Mauritania. When he is wandering through the streets of Clarksdale, Boubacar remembers his mother: "He thought with

longing of his mother and grandmother then, and how he could pick out the smell of his own dinner cooking at dusk, sifting out of the smells of all the dinners cooked by mothers and grandmothers on that street" (Shearer 212). Then when he is on Beale Street about to leave the South for New York, "He began playing an old French lullaby, one of the first his mother had ever sung to him" (418). Family is extremely important to Boubacar, as it is to all West Africans. My friend Daniel who is from Burkina Faso sends money back to his family in West Africa to take care of them because he is the oldest son and his father is sick. A sense of family is an absolutely essential component of the Southern mind, and Boubacar brings his own version of this sense to the region.

Angus Chien also holds family as very important, and this sense is expressed in the book in primarily two ways. First, he often thinks fondly of his sister, Alice, who was killed in Nanking. In one of the most powerful passages of the book, Angus is watching the empress tree in front of The Celestial Grocery, which grew after its seed accidentally came with them from China in a crate: "The empress tree grew fast, and Angus and Solomon Chien always accorded it the same respect they'd give to any newborn or ancestor, any refugee from the world's weather. Every spring when the pink blossoms arrived, the same word always formed in Angus's mind like a fragile bubble, *Alice*" (Shearer 96). Angus's love and longing for his sister is again and again expressed by his admiration of the empress tree. The second way that Angus is shown to value family greatly is the way he takes care of his grandson Jimmy's wife, Lisa, when Jimmy is never around while Lisa is pregnant (Shearer 282-287). Angus treats her like a daughter and when she has the baby, Angus's two main expressions of family in his life mold together as Lisa names her newborn daughter after Angus's sister, Alice (Shearer 399).

Boubacar and Angus's senses of family bring a lot to the South. Boubacar brings an adamant commitment to his family that is similar to that of the traditional Southerner, and Angus brings a care and concern for legacy that is also a Southern ideal. As they bring these different aspects to the table, they also receive pieces of the Southern concept of family. They find that in the South family is not always confined to flesh and

blood, but family is defined by who one truly loves and cares for. Thus, Boubacar and Angus, through their relationships in the community and even simply with each other, find that family and community in the South quickly begin to look like the same entity.

Boubacar's sense of community is mostly portrayed in his interactions with others musically. In the second half of the book, Boubacar becomes involved with a group of African-American Pentecostals when he happens upon a meeting of theirs at The True Light Temple of the Beautiful Name and is taught how to play the steel guitar by Reverend Calvin Dearborn (Shearer 293-300). In this group, he finds community, and after playing guitar with them, he expresses his happiness: "He put the alligator guitar case down and spun around in the field, arms outstretched, and danced.... The boy danced like a Sufi, like dust, arms up like a Pentecostal, *can I get a witness?*" (Shearer 299-300). Boubacar does not only find community in these people who have the same skin color as him, but at the end of the novel in the culmination of Shearer's commentary on the diversity of the South, Boubacar finds that community can exist through music among all different kinds of people when he hears music that he thinks is African in the Tower Records store in Memphis. When he asks what kind of music is playing, the girl at the cash register shows him the CD:

She handed the box to Boubacar, and he stood a while at the counter, studying the old photo of Benny Goodman and his band, including black men, all in white dinner jackets. He leafed through the liner notes. *'Sing, Sing, Sing'. Written by Louis Prim. Harry James, trumpet. Gene Krupa, drums. Hymie Schertzer, Vido Musso, Ziggy Ellman, Gordon Griffin.* The names came from everywhere....The clarinet, that was Goodman, the Jew. And the trumpets. Harry James. The Algerians made their trumpets into a rolling shout like that. But the drums were Wolof. Krupa, the man playing them, was white. (Shearer 417-418)

African-American men, Algerians, Jews, and even white men can all come together and make something beautiful. Boubacar comes to understand through music that the color of one's skin is not important, and he finds in the diversity of the people who

play the music sold in the store a perfect community, or “a jukebox of all spirits” (Shearer 418).

Angus Chien also finds community in the South in two ways. First, his store becomes the central hub of Madagascar. This manifests itself mainly in the group of “the Telephone Pioneers.” These men are old farmers who spend every morning eating breakfast, playing cards, and shooting the breeze at The Celestial Grocery (Shearer 100-101, 121-122, 131-132, 203, 341, 403). Outside of this group but equally important parts of Angus’s community are Aubrey Ellerbee and Dean Fondren. These two are Angus’s friends, and his care for them is made explicit when Aubrey is still just a child and Angus stands up for him with a shotgun against the racist farmers (Shearer 197-198). Angus relates to Aubrey like an uncle and Dean like a brother, finding in them a caring community.

While those examples of Angus’s community are important, the clearest point of community for Angus is with his Honduran love, Consuela. All throughout the novel, the tension between the two of them is painfully clear. Angus’s longing for Consuela makes the reader hurt and feel his heartache for her. The most beautiful passage of this kind comes shortly after Consuela quits her job working for Angus, and he is dancing alone in the grocery:

Angus Chien was dancing alone. He had his hands raised as if there were a woman standing before him, when there was only the yellow greasy light of the little store before him, same as always. Angus took some small sideways steps, *grapevine, grapevine*, and it became apparent that he believed his hands to be wreathed into those of an imaginary partner in front of him. It was a language intelligible to any man—*loneliness*. (Shearer 209)

In this passage, Angus’s dancing parallels Boubacar’s after playing with the Pentecostals because both of them have found community, Boubacar’s being hopeful in the Pentecostals and Angus’s being seemingly lost in Consuela. Angus’s loneliness would not last long, however, because by the end of the novel he is reunited with Consuela, and he expresses his feelings to her as awkwardly as only Angus could: “*I need you to make me a promise. I need you to stay where I can find you, too. And I will stay*

where you can find me” (Shearer 401). In the South, Angus finds love and community among people by whom he should have never been accepted, but this is the new face of the South.

Boubacar and Angus Chien are integral parts of the global hodge-podge of traditional Southern culture and international influence that the modern South is quickly becoming, and their senses of place, family, and community have opened the South up and made it a little bit lovelier. In her article, “Dangerously Smooth Spaces in Cynthia Shearer’s *The Celestial Jukebox*,” Karyn H. Anderson quotes James C. Cobb as saying that the Mississippi Delta is the “most Southern place on earth” (Anderson 199). After reading Shearer’s novel, I am sure that Cobb is correct, and it is not only because of the traditional aspects of the South portrayed therein. Rather, it is the immigrant perspectives of Boubacar and Angus that throw me into the world of the South and show me the beautiful evolution that is taking place. Cultures are colliding—the South with its incoming brothers and sisters—but it is not a conflict. No, on the contrary, it is progress: the best of the traditional South peppered and seasoned with the multicolored, multicultural palette of the world.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Karyn H. “Dangerously Smooth Spaces in Cynthia Shearer’s *The Celestial Jukebox*.” *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 37.1 (2012): 199-217. *Literature Online* Web. 26 April 2013.
- Bankston III, Carl L. “New People in the New South: An Overview of Southern Immigration.” *Southern Cultures* 13.4 (2007): 24-44. *Proquest*. Web. 22 April 2013.
- Bone, Martyn. “Narratives of African Immigration to the U.S. South.” *The New Centennial Review* 10.01 (2010): 65-76. *Proquest*. Web. 25 April 2013.
- Cobb, James C. *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Fogel, Joshua A. *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*. Berkeley: U California P, 2000. *ACLS Humanities E-Books*. Web. 26 April 2013.

Shearer, Cynthia. *The Celestial Jukebox*. Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005. Print.

Sporting Silence: The Complicit Language of Violent Masculinity

Tracy Jo Ingram

All these fuckin' star-spangled assholes watched it through binoculars. They make me sick.

I believe that the silence that allowed [my abuser] to extinguish the joy of so many is not static, but a dynamic silence. It required participation.

—Richard Hoffman, *Half the House*

My eleven year-old brother is sweating profusely in his navy and orange football uniform, arms hanging heavily at his sides. He wants to quit. Dad won't let him. *You gave the team your word, now you finish what you started.* Brett's face is bright red. *Men never falter on their words.* His eyes are hurting beneath the mask of his helmet. It's 91 degrees on a late August afternoon. It is nearly the third hour of practice. My father stands in his Oxford pressed shirt and khaki slacks. My brother pleads: *Dad, please. I don't want to do this anymore.* Dad grasps him by the bulky pads and walks him off the field for a moment, the proverbial father-son relationship personified in one left hand to right shoulder motion. His face gets close and tight with the face under the helmet. I hear the word *sissy* hiss from his whistling teeth. Brett's chest tightens, his hands go for his face as my dad's face tenses and his voice bottoms out. My brother starts to protest when Dad straightens up and pushes him back towards the field. "Ya gotta get tough, son!" he hollers after him. I was silent.

And moreover, I was entirely complicit. I was contributing to exactly what Richard Hoffman, author of *Half the House*, refers to as a participatory culture, a culture of silence that allows for violation of children and for social enforcement of violent masculinity. In Hoffman's memoir, the author explores and dissects the cultural forces that allowed him to be sexually abused for a year by a baseball coach. He uses the memoir as a platform to critique masculinity and masculine social constructs, particularly through the use of a metaphor that refers to American boyhood as a process of turning males into gladiators rather than men (184). His unexpected, fresh, and progressive approach to a sexual abuse account moves beyond the narrative and into deconstructing a society that is complacent, abiding, and participatory (184).

As the story of my brother's eventual manhood begins with team sports, so, too, does Hoffman's. He opens his memoir by relaying the narrative of a broken home: two terminally ill brothers, a distant and abusive father, a checked-out and negligent mother. Hoffman's only true source of camaraderie is found on the neighborhood football and baseball teams. However, despite the opportunity for comradeship, much like my brother succeeding him, his days on the field were massively pressurized and full of aggressive language. Richard's coach preferred to call his players "pussies" and insisted they "Get mad!" if they wanted to play on Sunday (44, 45). The boys learned that crying was only okay when it revealed "fritted teeth and lips curled back, roaring, snot, or even blood" and was "accompanied by rage, as long as you thirsted for victory" (44). Like Hoffman, as long as my brother's tears could not be founded on this principle, his tears reduced him to being less than a man. The message is simple: to become a man is to be silent, vicious, and non-communicative—to be the "opposite" of woman. Hoffman refers to this masculinity-training, with its dependence on physical and sexual violence, non-emotiveness, and detachment, as a "dynamic silence" that constantly affirms these qualities as standards of manhood, thusly perpetuating "a structure of shame, lies, and fear" that renders an entire culture "blind to the suffering of so many children" (185).

In light of a new wave of recent sexual abuse or harassment scandals, particularly in the sports world, it seems safe to say

there is something exacting about that sphere that creates conditions ripe for a person to more directly participate in enforcing violent masculine culture. Let's review, for example, the most obvious current scandal. Between 1994 and 2009, former Penn State Asst. Football Coach Jerry Sandusky abused a reported 54 children. The Special Investigative Counsel Report led by Freeh, Sporkin, and Sullivan offers that the senior leaders at Penn State knew, but preferred "a total disregard for the safety and welfare of Sandusky's child victims" (14-15). The report even includes a flow chart of more than 12 senior officials who swept it under the rug for fifteen years, for protecting instead, what *Sports Illustrated's* Frank Deford chocks up as, "the beloved game of football" (1). That same article, "The Penn State Scandal Defies the Masculine Culture of Football," also refers to football as:

[A] proud American throwback showcase of men being at their most primitive masculine. Indeed, the question of whether the sport is too brutal has always been an issue, and nowadays, of course, the subject is as prominent as ever. And as always, the defenders of football are furious that the violence might be curtailed by do-gooders, that football will be *sissified*. The expression heard from the time little boys first play is that football "teaches you to become a real man"—to be manly. (1)

Machismo, Deford continues, is what keeps the tradition of silence thriving as it is otherwise "painful, almost traitorous, for men who love football to accept such an abject contradiction of their sport's manliness—the very rape of a little boy by a coach" (1). It is refreshing to see a mainstream media respond to the matter, but though the conversation on masculinity is being increasingly discussed, it is often only in terms of the implications for the sport itself. Where is the analysis that treats "the rape of a little boy" as something other than a consequence of the sport culture? Where is the reflection that draws the deeper connections? The language too often refers to abuse as a consequence rather than an action, unnecessarily perpetuating complacency and victim-hood rather than seeking to evolve the masculine culture that enables it.

For another recent case, look no farther than Mike Rice, former Head Coach of the Rutgers Men's Basketball team.

Within the last month, a video went viral capturing footage of Rice referring to his players as “faggots” and “fairy queens,” while violently throwing basketballs at individuals for their mistakes. Sadly, the university sat on the knowledge of his abuse for six months before pursuing disciplinary action.

It is interesting how much of the language Rice used, like many coaches and my father before him, is predicated not solely on manhood and socially enforced masculine traits, but also on *not* being a woman or having feminine qualities. In searching for mass media discourse on policing masculinity in the sport’s world (or more broadly, critiquing masculinity at all), one will find there’s little to none. Of all the major journalism sources reporting on the concept of sports and masculinity—*Sports Illustrated* and *The Huffington Post*—neither explored the implication as far-reaching as Hoffman. While the former expresses concern in terms of sport, *The Huffington Post* article, “Penn State and the Crisis of Masculinity” by Dr. Niobe Way, does show a bit more critical analysis: “Our norms of masculinity—what we teach our boys and men about what it means to be male—is the primary reason why men disconnect from their own humanity and commit such acts of violence and betrayal.”

Hoffman takes his analysis further, specifically noting that our culture is a system of cruelty “designed to turned boys into gladiators with nothing but contempt for weakness, which is in turn absurdly identified as all things female” (184). He continues by observing that this enforced estrangement between man and women & children creates a deeply misogynistic culture that dehumanizes all persons (198).

Though my brothers have not been abused physically or sexually, they are mentally and emotionally abused not only by institutionalized concepts of masculinity, but by people like me who don’t stand up for them when someone tells them that their manhood is dependent on their “toughness.” Furthermore, every time I refuse to say something, I also enforce hegemonic structural powers that delineate and define women as weak. Perhaps most sadly, it also means that my father is telling his sons that he thinks his daughter, their sister, is a sissy and therefore lesser than. My brothers will then raise their sons to think their sisters and their daughters are fragile, secondary.

The more silent I am, the more I offer encouragement to this misogynistic way of thinking.

Our language, and particularly the language of male-dominated sports, is one of dehumanization, both of its need to devalue women and for its insistence on silence. It is a language that creates a culture that teaches a man to shut up, to put up, to turn off his emotiveness, and to choose violence foremost as an expression of his manhood. It is also one that feeds on muteness, barreling at the speed of sound towards a society vicious and complicit.

Daddy adjusts his belt buckle and comes back to rest in his sideline lounge chair. I look at Brett in his offensive linebacker’s position. He is hefty with thick oafish legs. More often than not he is fumbling, though over the course of the last five weeks he has gained in strength and speed. At this moment, it dawns on me that Dad praises him more for every pound he loses than for any of the brilliant notes he can nail on his trumpet. The scale reads this week’s new and improved weight: *Shaping up to be such a man, son. You make me proud. Such a sturdy, strong boy. I want to hold my hand out to him. I want to take him off the field and fill his thick little belly with double chocolate chip ice cream. I want to drive him around town and tell him in true, twenty-one year old big sister fashion: You can be whoever you want to be! And just then on the field, when you wanted to cry, you should’ve! You’re allowed to! And it’s okay to not be tough, you know?!*

Works Cited

- Deford, Frank. “The Penn State Scandal Defies the Masculine Culture of Football.” *Sports Illustrated*. N.p., 16 Nov. 2011. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.
- Freeh, Sporkin, and Sullivan. “Report of the Special Investigative Counsel Regarding the Actions of the Pennsylvania State University Related to the Child Sexual Abuse Committed by Gerald A. Sandusky.” Pennsylvania University. N.p., 12 July 2012. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.

Hoffman, Richard. *Half the House*. Morehead, Minn.: New Rivers P, 2005. Print.

Spargo, Chris. "Charming Rutgers Coach Mike Rice Calls Players 'Faggot,' 'Fairy'." *NewNowNext*. N.p., 3 Apr. 2013. Web. 13 Apr. 2013.

Way, Niobe. "Penn State and the Crisis of Masculinity." *The Huffington Post*. N.p., 14 Nov. 2011. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.

Myths and Memoirs: A Young Writer's Inquiry Into the Nature of Memoir and Anti-Memoir

Abby Rudolph

When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness.

—Joseph Campbell

Like many, I was in puberty when my existential identity awoke. It yawned and peered out at a new world, a world defined by death, struggle, tenderness, and irrationality. The universe, which had seemed ordered by a kind, invisible hand when I was a child, now seemed to have gone insane. I wrote in response. It was an angry response, a retaliation. But it was also a celebration of the chaotic beauty I felt completely unprepared to grasp, a plea to join in somehow. And it came out in the form of poetry. It came out in stanzas and it came out in paragraphs, but poetry was the clearest, most natural form of expression I could find to give a voice to my opening psyche. And, whether literary analysts would agree or not, every page was pure autobiography. Creative non-fiction. A memoir.

Lidia Yuknavitch calls *The Chronology of Water* an "anti-memoir." I'll admit that upon first hearing this term while sitting in a memoir writing class, I recoiled instinctively. Not because I was offended by the subversive edge of it, but there seemed to be a certain arrogance in the term. What made this, of all books, an anti-memoir? The moment of aversion passed when I realized that it had only been spawned from a lack of

understanding. The term “anti-memoir” itself was impenetrable to me. I could not fathom the boundaries of a traditional memoir, so how could I understand what an anti-memoir might be?

The genre of creative nonfiction is in flux. The modern memoir craze is only about twenty years old, and lost in the identity crisis typical of that age. In the early nineties, the literary market found a new mode of profit in the memoir. It was a written gold mine. While there were some bright-eyed and artful pioneers within the new genre that opened the door to fresh story-telling from personal experience, pioneers that prepared readers for later radicals like Yuknavitch, there was also a tedious slew of unimaginative personal narratives published which had little or no relationship to artistic aesthetic instinct, original thought, or craftsmanship. Many of these were propelled by the purpose of whetting the appetite of emotionally sadistic readers, eager to hear the dirty, intimate details of another’s experience with abuse, perversion, or vice. Some were driven by vanity, the simple impulse to glorify the self. And still others simply filled in the monotonously repetitive addiction-redemption and sickness-recovery narrative templates, supposedly meant to inspire readers with similar issues. Self-help memoirs.

In the light of this young, robustly capitalistic tradition of market-driven memoirs, Yuknavitch’s claim becomes much easier to understand and accept. *The Chronology of Water* does not play into the grasping hands of the market, nor the expectant hands of the common reader. She often denies us what we think we need from the reading of a memoir, or perhaps more accurately, what we have been conditioned to need by the emotional indulgence of more shallow memoirs. She unmask the monster of childhood abuse without self-pity or fabricated sense of catharsis. She recounts her experimentation with drugs without apology or regret. She reflects on past psychosexual behavior and her exploration into sadomasochism without shyness or defense. She celebrates all of these unconventional dimensions of her life, and their counterparts in all lives. Effortlessly and subtly, she connects her unique journey to the universal archetype of the “quest,” and connects her persona, the anti-heroine, to the mythic Hero and his journey. The soul of age-old mythologies is re-imagined within the body of a starkly modern narrative.

But, if *The Chronology of Water* is an anti-memoir, then what is a memoir? The essence of the term anti-memoir, what I could not understand when first being exposed to the term, is that it does not describe a narrative that breaks with the tradition of memoir writing as a whole, but merely the art of manufacturing melodrama controlled by market profits. Her term anti-memoir is an example of the type of critical response from an artist within a genre necessary to its further development. When considered through this lens, perhaps every important memoir is in reality an anti-memoir to some degree, a piece that pushes against prior convention and expands the umbrella to include new possibilities for creation.

I rebel against the idea that there are cardinal rules of writing, even memoir writing, as Lee Gutkind proposes in his article for the online journal, *Creative Nonfiction*. He says that creative nonfiction scenes “not only have to be factual and true (You can’t make them up!), they have to make a point or communicate information...and they have to fit into the overall structure of the essay or chapter or book” (“What is Creative Nonfiction”). Really? When working within the fluid and deeply intuitive landscape of memory, how can anyone profess to remain “factual?” Who would want to? Shouldn’t artistry and emotional truth take precedence over perfect accuracy? If a certain image from my past reminds me of another, or a memory directly relates to another separated by years, is it dishonest to overlay those images and memories to create a new nonfactual yet perhaps truer one? What if I am writing about hallucinations or even highly developed daydreams? Is it dishonest to write about these fantasies the way they are experienced in the moment? Real? It seems to me that, rather than detracting from the piece, such artistic decisions have the potential to reveal even deeper truths than a linear, journalistic approach based on accuracy. For me, writing is about using fresh wyes and personal experience to find connections like these and following their paths in order to tap into memory and dreams and the collective unconscious in order to present the mythic knowledge of a more broadly shared reality than our own limited experience. The genre of memoir offers an exciting well of potential for this kind of writing, but only if it is pushed and stretched by writers like Yuknavitch, as opposed to being defined, established, and strangled by scholars like Gutkind.

Yuknavitch discusses similar ideas in an interview with *The Rumpus*: “Poetic language,” she says, “is sometimes misunderstood as ‘abstract’ when in reality, it’s precise—precisely the language of emotions and the body. Underneath the forms of fiction and poetry, you can bet your ass the ground comes from someone’s actual life experience” (“The Rumpus Interview With Elizabeth Scarborough and Lidia Yuknavitch”). If we accept this as true, and I absolutely do, then the boundaries between memoir and poetry and fiction become blurred in a way that would no doubt make Gutkind cringe. To me, however, it seems completely natural that these boundaries should be, and in fact are inherently indistinct, whether it makes us uncomfortable or not. Boundaries are conceptual, not natural. They are applied to nature by the human mind to satisfy our obsession with order and rationality. In writing memoir, Yuknavitch says, “We are bringing literary practices to memory and experience, and giving literary shape to them...The genre of any book is secondary to the story the author is telling” (“The Rumpus Interview”). This is an understanding of the word “memoir” that I can support. It’s ironic that my pubescent self understood that honesty and artistic intuition do not have to be at odds. It was only as an English major in college that I questioned my natural instincts towards storytelling.

I am the only vessel containing, the only conduit with the power to transmit my story. It is my story, first. Only after it is written does it belong to anyone else. So how can any outside set of conventions demand that I tell it in a certain way? I am loyal to the idea that the real truth of experience is not always found in its factual accuracy, but in the interpretation of those facts by the subject, the writer, the “I.” And wouldn’t this process take place whether we admit to it or not? The mind is a slippery and tricky thing. We’ve got to work with what we’ve got: our version. If we can resurrect out of our experience a moment, not only true for us individually, but which magnifies towards a collective truth, and helps to unravel humanity’s narrative, then it seems that the importance of convention pales to invisibility in comparison to that realization.

Beyond this distinction between representing emotional and factual truth, lies the complication of politicizing the writer’s voice. Yuknavitch claims to have adhered to “the basic principal

of breaking every rule I ever learned from a patriarchal writing tradition that never included my body or experience, and thus has nothing to offer me in terms of representation.” Forms of writing are constructed and then judged worthy against the outlines of that construct by an elite sect of academics. In other words: white heterosexual males following in the footsteps of a long line of white heterosexual males. I have a bumper sticker on my car that says, “Keep Your Laws Off My Body,” I wish I had another one that said, “And Keep Your Hands Off My Story.” I don’t mean to devalue the literary canon, despite its disproportionate representation of the European heterosexual male experience and its misplacement of that experience as more important and worthy of attention than any other. I am a student, a disciple even, of that canon. However, I do mean to challenge the idea that the rules from this tradition can adequately contain and reflect all other voices, from all other traditions, especially at the peak of their honesty. Yuknavitch identifies this sense of inadequacy as “the limits of a narrow kind of storytelling that validates some people and not others [reflective of] the limits of a narrow kind of identity formation that validates some people and not others” (“The Rumpus Interview”).

How much of what we have experienced is truly safe in our own minds? How much do we alter memories as we retell them internally? And how much of this alteration is driven by individual psychology as opposed to social processes of conceptualization and contextualization that give us the words to retell our stories with? Is my experience informed by my identity or is my identity informed by my experience? Or can both be true? And how can any of these questions, the questions that a thoughtful memoirist must ask herself, be answered and explored in a meaningful way within the confines of a tradition governed by cardinal rules contingent upon a stringently devout reverence for fact above all else? I feel comfortable answering at least this last question: she can’t. I plan to explore the other questions without the blinders of convention on my eyes or the saddle of genre on my back. When I write, I do so not with the goal of creating “a poem,” or “a short story,” or “a novel,” or “a memoir” as such. I write with the simpler purpose of creating something, anything, real and true. True beyond myself. Whether it be fact or fiction. Literary progress, like indi-

vidual progress, comes with the freedom to experiment and discover, not through unthinking adherence to dogma.

Works Cited

- Gay, Roxane. "The Rumpus Interview with Elizabeth Scarborough and Lidia Yuknavitch." *The Rumpus*. N.p., 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2013.
- Gutkind, Lee. "What Is Creative Nonfiction?" *Creative Nonfiction*. N.p., 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2013.

The Prioress's Tale: A Matter of Redemption

Susan Taylor

The Prioress's tale of murder, revenge, and Marian miracles has fascinated and repulsed readers and critics because of the Prioress's graphic description of the slaughter of the "litle clergeoun" (PrT 58) and her tale's blatant anti-Semitic message. It is difficult, if not impossible, for readers using a modern paradigm to engage constructively with a text that has this archaic and offensive implication. In order to reconcile two competing worldviews, scholars analyzing the tale have been divided into two distinct camps, one preferring a literal interpretation and another choosing to read the tale as a parody (Besserman 57). While these schools of thought are worthy of examination, both seem to largely ignore key problems in the tale and Chaucer's other works, which prevents any consensus on the issue of interpretation of the tale. Both "hard" and "soft" readings of the Prioress's Tale focus on Chaucer's treatment of Jews, while ignoring possible criticisms of and prescriptions for Christian behavior. A more neutral reading—one that recognizes Chaucer as socially and politically progressive yet not a secular liberal-humanist—is the most appropriate for accurate interpretation. Chaucer's problematic construction of the Prioress and her tale, his inclusion of sympathetic Jewish figures, and allusions to the Eucharist all are utilized strategically in the creation of the tale to highlight issues of sin and redemption. An examination of these elements reveals Chaucer's greater intention in regards to the tale—to subvert contemporary attitudes towards Jews in the

Middle Ages, underscore inconsistencies between Biblical prescription of behavior and treatment of Jews, and emphasize the importance of conversion, both as an altruistic practice and a necessity for the Christian faith.

In order to argue for a “neutral” reading of Chaucer’s treatment of Jews in *The Prioress’s Tale*, it is necessary to outline the shortcomings in both hard and soft readings. As Lawrence Besserman explains, “In ‘hard’ readings, the idea that Chaucer intended any satire on the anti-Semitism of the tale is rejected because, it is argued, anti-Semitism was accepted as a given of the culture in which Chaucer lived, and it was therefore something which Chaucer as a man of his culture would have accepted without question” (Besserman 57). While an initial reading of the tale may warrant this type of response, in-depth analysis and an exploration of Chaucer’s views of Judaism seem to undercut this argument. Though anti-Semitism was more commonly accepted during medieval times, it certainly was not a viewpoint held by all of Chaucer’s contemporaries. Donald Howard responds to the contention that a writer who lived during the Middle Ages would not have been sympathetic towards Jews by noting, “Since some people were indignant toward the persecution of Jews this point of view was not entirely impossible to the Middle Ages” (Howard 277 n69). Furthermore, this type of reading does a great disservice to Chaucer’s intelligence and ability to critique the status quo. A hard reading assumes that Chaucer would have blindly accepted all social and religious convention even if they were inconsistent, illogical, or harmful. However, within Chaucer’s works is social and political commentary that suggests that Chaucer was willing to engage in criticism of mainstream or popular ideologies. Besserman points out that Chaucer explicitly voices support for the anti-War party of the Hundred Years War in the *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the *Tale of Melibee* (50). Chaucer was an exceptional man who was willing to undermine societal expectations and viewpoints through his writing. A hard reading, thus, re-

quires one to ignore Chaucer’s critical eye, which is evident throughout his tales.

A “soft” reading, though it gives more credence to Chaucer’s ability to critique norms, is equally problematic because reading the *Prioress’s Tale* as parody forces a liberal secular-humanist mindset on Chaucer that is “anachronistic” (Besserman 49). An examination of references to Jews and Judaism in Chaucer’s other works may help to reveal his larger beliefs. Derek Cohen and Debra Heller write, “Some other Chaucerian narrators do, in fact, refer to Jews. Far from justifying the Prioress’s anti-Semitism, however these references underline, by contrast, the especially vitriolic nature of the Prioress’s attitude” (Cohen & Heller 17). These other works include *The House of Fame*, *The Astrolabe*, and three other tales from *The Canterbury Tales*—*The Tale of Sir Thopas*, *The Monk’s Tale*, and the *Pardoner’s Tale* (Cohen & Heller 17). In the majority of these tales Jews are spoken of in a “neutral or mildly favorable” way (Cohen & Heller 17). The only other instance of a negative portrayal or discussion of Jews occurs in the *Parson’s Tale* when he refers to Jews as “cursed”; however this mention occurs during a section when the Parson is discussing the sinful nature of swearing (Cohen & Heller 18). The large body of evidence on the question of Chaucer’s literary treatment of the Jews would indicate that Chaucer did not harbor any marked ill-will towards Judaism. *The Prioress’s Tale* stands out as an exception in the dialogue over Jews, indicating that it is inconsistent with Chaucer’s overall religious ideology. These references to Judaism would signify that Chaucer was not liberal in the modern sense of the word because none argue for the willing acceptance of Jews by Christians, thus degrading the likelihood that Chaucer meant the *Prioress’s Tale* as true parody. Instead, the tale seems to be condemning of inaccurate representation of Jews by Christians and the general Christian attitude towards and treatment of Jews.

To determine the “sentaunce” of Chaucer’s controversial tale one must explore the primary contradictions and problematic elements of the Prioress’s Tale. Chaucer begins his deliberate construction of the tale, and its imminent undermining, during the Prioress’s portrait. Chaucer the pilgrim seems infatuated with the beautiful, well-bred nun. He describes “hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas./ Hir mouth ful smal, and thereto softe and reed” (GP I 152-153). In addition to her delicate features, the Prioress possesses delicate sensibilities as “she wold wepe if that she saugh a mous/ Kaught in a treppe if were deed or bleede” (GP I 144-145). The portrait creates a vision of supreme piety and tenderness that is completely reversed by the Prioress’s choice of tale. The nun who cannot bear to look upon a dead mouse describes in gruesome detail the murder of the “litel clergeoun,” the disposal of his body, and the torture and slaughter of an entire “Jewerye.” As Howard aptly observes, “Chaucer, having humanized her in this way, having made her interesting and sympathetic, turns the tables in her tale and shows how her simplicity and air of elegance lead her into a frame of mind which is deplorable” (Howard, 276). The fact that Chaucer describes the nun in such positive terms makes her tale all the more horrific.

The Prioress is an exemplum of the blind acceptance of Church doctrine that leads to one becoming complicit in atrocities. Chaucer uses the Prioress’s portrait to highlight her lack of true engagement with the Christian faith. Though “full weel she soong the service dyuyne” (GP I 122), there is no mention of her actually understanding the meaning of the service. Though she was able to imitate those who are truly devout, there is no indication that her active participation in the Catholic ritual means that she comprehended the implication of these verses that she so excellently sang. Essentially, her lack of true piety would allow her to fully devote her life to Christ while still finding entertainment in a story that makes light of mass murder as a means of retaliation. Perhaps, the Prioress stands in as an example of a

Christian body that holds contradictory beliefs—a hatred and intolerance of Jews as dictated by a Church that should preach love.

The power of the Prioress’s Tale is a product of the horrific nature of the story as well as the intensity of the suffering of the clergeoun’s mother. In a tale with an abhorrent plot, the mother draws sympathy from the reader because it is known that her relentless search for her son will end fruitless. Chaucer uses Biblical allusion to underscore the magnitude of the mother’s sadness by describing her as the “newe Rachel” (PrT VII 627). A medieval audience would have been well aware that Chaucer was alluding to the famous Jewish mother of the Old Testament. This choice is significant to the interpretation of the piece because Rachel was not only a mother, but also a mother who wept for the suffering of her children and a Jew. Rachel is revered as a Biblical figure for her ability to abstain from jealousy and resentment and for sacrificing her own happiness in order to preserve the purity of her sister (Kohn). Rachel challenges God, asking Him:

“If I, as a flesh and blood mortal, was able to transcend by jealousy and anger, how much more so should You, an immortal King, find compassion for Your people?” (Kohn). God responds to Rachel, promising that because of her sacrifice he will eventually save the Jewish people from exile (Kohn). This exchange is documented in the book of Jeremiah when the prophet Jeremiah proclaims, “The Lord seith these thingis, A vois of weilyng, and of wepyng, and of mourenyng, was herd an hiy; the vois of Rachel biwepyng hir sones, and not willynge to be coumfortid on hem, for thei ben not” (WYC, Jere. 31:15). Rachel is then consoled by the fact that her metaphorical children will one day be saved. Rachel’s weeping has interesting parallels with the clergeoun’s mother who “cryde” (PrT VII 605) for her missing son.

This allusion to Rachel has two distinct implications for the reading of the tale. First, the parallels between a Jewish and Christian mother draws sympathy for the Jewish community that is mercilessly tortured and slaughtered. Just as Rachel and the *litel clergeoun's* mother suffered a loss, so did the people residing in the Jewereye. Second, Rachel weeps for the exiling of her figurative children. This allusion is especially appropriate within the context in which *The Canterbury Tales* was written because in 1290 Edward I had ordered a mass expulsion of Jews from England ("Jewish Persecution"). The allusion to Rachel may serve to remind Chaucer's contemporary audience of the exiling of the Jews in medieval England and the misery that it caused. The suffering of the two mothers, on both a literal and figurative level, serves to connect both groups in suffering and persecution, evoking sympathy and understanding.

The Prioress's Tale is ripe with allusions that seem to encourage readers to closely examine inadequacies and inconsistencies in ideology adopted by the Prioress and the Christians depicted in the story. There are multiple allusions to the Eucharist, a Catholic rite that is spiritually and thematically significant because of its purpose of redemption. In a letter to the Archbishop of Paris in 1205, Pope Innocent III wrote, "Whenever it happens that on the day of the Lord's resurrection the Christian women who are nurses for the children of the Jews take in the body and blood of Christ, the Jews make these women pour their milk into the latrine for three days before they again give suck to the children" (Depres 413). The link between children and the Host created by the Pope began a child-as-host motif that became extremely popular during the Middle Ages (Depres 414). In these Eucharistic miracle stories, the Host would often appear to Jews as children being ripped apart and, as a result, the Jews witnessing this act would convert (Depres 416). Depres notes that the child-as-host motif is seen clearly at the end of tale as the child is offered almost as sacrifice. She writes, "That act is initiated by the abbot at the end of the 'Prioress's Tale,'

where it becomes both crux and spiritual center. If we interpret the final, solemn, ritual action of the tale—the resting of the slain child 'biforn the chief auter, whil masse laste'—as a Eucharistic sacrifice familiar to its audience through the bleeding-child-as-Host motif, we may better understand the underlying symbols of Chaucer's tale" (Depres 423). The focus of redemption through the Eucharist frustrates that act of retribution enacted by the Christians on the Jewish community. A single act of murder that is responded to a massacre of an entire ghetto is a disproportionate punishment and runs contrary to the idea of forgiveness and redemption that is so important to the Christian faith.

The second element of the tale that alludes to the Eucharist is the mysterious "greyn" that is found at the back of the *clergeoun's* throat that allows him to sing. The grain is related to the host practically because the host is a type of bread and is, thus, a product of the grain. However, there is a linguistic link between the Eucharist and the grain. Kathleen Oliver discusses the analysis of another Chaucerian scholar, Sister Mary Maldelva in relation to the grain as host conversation:

Sister Mary Madelva herself identified a relationship between the word "greyn" and the word "particle": "Greyn" is defined by Bradley and Murray to have meant in early usage "a small part." The Host is often called a "particle" and is given in the dictionary at one meaning for "particle." So, without any twisting of definitions, the greyn could mean the Holy Communion. This connection is further supported by the MED:--one definition of grain is "a particle" such as a "particle of manna" ...Moreover in medieval times, a grain was frequently mentioned in direct association with the Host, a wafer made from unleavened bread. (Oliver 358)

The argument for the greyn-as-host interpretation is furthered by the fact that the bread used in the Eucharist was often referred to as the "singing host" (Oliver 361). This is of particular

thematic importance to the Prioress's Tale because it is the "greyn" which allows the young clergeoun to sing the "Alma Redemptoris" as a means to uncover his burial spot. As the medieval scholar John Lydgate poetically notes, the purpose of the Host is "To sowie and boody bred of moost comfort, / Folk in siknesse, this bred doth hem cure, / To pore pilgrymes restoratyf and support" (qtd. in Oliver 359). Thus the Eucharist in the Prioress's Tale serves multiple purposes: to heal the body of the clergeoun and to deliver his soul to heaven. Including the allusion to the host in the Prioress's Tale underscores the profound importance of redemption and the necessity of a clean soul in order to achieve heavenly paradise. The Eucharist serves to critique the lack of redemption in all the Christians who murder a village without any remorse.

Though the focus of the Prioress's Tale is on the evil that is committed by the Jews who have been influenced by Satan, there is another representation of evil that is lurking just below the surface. The Christians in the tale reject the ideas of mercy and forgiveness that are essential to the Christian faith and, instead, engage in revenge. Angela Weisl elucidates this point: "Cast in terms which echo this eye for an eye" system of justice, the provost's statement 'yvel shal have, that yvel wol deserve' suggests a balanced system but in fact demonstrates a system entirely out of balance, in which lives and deaths are valued differently; the litel clergeon's temporary death and afterlife weighed against an entire people's two earthly punishments and (presumed) eternal damnation" (Weisl 4). The torture and extermination of an entire village, even though many are only tangentially linked to the crime, for the death of one boy requires one apply different values of worth to each community (Weisl 4). A system that requires such skewed metrics is not only unfair and antithetical to justice, it is inconsistent with the Christian belief in forgiveness and the rejection of the "eye for eye" mentality that is advocated for in the New Testament.

The intention of the tale can be determined, perhaps, through an exploration of problems within the tale as well as an examination of what elements of the tale are missing. Weisl notes, "Interrogating evil in the tale, one can see a means to its critique; neither system, justice or mercy, can be met within a world out of balance, because despite the model of Christian mercy, forgiveness, and even conversion at the end of the tale, the populace that might benefit from those graces is already destroyed" (Weisl 5). In analogues of the tale involving the "Alma Redemptoris," the Jewish murderer is not killed, but is saved after finally converting to Christianity (Weisl 5). This missing component is important to the tale because it undermines an altruistic and practical practice of conversion in the Christian Church. First, the bloodthirsty revenge of the Christians in the tale is incongruous with central beliefs of Christianity. Conversion, however, allows the Christians to spread their faith and "provides both solution and balance; the earthly life of the child is exchanged for the eternal life of the Jew and the Infidel" (Weisl 5). Second, the conversion of the Jews serves a practical purpose for Christians because a wide-held belief of postmillennial followers of the Christian faith is that the conversion of all of the Jews is critical to brining on the rapture. Gary North explains, "Their postmillennialism rested in part on their belief that God will convert the Jews to Christianity as a prelude to the kingdom's period of greatest expansion, an idea derived from Paul's Epistle to the church at Rome, chapter 11" (North). The massacre of the Jews in the tale prevents a conversion and similarly the forced exodus of Jews from England, also, thwarted the conversion necessary to cause the rapture—the ultimate redemption. Perhaps, Chaucer utilizes this blatant disruption between the Analogues and tale to highlight what is missing from the tale and what is missing from medieval Christianity—the possibility of conversion.

Chaucer was neither accepting of societal norms nor was he a liberal secular-humanist. It seems that in writing the Prioress's

Tale he aimed to disrupt a mainstream revulsion and suspicion of Jews by complicating the nun's tale. In doing so, he critiques blind acceptance of Church doctrine, draws parallels between Christians and Jews, and argues for redemption and mercy. The end product is a prescription for Christian behavior that rejects stereotyping of the Jewish community and advocates for the acceptance of Jews within mainstream society for the purpose of conversion. Though Chaucer does not adopt a modern view of Christian-Jewish relationships, as he should not be expected to, he does present a more progressive alternative to the medieval Christian narrative.

Works Cited

- Besserman, Lawrence L. "Ideology, Antisemitism, and Chaucer's Prioress's Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 36.1 (2001): 48-72. Print.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Ed. Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor. 2nd ed. Peterborough: Broadview, 2012. Print.
- Cohen, Derek, and Deborah Heller. *Jewish Presences in English Literature*. Montreal: McGill Queen's UP, 1990. Print.
- Despres, Denise L. "Cultic Anti-Judaism and Chaucer's 'Litel Clergeon'." *Modern Philology* 91.4 (1994): 413-27. Print.
- Howard, Donald R. *The Idea of Canterbury Tales*. Berkeley: U California P, 1976. Print.
- Jeremiah 31:15. *Jeremiah 31:15 (WYC): The Lord Seith These Thingis, A Voisa. Wycliffe's Bible (WYC)*, n.d. Web. 9 Dec. 2012.
- "Jewish Persecution." *Jewish Voice*, n.d. Web. 8 Dec. 2012.
- North, Gary. "The Unannounced Reason Behind American Fundamentalism's Support for the State of Israel." *Lew Rockwell*, 19 July 2000. Web. 11 Dec. 2012.
- Oliver, Kathleen M. "Singing Bread, Manna, and the Clergeon's 'Greyn.'" *The Chaucer Review* 31.4 (1997): 357-64. Print.
- Weisl, Angela. "'Yvele wol have what yvele wol deserve': Evil in the Prioress's Tale." 18th New Chaucer Society Congress. Portland State University, Portland, OR. 26 July 2012. Conference presentation.

The True Facts of a Lying Memoir

Rebecca Thieman

Is metaphor in memoir, in life, an alternate form of honesty or simply an evasion? This is what I want to know.

—Lauren Slater, *Lying* 2001

Lauren Slater is sitting five people to my right in a circle of admiring students and envious professors and colleagues. I am attending an undergraduate conference at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania, quite a ways away from my Kentucky roots—a fact these kind northerners have not failed to remind me of. I have been dubbed “The Kentucky Girl” and have suspicions that the majority of my peers believe the boots I wear (regular slip-ons, not cowboy) are my first real pair purchased specifically for this event. Lauren Slater is dressed in a velvet black and red patterned box top that hangs large and heavy from her body. Her hair is graying, vaguely reminiscent of Einstein’s signature static do, and her shoes, I have noticed, are unremarkable and worn. I like to think between her hair and my boots we are both outsiders.

Slater is speaking to us. Her voice is soft and fragile, as if she questions every word. Not that it matters, we hang from each hesitant utterance like children licking droplets from a fruit flavored Popsicle: every word consumed in quenched ecstasy. Though, based on a handful of expressions worn by my fellow circle sitters, some are having trouble swallowing. On their faces I see the same punctuation that Slater’s memoir, *Lying*, claims as its own: a question mark. While I have selected her as my comrade in outsider arms, I do experience a similar hesitation in trust. We are wondering whether we can believe every

word she says. We are questioning the fruit flavored quenching of the Popsicle. We are asking how far we are willing to trust an author whose first chapter consists of two words: I exaggerate. Lauren Slater is sitting five people to my right. We are hanging onto her every word. We admire. We respect. We are lied to.

As readers we expect a memoir to be true, honest, factual and accurate. We expect a memoir to be real life; otherwise we would read fiction. Without conscious thought, every writer has an unspoken agreement with readers centered on trust. Every narrative we read we take to be truth because we have no reason not to. It is the assumed reader-narrator contract. Which bears the question: what happens when a memoir is not factually true or accurate?

Slater’s book *Lying* is categorized as a metaphorical memoir. She uses the disease epilepsy as a vehicle through which she tells her story, a story, which when asked by the skinny, tall girl two down from me why she wrote about her mother this way, Slater responds by saying that no other way worked. “I tried,” she says, “but everything I wrote came out sounding like a bad soap opera. I couldn’t write about my mother or my childhood the way it actually happened. So I told it through epilepsy instead.” The memoir is so convincing in its portrayal of Slater as an epileptic her editor wanted to title it: “My Struggle with Epilepsy” despite having been told numerous times that it was, in fact, a metaphor. “Of course I don’t have epilepsy,” Lauren laughs from her spot in the circle. We laugh with her as if we, too, were never so naïve as to believe.

What makes *Lying* a source for critique is its categorization as nonfiction. Many, such as Rebecca Mead from *The New York Times*, view the book as Slater’s cry for attention. “Sickness demands compassion,” Mead says, “but even so, one can be forgiven for wanting to throttle the narrator of Lauren Slater’s latest book, *Lying*...It doesn’t so much wink at its own unreliability...as it does hold up a big neon sign reading ‘I Am Not to Be Trusted.’” While meant as a critique, Mead’s observation indirectly supports one of the central aims of the book. *Lying* never

claims to be factual. From the title, to the first chapter's only words—"I exaggerate"—to the second chapter where the narrator admits that "truth is bendable, that what you wish is every bit as real as what you are," readers are warned this will not be a factual memoir (Slater, *Lying* 3, 5). This will not be a narrative that honors the unspoken pact. What this will be is "a slippery, playful, impish, exasperating text, shaped, if it could be, like a question mark" (221).

Yet, despite these hints - which Slater describes to my peers and I as "beating the reader over the head" - you cannot read *Lying* without falling into the trap of belief. While it could be her skills as an extremely convincing and gifted writer, I think our irrational willingness to accept her epilepsy as fact, despite her warnings, is a simple matter of labeling. We want so much for the memoir genre to contain only absolute and honest details we are unwilling to accept the possibility that truthful does not always mean factual.

"It's okay to invent in your memoir if it's getting at the truth. If it captures the essence of me, if the words hold me in them, then that doesn't make it fiction. It's the truth of me. That's the bottom line."

I stop staring at Lauren Slater for a moment and look at my peers. On some faces I see obvious disagreement and on others I detect hesitant approval. I, myself, am torn on the matter. Can you lie in memoir? In theory, what Slater says makes sense. We read memoir to experience, and at the core of experience is emotion. Does it matter if every word is factually true if, in the end, we understand and feel the emotional truth? Donna Kay Kkongge, author of *How to Write Creative Non-fiction*, posits emotional truth is "knowledge coming from your heart" (9). It might not be accurate in detail but it feels true, which is itself a kind of truth. However, the debate is not whether emotions are true, but rather, can they replace fact in nonfiction.

As I sit listening to Lauren Slater, I wonder if it is not up to the reader to decide whether it matters how the story is told. We take for granted the pact between narrator and reader and assume every word we read in nonfiction is fact. In an interview with *Wag's Revue*, Slater expresses frustration over how "the

public is insisting that memoirs, too, adhere faithfully to the truth. And of course they must! And of course they can't!" (Allen, 26). Despite lack of factual basis, emotions can still create a sense of person, of time, of place, of relationship and thought. Of course memoirs must adhere to truth, but at the same time, what if the facts don't create the same truth? What if it is the emotional truth that tells the author's real story?

"Why aren't you in the trenches with the rest of us?" a Susquehanna professor asks,

"Why are you hiding behind metaphor?"

This takes Slater by surprise. She opens her mouth as if to answer, then closes it and sits biting her lip. I can see her brain straining to find an answer that requires more self-analysis than she bargained for when she came to this small Amish town in Pennsylvania. "Maybe," she hesitates, "maybe I'm just not a good enough writer. I haven't found a way to tell it like it's happened. I wonder if there are some life events that don't lend themselves to art."

I see a lot of my peers swallow that down easily. Their little Adam's apples bobbing down then up as Slater's words are accepted into their brains. They can accept this because they understand it. As writers we comprehend the impossible composition of certain topics. I raise my hand and ask Lauren Slater a question.

There is an essay called "The Facts of the Matter" recounting a twentieth-century rape from the perspective of a male who now teaches at a prominent university. The essay was anonymously authored and submitted to *Triquarterly* and hesitantly published on October 22, 2012. It is labeled as meta-nonfiction. The narrator argues "given that any narrative involves a selection of details and thus a distortion of sorts, *facts*—so the argument goes—aren't important. As long as an account tells the *truth*—psychologically, emotionally—facts aren't required" ("The Facts of the Matter").

Upon first reading this, I agreed. Emotions, for me, were more important than the facts. However, the anonymous author

also goes on to argue, "A lie can be a violation, a forced entry, a kind of rape." So, if we follow this logic, when an author lies about the facts in a memoir, despite any emotional validity, the reader is experiencing a violation of sorts. At the end of the "The Facts of the Matter," it is disclosed that the narrator is actually the woman victim, not the rapist. Then the narrator says the crime never happened at all but certain details happened to different individuals and their facts were joined together to form one narrative. The reader is left confused, angry and, yes, violated. But the essay proves the point of its title: "writers of creative nonfiction have become so at ease with lying...we are happy to play with our words. Indifferent to the facts of the matter."

The dialogue I use in this essay is not factual. It is not verbatim but taken from my memory and my notes. Does this make what Slater said that day any less true? What if she wasn't actually biting her lip when the professor asked her a question? What if I put that detail in so that you, my reader, could feel her hesitance and imagine the tension in the room? I believe emotions are the meat of memoir, but the facts do matter. It does matter to me whether the narrator is the rapist or the female victim. It does matter to me whether Slater has epilepsy or not.

I ask Slater what separates her from the author of "The Facts of the Matter" if, in the end, they both are lying. Without missing a beat, she responds that it comes down to reader awareness, "I tell my reader from the beginning that I am going to lie. I want to make them dizzy and put them on uneven ground. What that author did was rip the rug out from under the reader. It can't work that way." To this extent, I agree. However, I think the issue then becomes whether we are lying about our own life or another's and whether emotional truth has a place in illness memoir.

Slater, the psychotherapist, is questioning the conventional narrative that has been recently dubbed "sick lit." In a response to Mead's critique that *Lying* could have been told without epilepsy, without disease, Slater says: "I believe we exist in our God-given natures as diseased beings. We do not fall into illness. We fall from illness into temporary states of health ...

Nearsighted, farsighted, noses spurting bright blood, brains awack with crazy dreams, lassitude and little fears nibbling like mice at the fringes of our flesh, we are never well" (Slater, "One Nation Under the Weather"). The illness memoir is many things, but at its core is human suffering, whatever form it may take. According to Slater, emotionally, an illness memoir is always true.

However, "The Facts of the Matter" is not an illness memoir but a rape narrative with a larger scope of societal honesty. The politically minded Anonymous focuses less on individuals as diseased beings and more on the disease of our culture. As a society, this author says, we are routinely lied to about WMD's, massive genocidal rapes and religious injustice. Even on Western Kentucky University's campus we are not given the entire truth of the rapes that occur annually. Does this deception matter? Anonymous writes, "Perhaps it is only those who are not subject to the consequences who can afford to say that facts don't matter" ("The Facts of the Matter"). Which causes me to think that, maybe, truth in memoir can be emotional if it is the author's rape, the author's disease and life that feels like a seizure. Slater can use epilepsy as a metaphor because it is her life, her human suffering, being narrated through disease. Anonymous cannot claim this same right. The rape was not his or her story. It might be no one's story, or several people's, but it is not Anonymous' and it is a lie told with no warning. Memoir can be emotionally true, void of factual authenticity, but only through honest origin.

Beyond the literary world of our relationship to "facts" and the narrator-reader contract, I think the question of truth in memoir opens up a larger conversation about the contract we negotiate as citizens in a larger culture. How far are we willing to go to swallow a lie? How long can we afford to say the facts don't matter? Slater believes illness memoir is "a reflection on...[the] absurd and somehow very funny truth, that we are rotting, rotting, even as we write" ("One Nation Under the Weather"). I'd argue that we also rot while we live. As citizens in a larger culture we cannot say the facts don't matter. However, as memoirists, lying is often the greatest form of truth.

Works Cited

- Allen, Sandra. Interview with Lauren Slater. *Wag's Revue* 6. (2010): 23-33. Print.
- Kakonge, Donna Kay. *How to Write Creative Nonfiction*. [Raleigh, N.C.]: Lulu.com, 2008. Print.
- Mead, Rebecca. "Stranger Than Fiction." *Books of the Times*. The New York Times, 21 June 2000. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.
- Slater, Lauren. *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*. New York: Random House, 2001. Print.
- Slater, Lauren. "One Nation Under the Weather." *Salon*. Salon Media Group, 5 July 2000. Web. 14 Apr. 2013.
- "The Facts of the Matter." *TriQuarterly Main*. Northwestern University, 22 Oct. 2012. Web. 7 Mar. 2013.

Black Milk, Goldenes Haar, and the Death-Dance: Threads of Allusion and Perversion in Paul Celan's "Todesfug"

Maggie Woodward

Translated from German, the title of Paul Celan's haunting poem means "Death-fugue," and it foreshadows a pervasive aspect of the work: the collision of two languages, one that functions as oppressor, the other as oppressed. Because it is descriptive of the Holocaust, the poem incorporates elements of both Jewish and German culture, setting them in direct opposition to each other. However, while the poem is an indictment of German culture, it simultaneously demands participation in it, with many allusions to German and Christian works. Namely, Celan infuses the poem with Biblical references to *Psalms*, *Song of Songs*, and literary allusions to Goethe's *Faust*. Not only do these works point to other traditions than that of Judaism, they are formative literary symbols of these cultures; the Bible is the central Christian text, and *Faust* is considered the great symbol of German literary culture. At the same time that "Todesfug" incorporates this intertextuality, the poem is written in German. All of these layers point to a central thematic element of the poem: the structural components of a culture are inextricably tied up with one another—a notion that many other writers have demonstrated. For instance, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, another piece of Holocaust literature, also displays strong hints of internationalism and hybridity. Ultimately, the advertent or inadvertent inclusion of other cultures, including that of the oppressor, is unavoidable when examining literature contextually. In "Todesfug," the references to the Bible and *Faust* serve to intensify the bleakness of death in the poem, as well as to retrospec-

tively shed light on the Christian and German texts Celan alludes to.

The poem begins with the words “Black milk of daybreak,” a phrase which is repeated again in lines ten, nineteen, and twenty-seven. While “black milk” could refer to several things, it strongly points to the perversion of a Biblical concept. In the King James Version, Exodus 33:3 states, “Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people: lest I consume thee in the way.” The Biblical story about “the land of milk and honey” revolves around God delivering his chosen people (the Jews) to the promised land, a land of bounty and fertility. However, in “Todesfug,” Paul Celan describes the concentration camps as a stark contrast to the promised land guaranteed in Exodus. The milk has been tainted—blackened—and the Jewish people in Germany must drink it constantly: “Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening/ we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night/ we drink and we drink” (Celan). Throughout the poem, Celan switches the order of the times the Jewish prisoners must drink the “black milk”; this again illustrates an idea Wiesel emphasizes in *Night*—in the death camps, time loses all meaning, contributing to the dehumanization of the inmates.

The “black milk” thread of the poem begins each stanza; the thread of Marguerite and Shulamith is woven into the middle of stanzas and eventually comprises the poem’s final couplet. Within this sequence, Celan incorporates the most head-on collision between German and Jewish culture, and it intensifies with each stanza. In line six, the poem reads, “he writes when it turns dusk to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite.” Jerry Glenn discusses the tendency of scholars to search for affirmation or hope within the connection between Shulamith and Marguerite. Because the poem slowly incorporates Shulamith into lines fifteen, twenty-three, and the closing line of the poem, many critics have argued that Celan is attempting a reconciliation between the two women, and therefore between the German and Jewish cultures. However, Glenn dismisses this idea, stating:

On the contrary, “Todesfuge” is an extremely bitter poem. Contrasts of philosophy become sharper if they are expressed in the manner of an epigram in two lines

of identical meter. This is precisely the effect of the final lines of “Todesfuge.” The distance between the two women is increased by the form of the lines. (25)

Glenn also demonstrates the similarities between “Todesfug” and *Night*, quoting from Wiesel’s literary memoir:

For the first time I felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible was silent. What had I to thank Him for?...Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night...Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. (qtd. in Glenn 26)

Taken together, these two modes of analysis emphasize that the internationalism of the poem is not an attempt to reconcile these cultural incongruities. Rather, by alluding to such powerfully significant cross-cultural works, Celan instead points to the extreme distance between each ideology—distances which manifest themselves in the form of a German officer at a concentration camp “play[ing] with his vipers,” writing to his golden-haired Marguerite, and then “step[ping] out of doors and the stars are all twinkling he whistles his hounds to come close.” He does this while the Jews drink the “black milk of daybreak,” dig their own graves, and upon the German officer’s command, they “strike up and play for the dance” (Celan). Glenn concludes, “Much of Celan’s verse is profoundly pessimistic and correct interpretation is facilitated if the poems are approached with the historical background in mind” (26). Thus, while it is true that the literature and language of the contrasting cultures in “Todesfug” are intertwined, they are not used together to signify inclusiveness, but rather, how language can be used to oppress others.

Yet another thread knitted into “Todesfug” is the image of the death camp inmates being told to “strike up and play for the dance,” a phrase first introduced in line nine and which also concludes the second and third stanzas. Psalms 137:3, “The Mourning of the Exiles in Babylon,” reads, “For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” Once again, Celan distorts this Old Testament story to highlight how it is being used to intensify the suffering of the

Jews. Sandra Dillon discusses some of the thematic recurrences in "Todesfug." Of the image of Jews being ordered to dance, she says:

The death dance has a long tradition dating back to the Middle Ages...the idea of the dancing death is repeated in Celan's poem with the line, 'The shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Germany.' Death ceases being an abstract concept and becomes concrete when named a master from Germany. (38)

The juxtaposition of Biblical promises of fertility and music with death increases the cultural contrasts in the poem. The references to art and music devolve with each repetition. In line eighteen: "jab your spades deeper you there you others *play on for the dance*"; in lines twenty-four and twenty-five: "He shouts *play death more sweetly* Death is a master from Deutschland/ he shouts *scrape your strings darker* you'll rise then in smoke to the sky" (Celan). As the language and distinction between German culture and Jewish culture disintegrate, "the theme of darkness and death leads to the destruction of musical aesthetics" (Dillon 38). This repetitive thread, along with the others, all deepen the chasm between German and Jewish ideals, rather than providing a link between them.

Though the allusions in "Todesfug" are pervasive and critical of the oppressor, there remains the fact that the poem ends with the Margarete/Sulamith daydream. L. L. Duroche argues that while these two women are being contrasted throughout the poem, they remain a symbol of love: "Margarete stands for the Germanic ideal of innocent beauty; Sulamith is the Beloved, the 'fairest among women,' described so sensuously in The Song of Solomon and providing one more connection with the Old Testament as the source of poetic inspiration" (476). Thus, Margarete and Sulamith, in the closing lines, rise from the ashes of the murderous death camps—their image is the prevailing one; they are, despite their incongruous nature, the fate of the poem. Duroche continues, "What is ignored is that The Song of Solomon is a love song and that all the allusions in 'Todesfuge' are functional...The Biblical allusion in line nine implies that 'Todesfuge'...is the threnody of an exile returning from the Babylonian captivity" (476). Thus, perhaps the Faustian/ German Margarete and the Biblical Sulamith, though not extending

their hands to each other, are attempting to find a way to climb up from suffering through the act of love. This love is independent of culture and language, but represented by the color of their hair—Margarete's "golden Haar" and Sulamith's "aschenes Haar" become the lingering aesthetic of the poem.

The intertextuality of "Todesfug" calls into sharp focus the collective literary tradition of our world, the inseparability of Hebrew tradition from Greek tradition, and the inextricability of German tradition from Jewish tradition. The German Nazi officer enthralled with *Faust's* Marguerite recalls a work that defines a people, and the inmates' fascination with Shulamith's "ashen hair" points to a central work in Jewish history and consciousness. Wrapped up into a single poem, the allusions in "Todesfug" are evidence that the literary imagination looks to itself to create itself; and that bearing witness to suffering illuminates old universal themes while also creating new meaning.

Works Cited

- Byatt, A. S. *The Book of Exodus: Authorized King James Version*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998. Print.
- Byatt, A. S. *The Song of Solomon: Authorized King James Version*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998. Print.
- Celan, Paul. "Todesfug." *The Sand from the Urns*. Austria: A. Söxl, 1948. Print.
- Dillon, Sandra I. "Audacious Rhetorical Devices in Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge' and Nelly Sachs' 'O Die Schornsteine'" *Rocky Mountain Review* 64.1 (2010): 32-46. Print.
- Duroche, L. L. "Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge': A New Interpretation." *MLN* 82.4 (1967): 472-77. Print.
- Glenn, Jerry. "Manifestations of the Holocaust: Interpreting Paul Celan." *Books Abroad* 46.1 (1972): 25-30. Print.
- Wiesel, Elie, and Robert McAfee Brown. *Night*. Toronto: Bantam, 1986. Print.

