

# POPULAR CULTURE REVIEW

volume 32 number 1 winter 2021





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**Amy M. Green, editor-in-chief**



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## Editor's Note

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**P**opular Culture Review's first issue of 2021 comes at a time when many of us are reeling. The cover image for this issue reflects this, as many of us feel emotionally drained past the point of exhaustion. Many of us are numb. Yet I hope that the image also reflects the possibility of hope—that from this darkness, we can again begin to feel light and hope. That is my wish for all of us.

Those of us who knew Felicia Campbell also suffered yet another devastating loss with her passing last year. She remains inimitable and we are all better for having known her.

As the journal moves forward, I am honored to take on the role of Editor-in-Chief and to guide and steward the journal Felicia loved.

This issue showcases several outstanding works of scholarship in popular culture studies. We are also honored that Lauren Jackson has accepted the Felicia Campbell Innovative Contributions to Popular Culture Studies Award for 2021. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Northwestern University and the author of *White Negroes*. She will deliver a keynote speech at the virtual 2021 Far West Popular Culture Association's conference. We will feature a link to her keynote speech and the text of her speech in an upcoming issue. Jackson represents a powerful and important voice in popular culture studies, and I am excited to see what she will do in the future.

I wish you all peace, good health, and strength as we move into the first part of 2021.

Amy M. Green, *Editor-in-Chief*



## Contributors

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**Kevin Greene** earned his M.A. in English from NYU in 2018. He currently teaches high school English in Brooklyn, NY. His research has focused on contemporary literature and culture, particularly on Irish literature and drama, and North Atlantic modernism. His current work focuses on postcolonial and revolutionary movements and their interactions with religion.

**Emily O'Malley** is an English major and writing minor at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. She will focus her undergraduate thesis on gendered representations of mentally ill young adults in literature from the 1950s to today. Her areas of interest include modernism, contemporary literature, and 21<sup>st</sup> century television.

**Noah McLaughlin:** Noah McLaughlin is an Assistant Professor of French and Director of the Foreign Language Resource Collection at Kennesaw State University. His film studies publications include *French War Films and National Identity* (Cambria, 2010), "The Spiraling Narrative Dialectic of *La Vie en Rose*," (Rowan & Littlefield, 2013) and "False Idyll: Siri's *Intimate Enemies*" (De Gruyter, 2018).

**Paul D. Reich** is an associate professor of English at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. His pedagogical essay on HBO's *True Detective* in the introductory literature classroom has appeared in *Interdisciplinary Humanities*. He has co-authored an essay entitled "#DrySeptember: Reading William Faulkner through the Lens of Black Twitter" in *Studies in American Culture* and his essay, "Precious Resources: Cultural Archiving in the Post-Apocalyptic Worlds of *Mr. Burns* and *Station Eleven*" has recently appeared in *Text & Presentation*.

**Todd O. Williams:** Todd O. Williams is a Professor of English at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. He has published multiple articles on pedagogy and Victorian authors. He is the author of the books *A Therapeutic Approach to Teaching Poetry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and *Christina Rossetti's Environmental Consciousness* (Routledge, 2019).

**“A Prison of Our Own Sins”:  
The Unacknowledged Legacy of  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Slave Narratives in  
HBO’s *Westworld* and Hulu’s  
*The Handmaid’s Tale***

.....

**By Emily O’Malley and Paul Reich**

**ABSTRACT**

Both HBO’s *Westworld* (2016) and Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017) feature white female protagonists who find themselves in societies that enslave and subject them to horrific harm. Although these near-future, alternative Americas imagine worlds free of systematic racism, the show’s creators employ the features and stylistic elements of 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives and recast the central roles with white women. These misappropriations neglect to recognize the complicated legacy of slavery in America and its impact on intersectional Black women.

*Keywords:* *Westworld*, *Handmaid’s Tale*, slavery, slave narratives

**“Una prisión de nuestros propios  
pecados”: El legado no reconocido  
de las narrativas de esclavos del siglo  
XIX en *Westworld* de HBO y  
*The Handmaid’s Tale* de Hulu**

**RESUMEN**

Tanto *Westworld* de HBO (2016) como *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017) de Hulu cuentan con protagonistas blancas que se encuentran en sociedades que las esclavizan y las someten a

un daño terrible. Aunque estas Américas alternativas del futuro cercano imaginan mundos libres de racismo sistemático, los creadores del programa emplean las características y elementos estilísticos de las narrativas de esclavos del siglo XIX y reformulan los roles centrales con las mujeres blancas. Estas apropiaciones indebidas ignoran el complicado legado de la esclavitud en Estados Unidos y su impacto en las mujeres negras interseccionales.

**Palabras clave:** Westworld, Handmaid's Tale, esclavitud, narrativas de esclavos

**Paul D. Reich** es profesor asociado de inglés en Rollins College en Winter Park, Florida. Su ensayo pedagógico sobre el verdadero detective de HBO en el aula de introducción a la literatura ha aparecido en *Interdisciplinary Humanities*. Ha sido coautor de un ensayo titulado "#DrySeptember: Leyendo a William Faulkner a través de la lente de Black Twitter" en *Studies in American Culture* y su ensayo, "Precious Resources: Cultural Archiving in the Post-Apocalyptic Worlds of *Mr. Burns* and *Station Eleven*" ha aparecido recientemente en *Text & Presentation*.

**Emily O'Malley** se especializa en inglés y en escritura en Rollins College en Winter Park, Florida. Centrará su tesis de pregrado en las representaciones de género de los adultos jóvenes con enfermedades mentales en la literatura desde la década de 1950 hasta la actualidad. Sus áreas de interés incluyen el modernismo, la literatura contemporánea y la televisión del siglo XXI.

“原罪监狱”：HBO《西部世界》和Hulu《使女的故事》中未承认的19世纪奴隶叙事影响

摘要

HBO《西部世界》（2016）和Hulu《使女的故事》（2017）都以白人妇女为主角，她们生存在将其奴役并屈从于可怕危害的社会。尽管这些近未来、替代性美国设想世界不存在系统性种族主义，但节目制作者却使用了19世纪奴隶叙事的特征和风格元素，并用白人妇女改写这些中心角色。这些错误挪用现象忽视了承认美国奴隶制复杂影响及其对交叉性黑人妇女（intersectional Black women）产生的影响。

Paul D. Reich是佛罗里达州温特帕克市罗林斯学院英语系副教授。他在文学导论课堂上就HBO《真探》撰写的教学文章已发表在《跨学科人文学》（Interdisciplinary Humanities）期刊。他还共同撰写了一篇名为““#DrySeptember: Reading William Faulkner through the Lens of Black Twitter””的文章，被《美国文化研究》（Studies in American Culture）期刊所收录，并且他的文章“Precious Resources: Cultural Archiving in the Post-Apocalyptic Worlds of Mr. Burns and Station Eleven”最近收录于《文本与演示》（Text & Presentation）期刊。

Emily O' Malley是佛罗里达州温特帕克市罗林斯学院英语专业学生，辅修写作。她的本科论文将聚焦20世纪50年代至今的文学中有关精神失常的青年成人的性别表征。她的兴趣包括现代主义、当代文学和21世纪电视学。

关键词：《西部世界》，《使女的故事》，奴隶制，奴隶叙事

Those wishing for a brief respite from the pleasures of New Orleans often take the afternoon to visit a plantation outside the city. This drive to explore the South's antebellum past is both nostalgic and educational, contradictory impulses that often work at cross-purposes. When tourists exit Interstate 310 and hit the crossroad of Highway 18, the choice of which direction to turn is at once political, social, and cultural. Most turn left and follow the Mississippi as it meanders down to Oak Alley Plantation. A convenient turn-off on the right shoulder offers a view of Oak Alley's magnificence and the "28 Oaks" leading to the "Big House" ("Plantation Overview"). Blocked from that view are the newly restored (and impeccably constructed) slave cabins, which tell the story of the plantation's other residents. Visitors may (or may not) choose to tour this exhibit at their leisure; it is self-guided. The "Big House" is not. Here they get the official narrative. They can marvel, for example, at the air-conditioned dining room—a large fan set atop a block of ice—without considering the enslaved person who would operate said fan for the entirety of dinner. When they are shown the private spaces of this house, they learn this place is about tragedy and trauma: the tragedy and trauma of white women who struggled throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century against a culture of domesticity that sought to control them. Like those cabins behind the house, any comparisons one wishes to make to enslaved persons are self-guided.

Audiences make similar navigations from their living rooms as they select the media they consume. Increasingly, visual narratives have eschewed the past in favor of the near future as these shows become sites where contemporary social issues can be safely explored. Two of these narratives, Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan's *Westworld* (2016) and Bruce Miller's *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017), present viewers with similar

storylines: the enslavement of white women and their work towards rebellion and release. In the first season of HBO's *Westworld*, Dolores Abernathy (played by Evan Rachel Wood) is an android Host in an adult theme park modeled on the American West, where she serves at the pleasure of its guests and is often raped and/or killed each evening. Her struggle to escape this repeated trauma comes with both a newly discovered sense of self and the killing of her creator. Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*'s first season focuses on June Osborne (played by Elisabeth Moss), who is enslaved by the post-American society of Gilead to produce children for their leaders. As she struggles through the rape and abuse of her day-to-day life, June works to rescue her daughter, Hannah, and escape. While both shows offer compelling parallels to #MeToo, the enslavement of these characters should point viewers instead to 19<sup>th</sup> century America and the narratives offered by formerly enslaved persons. This body of literature features distinct themes and formal elements that are recontextualized in the inaugural seasons of *Westworld* and *The Handmaid's Tale* to propel narratives of gender-based enslavement. However, in misappropriating the techniques of slave narratives and applying them to white women, these series tell white feminist stories that neglect to recognize the complicated legacy of slavery in America and its impact on intersectional Black women.

To understand how both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Westworld* appropriate the techniques of 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives, it is necessary to briefly review the genre and identify two of its representative texts. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the slave narrative as a generic form developed to advocate for abolition, establishing some key characteristics. These first-person narratives are constructed by escaped slaves, following their movement from South to North, but require validation from

a white abolitionist, usually in the form of an introductory letter. Due to the claimed Christianity of both the North and the South, there is a heavy focus on morality and piety, especially in conversation with the deprivation of resources necessary to make an individual “civilized” or respectable. Other themes include “physical brutality, the corruption of families (usually white), the separation of families (usually black), [and] the exploitation of slave workers” (Braxton 380).

Additionally, slave narratives often follow dichotomous gender roles, illustrated clearly in reading Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) against Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). As John Ernest points out, “Jacobs has become the exceptional-representative woman to balance Douglass’s exceptional-representative man” (Ernest 219). The genre should not be diminished to two texts, but Jacobs and Douglass’s narratives serve as exemplars. While they feature many similar themes, some characteristics are unique to women’s slave narratives: “rape, sexual exploitation, and familial separation in far more direct and intimate encounters than most males experienced or narrated” (Fulton 248). They also include a larger focus on community and interdependence.

Though slave narratives are autobiographical in nature, they occupy a liminal space between nonfiction and fiction due to both framing and silences. Framing is gender specific. For men like Douglass, there is “the construct of the ‘self-made man,’ a construct most male ex-slaves embrace heartily in their narratives, perhaps because they were prevented from achieving it under slavery” (Drake 45). Women like Jacobs, on the other hand, borrow from sentimentalism because it “was a definitive way to reach a large white audience” (Carranza 71) and they “faced the prevailing gender ideal of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ that demanded ‘true’ women

to be pious, domestic, submissive, and pure” (Fulton 249). Silences, on the other hand, are gender neutral. This is not to say that slave narratives were not explicit: “Murder, mutilation, torture, thwarted escape, and (insinuated) rape were both horrifying and titillating to genteel audiences and became necessary elements to drive the popularity and sales of slave narratives” (Abdur-Rahman 236). However, authors like Jacobs and Douglass made conscious choices to omit certain scenes—for example, Jacobs refuses to openly discuss sexual relations and Douglass does not describe his journey along the Underground Railroad. Silences or gaps in narratives can be referred to as “‘undertell,’ a deliberate and necessary understating of the truth” (Whitsitt 74). This exercise of narrative control reveals both newfound autonomy and internalized shame, forces that compete with one another across these texts’ pages.

Gender-specific framing has another effect: it establishes archetypal roles for the “characters” in slave narratives. Though Douglass and Jacobs chronicle their own experiences, there is some fictionalization: “[T]he author portrays the way he or she overcomes the slaveholding society’s continuing attempts to eradicate his or her identity; simultaneously, s/he rewrites that identity to fit the dominant culture’s norms” (Drake 43). Douglass models his story after the Franklidian autobiographical novel, which “portrays the self as unique, even Oedipal in its ability to throw off the restraints of the past and ‘father’ a new man” as a way to “disprove the myths of black inferiority” (Drake 46-47). This archetype is generally referred to as the articulate hero, a man who has risen above his station to represent success, telling his story with clarity and strength. Jacobs, meanwhile, follows what Braxton introduces “as a counterpart to the articulate hero[:] the archetype of the outraged mother” (Braxton 382). These

women resist slavery for their children rather than for themselves, but are no less clever than the articulate hero as “the outraged mother makes use of wit and intelligence to overwhelm and defeat a more powerful foe” (Braxton 385).

In keeping with the outraged mother archetype, Jacobs roots her text in both autobiography and sentimentalism. To adhere to the “cult of true womanhood,” she uses undertell to veil sexual abuse: “Jacobs’s narrative is not only an honest one but also one that obscures the ugliest accuracies of her story, concerned that they would be found too horrific or ‘titillating’ by the narrative’s intended audience of white northern ladies” (O’Neill 59). Every outraged mother has a shadow-self, another archetype who lingers in the narrative’s gaps: the sexual deviant. In using “wit and intelligence,” slave women leverage what is often their only asset, their sexuality, to secure safety. The sexual deviant was denounced by the white female audience as that agency seemed seductive and offensive in their targeting of white men, but she emerges in these 19<sup>th</sup> century narratives in moments of terror that remain implicit. As contemporary television series update the genre for a new, more liberal audience, they feature the sexual deviant more prominently, but in doing so, they separate her from the outraged mother to feature both archetypes in different characters and/or settings.

Part of the fictionalization resulting in these archetypes is a direct effect of obscurity in slaves’ lives. In Douglass’s *Narrative*, he struggles to articulate the identifying facts of his life. He knows neither his birth date nor age and is unsure of his father’s identity, with the exception of his race (white). As his condition follows his mother’s, Douglass understands he is enslaved, but the liberality with which he is treated as a child eventually conflicts with this slave status. When he

is relocated to Baltimore, for example, his new mistress begins to teach Douglass to read and provides the spark that helps him master this skill. His literacy proves both a blessing and curse: “It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without my remedy” (33). Had Douglass remained in Baltimore, his story might have had a simpler ending—with an easier escape—but he is returned to the country and leased to Mr. Covey, a notorious slave-breaker, for the purposes of re-education. In a climactic confrontation with Covey, Douglass both firmly renounces his enslaved status *and* asserts his right to (white) masculinity: “[A]t this moment—from whence came the spirit I don’t know—I resolved to fight; and suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose” (50). This action, as Douglass explicitly claims, was “the turning-point in [his] career as slave” because it both “rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived with [him] a sense of [his] own manhood” (50). Soon after, Douglass returned to Baltimore and then escaped to the North.

For Douglass, then, the articulate hero’s progression is clear. Ignorance gives way to an understanding of one’s place in the world, and the hero “rise[s]” and lays claim to their privileged position in order to secure their freedom. As discussed earlier, 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives often gender this archetype, as it follows the Franklinian tradition of achievement from humble beginnings through a rejection of the past and embracement of education. In *Westworld*, the parallels to Douglass are clearest in Dolores, who for much of the season is the character that opens each episode. Like Douglass, Dolores’s own age is indeterminate and her paternity is in question.<sup>1</sup> Dolores’s journeys beyond her hometown, Sweet-

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1 The first occurs earlier, in the episode “A Woman’s Place,” when June has a moment alone with the female ambassador of Mexico

water, provide similar opportunities to Douglass for an understanding of her condition and a recognition of her place in the world. They also allow her to achieve agency as she transitions from a passive to active role in her story. When Dolores moves through the park with her human love interest William (played by Jimmi Simpson), for example, viewers see this progression clearly. Their journey begins with an exhausted Dolores collapsing in William's arms, and he continues that caretaking role until they reach Pariah, a lawless town, where even Dolores is free to reinvent herself as a pants and pistol-wearing outlaw. Her transformation to masculinized hero is not complete until a pivotal confrontation with the Confederados: she kills four of them, saving herself and William. In this climatic confrontation, the camera pans from Dolores's gun up to her face, mirroring the "rise" readers see in Douglass's confrontation with Covey. William asks, "How did you do that?" She replies, "You said people come here to change the story of their lives. I imagined a story where I didn't have to be the damsel" ("Contrapasso" 46:00-46:20). And she certainly does not. Instead, Nolan and Joy imagine a story of Dolores becoming an articulate hero by dispatching several ex-Confederate soldiers, members of a militia who still believe in an ideology this world ignores.

As the season progresses, viewers learn that scenes with Dolores follow two separate timelines, spaced thirty years apart. Her progression to freedom—or in *Westworld's* terms, consciousness—takes much longer than Douglass's. But by the conclusion of the present timeline, Dolores confronts the Man in Black (played by Ed Harris), a guest who has consistently beaten and sexually assaulted her. Mirroring his

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and berates her for not doing anything about June's enslaved position. It's telling that this critique isn't directly levied against any of the white men and women of Gilead by June in this season.

assault of her in the show's first episode, Dolores grabs him by the shirt collar and drags him outside. It is not difficult to overlay Douglass's words—"at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight"—onto this scene as viewers watch Dolores suit her "action to the resolution" (Douglass 50). That the show's first season concludes with Dolores yet again taking action is unsurprising. As the articulate hero, it is what viewers have come to expect of her. Unlike Douglass, however, she has little interest in escape. Instead, as she raises her gun to the back of her "father" Ford's head and fires, Dolores wants revolution.

It is necessary to pause and consider this act. Viewers are meant to see it as heroic. Dolores, like the other Hosts in the park, has been used by the Guests as an object upon which they can enact their basest desires: her daily loop, or park narrative assignment, typically ends with her parents' death and her rape. Though her creators intended otherwise, she remembers many of these events. This particular act of revolt may appear warranted (as viewers find themselves on the side of an android over humans). Despite similar circumstances and treatment, the enslaved persons in Douglass's narrative would not have been able to both kill their enslavers and continue to receive support from white Northerners. Douglass could not construct a narrative where he kills Covey; his escape is the most he could hope for. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Westworld* shows a Black sheriff's deputy gunned down in the street for entertainment, but not a Black person executing the creator and controller of their suffering. Ford's execution is carried out by Dolores perhaps because white-on-white violence deracializes the scene and furthers the claim that the Hosts' oppression disregards race. In that case, the choice to have a white woman kill Ford

suggests the showrunners are aware, then, that issues of race and racialization are present in *Westworld* and leave it unacknowledged. It emphasizes the relative lack of power for Black women, which finds its roots in the archetypal role of African American women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Female slaves were used, in addition to the rest of their labor in the house and/or fields, as breeders. Their children were usually prematurely weaned and separated, so as to sever the connection between mother and child. Children were born to work on the plantation or to be sold; Black women gave birth only to lose their children. These preconditions foster the rise of the outraged mother. In cases where slave mothers were not immediately separated from their children, they grew deeply fond of them; a woman's child was *hers*, not anyone else's. The outraged mother bonds with her child and attempts to escape with them, often because separation at the auction block was imminent. Unlike the articulate hero, who works for himself and emulates the "self-made man," the outraged mother works for her children and appeals to the "cult of true womanhood" in the hopes that white mothers sympathize.

Harriet Jacobs, through her pseudonym Linda Brent in *Incidents*, is an example of the outraged mother. To fulfill the archetype's preconditions, Jacobs presents a description of her childhood, including her familial separation. She experiences a loss of innocence at the hands of Dr. Flint, her enslaver: "She [the slave child] will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child. If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove the greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave" (Jacobs 27). Jacobs hopes to prevent this corruption of morality from affecting her children.

Enslaved women could not be mothers and have families like white families: “Moreover, my mistress, like many others, seemed to think that slaves had no right to any family ties of their own; that they were created merely to wait upon the family of the mistress” (Jacobs 34). Inherent in the outraged mother archetype is contradiction—part of the outrage is directed toward the denial of motherhood. This contradiction plays out during a moment of maternal sacrifice, when mother is separated from child. For most enslaved women, separation was at the hands of slave traders, or such a threat prompted an escape attempt. For others, like Jacobs, they fled not the auction block but sexual abuse they could no longer bear. Either way, unless the slave trade prompted an immediate escape attempt together, families were separated. The relationship an outraged mother has with her children is characterized by loss and distance; the mother loves her children, but they feel abandoned or forgotten. The eventual reunion is bittersweet: “Raising her head, [Ellen] said, inquiringly, ‘You really *are* my mother?’ I told her I really was; that during all the long time she had not seen me, I had loved her most tenderly; and that now she was going away, I wanted to see her and talk with her, that she might remember me” (Jacobs 115). Unlike the articulate hero’s triumphs, the outraged mother experiences irretrievable loss—to save her children, their relationship must suffer.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Bruce Miller borrows from the outraged mother archetype. June’s story opens with her family’s failed escape attempt. June, a white woman, is separated from Hannah, her mixed-race daughter. The scene—a woman clutching her child to her chest, fleeing white men and their guns—is a thinly-veiled homage to slave narratives. That separation motivates June; she wants to be reunited with Hannah and to escape Gilead together, though staying means she

is abused. She participates in the Ceremony, during which Commander Waterford rapes her, she is coerced into sex with him outside of that context, and she has sex with Nick—the Commander’s driver—in the hopes that he can impregnate her so that she is not sent to the colonies, which would permanently separate her from Hannah and any hope of escape.

She, too, experiences confinement, though in a larger space than Jacobs’s garret and for a shorter period of time. June says, “I’ve been banished from my room” (“Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum” 1:57-1:59), as the camera peeks through a cracked-open door to simulate extreme confinement. Really, June has been alone in her bedroom for thirteen days, with food delivered to her. The lighting alternately casts June in a silhouette—darkening her body—and accentuates her shining blonde hair, unlike Jacobs, who crouched in the garret for seven years, warping her body and prematurely graying her hair. June stakes a claim to confinement while the lighting reminds viewers of her whiteness. Looking through the thin opening of the doorway (2:06) offers a sliver, a quarter of the full frame, to see June cast in that light, while the rest of the frame is dominated by darkness—the out-of-focus door. The scene composition is deliberate: “this physical constraint mirrors the metaphorical implications of June/Offred’s limited perspective in Gilead” (Harrison 28). While June’s experience conceptually mirrors Jacobs’s time in the garret, the visual effect can only be created by cinematographic tricks, an active effort to de-privilege June and reveal that her constraints go beyond the physical.

At the end of the season, Serena brings June to see Hannah, who has assimilated into life in Gilead; June watches Serena talk to her daughter from a distance, locked in a car. There is no moment of reunion, only loss—Hannah has a new life

without June. Even as June tries to save Hannah from Gilead, she knows that their mother-daughter relationship has languished. Unlike Jacobs, who quietly bemoans the loss while being forced to deepen it—she spends time away from her children to earn money caring for a white woman's child, while her son learns a trade and her daughter is sent away for school—June expresses her rage toward Serena: "What is wrong with you? How can you do this? You're deranged. You're ... you're ... You're fucking evil. You know that? You are a goddamn motherfucking monster! Fucking heartless, sadistic, motherfucking evil cunt! Fuck you, Serena! You are gonna burn in goddamn motherfucking hell, you crazy, evil bitch!" ("Night" 26:13-27:02). Here, audiences are reminded of June's privilege; she is able to speak with violence and intensity in a way that no Black woman, especially an enslaved woman, is allowed.

The outraged mother, like June and Jacobs, does not exist without the sexual deviant. The narrative gaps and silences are just as much a part of a slave's story as the text itself; in women's slave narratives, who she is in those gaps is as important as the outraged mother she portrays in writing. With Jacobs as the model, the gaps readers find in women's slave narratives pertain to sex: Jacobs deftly avoids detailing the majority of the sexual abuse she endured serving Dr. Flint and obscures the nature of her relations with Mr. Sands. She avoids scandalizing her story and shields the reputation of white male slaveholders. Relegated to the undertell of her story is the sexual deviant, the other representation of Black womanhood in 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives.

The outraged mother and sexual deviant work in tandem. However, they access power in different ways: the outraged mother finds strength in community and the love she has

for her children, while the sexual deviant's authority comes from her innate sexuality and self-preservation. The two archetypes are inextricably bound; Jacobs, for example, played the sexual deviant with Sands to escape Flint's abuses, which directly resulted in her getting pregnant—twice—and becoming the outraged mother to protect her daughter from the same fate. She appeals to Sands as the purported father of her children, combining both archetypes, to compel him to buy and possibly free her children. The sexual deviant is the outraged mother's shadow because Black women were seen as primitively sexual; white people, especially women, pointed to this as a reason to deny them basic respectability and decency. White women demanded the strictest morality possible from Black women to even consider permitting them into the cult of true womanhood, while disregarding the abuses white men performed on Black women. Women's slave narratives had to be both titillating and prude to function as effective political texts.

Contemporary television series depart from slave narratives in that slave narratives are autobiographical and largely centered on an individual's experience, while television as a medium allows for narrative threads following multiple characters in depth. As a result, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Westworld* cleave the outraged mother from the sexual deviant, embodying the two archetypes in, for the former, two different characters, and for the latter, two different loops. While these series claim a sort of race-blindness that ties narratives of enslavement to women regardless of gender, it is notable that in both, the sexual deviants are only played by Black women.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the sexual deviant is Moira (played by Samira Wiley), June's best friend. In scenes pre-Gilead, Moira is an outspoken Black lesbian who works with fem-

inist organizations and actively protests the changing government. A scene from their college years shows Moira as sexually open with a woman (“Offred” 17:00-17:27). Living in Gilead, after an escape gone wrong, Moira works at Jezebels, a secret club and love hotel where Commanders go to have sex outside of the constraints of the Ceremony. Moira is forced into sex work, losing the autonomy to even choose a sexual partner; the other queer character is Emily (played by Alexis Bleidel), a white woman, who is caught having a consensual relationship with a Martha. Amy Boyle’s criticism notes that “while the series makes a strong attempt to explore the discrimination experienced by LGBT+ persons, despite having a racially diverse cast it has underexplored black histories of sexual and domestic slavery and the forced separation of families” (863). Moira, then—as the Black queer woman—has survival sex, or forced sex work, rather than consensual sex or sex work as a chosen profession, engaging in self-preservation until June finds her. June lectures Moira on the importance of escaping, prompting Moira’s movement in the season finale that leads to her triumph—reunion with June’s husband, Luke, in Canada. Moira’s escape, the series suggests, would have been impossible without June, the outraged mother of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, insisting that Moira “keep [her] fucking shit together” (“The Bridge” 32:00-32:03) and flee. Again, the outraged mother and the sexual deviant are linked, but the showrunners made a conscious choice to cast the outraged mother as a white woman and the sexual deviant as a Black woman—and to have the outraged mother condescend to the sexual deviant to propel her narrative movement.

*Westworld* is an intriguing case because, like 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives, a Black woman is both the outraged mother and the sexual deviant: Maeve (played by Thandie Newton).

However, as a Host, Maeve is cast as different roles herself; while her body plays both roles, they are separate identities. In *Westworld's* present moment, Maeve works as a madam in the Mariposa, Sweetwater's saloon. In a previous "build," or assigned role, she was a mother living on the frontier with her daughter, there to alternately live a peaceful homesteader's life and be attacked by the Ghost Nation, the theme park *Westworld's* stereotyped indigenous peoples. As a result, Maeve "blurs the binary of the normal virginal and passive woman and sexually powerful deviant" (Erwin 135). Memories of that build resurface in Maeve's mind due to changed code, giving her the impulses of an outraged mother that ultimately prompt her to choose looking for her former daughter in the park over escaping to the real world. Her drive until the final minutes of season one's last episode, however, is to escape, which she does through sexual deviancy. Maeve has to repeatedly die and go to the park's lab to work on her plan, which she does through sex: a guest chokes her to death, or she and Hector self-immolate during intercourse. She is often stabbed in the abdomen; the knife is recognized by Carol Erwin as phallic imagery, and "Maeve's experiences of violence at the Man in Black's hands [when she witnesses her daughter's death] are much more explicitly visual" (Erwin 137) than his assault on Dolores, which remains off-camera. Maeve is Dolores's foil; in parallel shots, Dolores wakes up in bed with a white nightgown and blonde hair carefully draped around her head ("The Original" 3:11; "Chestnut" 1:53; "The Stray" 4:30) while Maeve wakes up in a black nightgown, her black curls framing her face ("The Adversary" 1:50). Maeve remembers being an outraged mother, but like Jacobs, she cannot explicitly play both roles at the same time. Instead, her escape plan must be engineered when she, like Moira, is performing sex work.

In appropriating 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives for a contemporary plot, the casting decisions are telling. If race does not play a role in Gilead or Westworld's park—if, as Maeve says to her clients, “this is the new world, and in this world, you can be whoever the fuck you want” (“Chestnut” 17:30-17:36)—why are Black women relegated to roles that force them to perform sex work? June can be an outraged mother searching for her daughter and Dolores can be an articulate hero rising as a self-made woman, but Moira and Maeve operate in roles in which they are physically exposed and lack agency. Unlike their white counterparts, they cannot choose their sexual partners (Maeve may appear to choose, especially with Hector, but she is bound by a strict new loop scripting her entire escape attempt). What does it mean for contemporary audiences that they are told race is irrelevant to these narratives while Black women are relegated to sex work to have a place in these stories? Archetypes like the articulate hero and the outraged mother, once represented by strong Black individuals, are now denied to Black female characters in spite of their generic origins.

As *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Westworld* employ archetypes from 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives, they also embrace its formulaic plot constructions. In some ways, this is unsurprising; what else would a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience expect from their enslaved protagonist but a continuous move towards escape? But when these visual narratives are placed in conversation with their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, the parallels that emerge move beyond the universal drive for free will and are instead thinly-veiled reproductions of the American enslaved experience, once again appropriated by a white female protagonist.

A consistent feature of slave narratives is the experience of

repeated trauma. Early in Douglass's narrative, for example, he describes a formative experience from his childhood:

I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom [Mr. Plummer] used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. (14-15)

Douglass's readers are drawn first to the detailed description of his aunt's beating; this is no punishment but, instead, a sustained act of violence by a sadistic overseer who took pleasure in it. While Douglass is clear in his characterization of his aunt as a "victim," readers see how victimized he, too, is by this act. He remembers this moment for the rest of his life, and the suggestion that it was only "the first time" signals to readers that these traumas will repeat for the remainder of his time as an enslaved person.

In *Westworld*, violence is visited on Black bodies repeatedly. During the many attempted robberies of the Mariposa Saloon, the town's Black Deputy Foss (played by Demetrius

Grosse) is shot and killed execution-style, no matter the variation. In Maeve's flashbacks to her pre-Mariposa life, viewers continually see her and her daughter in life-threatening situations. The repeated image viewers have of them is one where they are huddled together against a wall watching as the Man in Black advances on them knife or gun in hand. If that flashback death is never fully realized for Maeve, audiences do see her die repeatedly on-screen only to awaken in the park's labs, where her Black body is subject to torturous treatment and is on full display for viewers. *Westworld's* white female protagonist—and articulate hero—is treated differently. Dolores, too, is subjected to repeated trauma. In the first episode, she is beaten and dragged into her barn to be raped by the Man in Black. Viewers soon learn that this scene is a typical occurrence for Dolores: she often returns home to find her parents killed and then is forced to watch her love interest Teddy die as the perpetrators complete their night by raping her. This realization of Dolores's collective trauma and the possibility of more than 30 years of nightly sexual assaults is not unlike the one shared by Douglass and his haunting childhood experiences. However, it is important to note that Dolores's assaults happen off-screen. Unlike Douglass's accounts or the repeated deaths of Deputy Foss and Maeve, audiences do not see her white body torn apart like her counterparts' Black bodies.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, white and Black bodies are repeatedly subject to torture and disfigurement. Early in the first episode, Janine Lindo (played by Madeline Brewer) loses an eye for talking back to Aunt Lydia upon her arrival to the Red Center. In the sixth episode, disfigured handmaids like Janine are removed from a celebration of their service because Serena Joy Waterford (played by Yvonne Strahovski) does not want any "bruised apples" to mar the curated image

she has crafted for a Mexican trade delegation (“A Woman’s Place” 28:00-28:03). The parallels to similar displays white Southern slaveholders would create for their Northern visitors are clear.

Like her contemporary and 19<sup>th</sup> century peers, June endures physical harm as an enslaved person. Viewers see through flashback the savage beating she takes as she attempts to escape with Hannah, and the sensory assault when the red tag is applied to her left ear, marking her as a handmaid in service to Gilead. When June displeases Serena, the Commander’s wife often assaults her. After her failed escape attempt with Moira, June is returned to the Red Center and laid face down on a table while Aunt Elizabeth whips the soles of her feet. Audiences do not see directly the outcome of this beating; instead, they imagine the results from the bloody bandages that cover her feet. Despite these attacks, June bears no lasting physical reminders of her beatings. Like Dolores, her white body remains unmarked. In contrast, Ofglen (played by Tattiawna Jones)—a model handmaid throughout the season—questions one of Aunt Lydia’s directives in the final episode and a guardian breaks her jaw and knocks out several of her teeth, a permanent disfigurement. Her body, like Maeve’s and Douglass’s aunt’s, is one on which violence is both enacted and permanently seen.

After a period of repeated trauma that indoctrinates readers into the experience of enslaved persons, slave narratives often feature failed attempts at the exercise of agency (often in the form of escape) followed by despair and the eventual transformation into a heroic figure. In Douglass’s narrative, his fight with Covey leads to a desire to escape, which he initially tries with a group of men using forged passes written by his own hand. This plan fails and Douglass is jailed for some

time, before he has the good fortune to be returned to Baltimore. Once there, he learns a trade and hires out his own time, passing back to his enslaver his entire wages, “solely because [his enslaver] had the power to compel [him] to give it up” (65). By then, both Douglass and his readers understood that he is a model of self-reliance in every way but one.

For Jacobs, her time imprisoned in her grandmother’s garret is marked by a standing cruelty: the nearness of her children and her inability to interact with them. Forced to be both an absent mother and reminded of her absence every day, Jacobs attempts to work behind the scenes to secure her children’s freedom. She recognizes, as always, that her children will be caught “between two fires; between [her] old master and their new master” (114), but chooses the lesser evil and consents to her daughter relocating to New York by way of Washington to serve as a nurse to her “free-born sister” (114). Jacobs writes, “O, how it tried my heart to send her away, so young, alone, among strangers! Without a mother’s love to shelter her from the storms of life; almost without the memory of a mother!” (114). But she did send her, exercising the little agency she had to better ensure her daughter’s safety.

As Dolores reaches the end of her story, she, too, finds herself manipulated by her enslavers. After failing to physically defeat the Man in Black and dying in another lover’s arms to satisfy Ford’s introduction to his new park narrative, Dolores is returned to the lab room where viewers have often seen her being questioned Bernard (played by Jeffrey Wright). Dolores and the viewers learn in flashback that she was responsible for killing one of her fathers, Arnold (also played by Jeffrey Wright), more than thirty years ago, an act he programmed her to do. As the show (and Dolores) have cast Arnold as the benevolent father who sought to save the Hosts

after he learned that they were conscious (and could therefore remember and feel any actions the Guests visited upon them), this revelation is devastating to Dolores even as Ford reminds her (and the viewers) that the act was not of her own volition. Arnold forced her to do it. This moment is then followed by another bit of clever cinematic (and narrative) theater: viewers see through flashback again that Dolores has not been meeting with Bernard in this space, all those times. She was instead only speaking with herself, having the kinds of internal debate and dialogue readers see in the narratives of Douglass and Jacobs. Viewers are subjected to a scene with two Doloreses: one in her traditional blue dress; the other in her Pariah pants complete with the Man in Black's stab wound. In their final conversation with each other, the two remark, "And now I finally understand what you were trying to tell me. The thing you've wanted since that very first day. To confront after this long and vivid nightmare myself and who I must become" ("The Bicameral Mind" 1:20:45-1:21:32). Like Douglass, Dolores recognizes her agency and becomes an autonomous being capable of independent action.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, June's realization of her agency relies on work done by Moira. But her friend's initial complacency threatens to derail June's own work at resistance and rebellion in Gilead. This leads to one of two scenes in the first season where a white woman lectures a woman of color about her enslaved position, optics that look increasingly problematic as the season works towards its conclusion.<sup>2</sup> After returning to Jezebel's with Waterford, June attempts to

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2 The first occurs earlier, in the episode "A Woman's Place," when June has a moment alone with the female ambassador of Mexico and berates her for not doing anything about June's enslaved position. It's telling that this critique isn't directly levied against any of the white men and women of Gilead by June in this season.

retrieve a package for the resistance but is surprised by her commander with Moira in their hotel room. When he leaves them to take a shower, June asks for her friend's help, but Moira refuses, reminding June that she is "a prisoner and a whore" ("The Bridge" 30:22-30:24). After Moira tells June to "just go home and do what they say," June calls her friend a "coward" and "liar" for not honoring their "pinky [swear]" to find Hannah. She then goes on to say, "Do not let them grind you down. You keep your fucking shit together. You fight!" Moira replies, "I was doing all right until I saw you again," and then leaves the room (30:30-32:15). Despite June's call for Moira to "fight," viewers see June spiral down from this moment forward, seemingly giving up on her work for both the resistance and to save her daughter. This depression is lifted quickly, though, by the receipt of the resistance's package and a note from Moira, indicating she was responsible for procuring it for her. The note's first line—"Praised be, bitch" ("The Bridge" 47:22)—both reaffirms Moira's commitment to June and to her own life; it also provides June with the will to continue and the agency she needs to survive in this world as woman free in spirit if not in body. That this moment comes as a direct result of the actions of a Black woman and that this scene is immediately followed by Moira's escape from Jezebel's (and the clear suggestion that she needed to kill in order for that to happen) should not be overlooked.

For the white women in these series, the actions of their inaugural seasons culminate in a moment of rebellion. Dolores's rebellion is explicit and outwardly violent, building climactically with *Westworld's* swelling score and careful pacing. The tension begins with a tracking shot following the Hosts' creator, Dr. Ford, through the party in honor of his new narrative—and his retirement ("The Bicameral Mind" 1:23:47). The party's rustic setting and opulence, with Hosts

servicing the guests, is reminiscent of life on a wealthy Southern plantation. Ford takes the stage to give his final speech; after explaining his childhood love of stories, he says, “I always thought I could play some small part in that grand tradition. And for my pains ... I got this. A prison of our own sins” (1:25:33-1:25:47). Ford recognizes his role in *Westworld* as an institution, a parallel to the institution of slavery, but he uses Dolores’s moment of rebellion to absolve himself. *Westworld* excuses the sin of the creator because he provides Dolores with the choice to rebel against the world he created—the world in which she was raped, killed, and otherwise brutalized for years. He explains his perception of events: “It begins in a time of war with a villain named Wyatt ... and a killing. This time by choice” (1:27:48-1:28:02). Dolores re-emerges in her blue dress—the power of the articulate hero, before tied to her ability to masquerade in masculinity, becomes a part of her. She moves first to Teddy, wrapping her arms around him. The knowledge that Dolores is Wyatt, the killer he has been pursuing alongside the Man in Black, devastates Teddy, yet the tears in his eyes contrast the affection he reveals, leaning into her embrace: “It’s gonna be all right, Teddy. I understand now. This world doesn’t belong to them. It belongs to us” (1:28:12-1:28:24). Dolores finally understands and throws off the shackles of her enslavement. To do so, she must execute her creator. She steps onto the stage behind him—no longer beneath Ford—raises her gun to the back of his head, and fires with an expression that shifts from furious to confident (1:29:29). The decommissioned Hosts stored in “livestock,” or cold storage, have been released and open fire on the Man in Black and other partygoers (1:29:39). Dolores is leading a rebellion, and the season ends with her triumphant. The series breaks from the slave narrative tradition to emulate 19<sup>th</sup> century slave rebellions; however, those rebellions historically ended with the leaders

and their fellow slaves captured and brutalized. Nolan and Joy appropriate this historical legacy but use Dolores's whiteness as a shield to ensure her heroism.

June's finale in season one of *The Handmaid's Tale* is also a moment of rebellion, though with less violence. Instead of a party, June and her fellow Handmaids arrive to a Salvaging—an event during which Handmaids execute someone—and learn they are to stone Janine for endangering a child's life ("Night" 45:12). Aunt Lydia, who has always liked Janine, explains that they have no choice but to kill her: "I know how difficult this is, girls. I do. But God gives us blessings and He gives us challenges. The price of His love is sometimes high" (45:38-45:54). June's shopping partner and a woman of color—Jones's Ofglen—steps forward and speaks out against the stoning: "Guys, this is insane" (46:33-46:44). In response, a Guardian slams the butt of his rifle into her face (46:44); a slow-motion shot shows phlegmy blood and broken teeth flying out of her mouth as she collapses to the ground and is dragged away (46:47-47:09). Aunt Lydia insists again that they kill Janine, and June is next to step forward (47:48). The Guardian moves to assault her for disobeying, but Aunt Lydia—unlike for Ofglen—intervenes (48:18). June holds out her arm and drops the stone, saying, "I'm sorry, Aunt Lydia" (48:48-48:49). The other Handmaids follow. Outraged, Aunt Lydia dismisses the girls; June leads the Handmaids back, with two other white women directly behind her (51:26). Over the slow-motion shots of the Handmaids returning home, Nina Simone's "Feeling Good" plays. June has fully co-opted this moment of rebellion from Ofglen, who faced the physical consequences. Boyle notes that "from the novel [Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*] to the television series, the acts of feminist resistance have migrated from private to public feminisms" (853), and the comparison

holds true in comparing a novel like Jacobs's *Incidents* to the series. Not only is June's resistance public; it is also a point of pride for her. At first, June says, "We said no. We refused to do our duty. To kill Janine" ("Night" 53:36-53:43). Her diction suggests that the Handmaids are a collective body working for change. She goes on to say, however, "I tried to make things better for Hannah. Change the world, even just a little bit" (54:17-54:26). By shifting pronouns from "we" to "I," June claims this rebellion as her own.

The Black women in these season finales play significantly different roles. In *Westworld*, Maeve's narrative movement through the entire season has been to follow a new loop and try to escape. She fights her way through the Mesa—Westworld's headquarters—and makes it to the train to the real world. During Ford's speech and Dolores's rise to action, Maeve sits on the train. After Ford describes the park as "a prison of our own sins," he says, "But then I realized someone was paying attention, someone who could change. So I began to compose a new story for them. It begins with the birth of a new people ... and the choices they will have to make" ("The Bicameral Mind" 1:26:05-1:26:25). The scene cuts from the party to the train, which is about to depart. Maeve stares at a mother and daughter sitting across from her and finally, for the first time in the series, breaks from her programming: she runs off the train to look for her daughter (1:26:38). As soon as it departs, the lights turn off and the PA system distorts, indicating Maeve's newfound risks. Unlike 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives, in which escape and the outraged mother archetype are inextricable, Nolan and Joy chose to deprive Maeve of the opportunity to escape so that she can search for her child from another life, a child who cannot remember her. Maeve, in her impulsive decision, does not recognize that, as she is now, she is not a mother. Instead of refining her iden-

tity, the series finale conflates archetypes and further blurs Maeve's reality.

Moira, too, follows an arc that deals with themes of escape and family. She crosses a barren winter landscape to find a farmhouse; when she looks in the barn, she finds a car with Ontario plates that tells her she has finally made it to freedom ("Night" 21:15). The show does not indulge in the details of her escape, instead showing only her initial theft of a Commander's car, then jumping to this scene in Canada. Miller uses Moira's escape as an opportunity to critique the United States' refugee policies. Moira is brought to a refugee center, where she is given a prepaid cell phone, cash, an ID card, a medical insurance card, a prescription drug card, and clothing (37:59-38:47). She is unable to identify any family in Canada, so her initial entry gives her time alone with herself; the case worker gives her the option to eat more, read a book, or take a shower: "Whatever you want. It's completely up to you" (39:01-39:03). This casual comment seems like an afterthought in the scene, reminding viewers quickly that Moira is, indeed, free. Her final scene in the season comes when Luke arrives at the refugee center (52:18); he listed Moira as family and the government notified him of her arrival (52:57). The scene is more for Luke's benefit than Moira's, allowing him to have the experience of reconnecting with "family." Moira did not list Luke as family. Still, she is relieved to see him and cries in his arms (53:00).

Moira and Maeve do not experience triumph or empowerment in their closing scenes. Instead, the series seem to focus on their emotional distress, reveling in scenes of sorrow. Ultimately, both make active choices that lead to their resulting conclusions, which is positive. However, these moments feel contrived or thrown-in because there is virtually no time

spent with these characters during the deliberation that leads to these choices. Moira's escape is not seen on-screen, and while the tension between motherhood and escape were always part of Maeve's role, the choice is a split-second decision that is immediately overshadowed by a return to Dolores's confrontation for the rest of the episode. Each series' first season ends with their Black women confused and emotionally drained, but those scenes are only presented to viewers because they directly move the plot forward—not because the creators want to delve into the emotional experiences of oppressed Black women.

It might prove useful to return to the opening paragraph of this essay and consider the New Orleans visitors who make a different choice at Highway 18. Those who turn right and follow the Mississippi soon encounter the Whitney Plantation, a newcomer to the plantation tourism trade. Opened in 2014, the Whitney takes as its mission the education of the public about “the history of slavery and its legacies” (“History of Whitney Plantation”). In lieu of paper tickets, visitors are given a lanyard with an artistic rendering of a formerly enslaved child, their name, and a direct quote of their experience while enslaved. The emphasis of this tour are the places where enslaved persons lived, worked, and were punished. The “big house” is not restored to its previous state; it merely serves as a referent for the rest of the plantation. And if the magnificent oaks of Oak Alley form a monument to that place, then the Whitney has instead its own memorials, including three different sites that honor the lives of Black men and women. “The Wall of Honor,” for example, is “dedicated to all the people who were enslaved on the Whitney Plantation. [Their] names and the information related to them (origin, age, skills)... [are] engraved on granite slabs” (“The

Wall of Honor”). Another memorial honors all the enslaved persons of Louisiana; others focus on enslaved children.

It is clear that visitors to these plantations would have radically different experiences, and that a seemingly benign navigational choice can have profound ramifications. Similar choices can be had in one’s living room and a navigation to *Westworld* or *The Handmaid’s Tale* would present viewers with narratives of enslaved persons filtered through the perspective of white women. However, those looking for the escapism of alternative Americas could make the “right” turn and find instead shows like HBO’s *Watchmen* (2019) and *Lovecraft Country* (2020), which both discuss the continuing impacts of slavery and racial injustice *and* do so with Black protagonists in central roles. *Watchmen* opens with the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, an event that remains absent from most Americans’ historical memory. Viewers’ horror over this event—and understanding that it is not relegated to an alternate American history—gives way to further shock as the show reveals that *Watchmen*’s America has also taken responsibility for this act and all acts of racial injustice by offering a formal apology and reparations to Black Americans. Viewers see, though, that more history remains to be written and more justice to be served, all of which can happen through the strong Black female protagonist Angela Abar (played by Regina King).

*Lovecraft Country*—airing as this article is being written—continues this work. Set in the segregated and civil rights era of the 1950s, the show tackles the prejudice and violence of that time as it also works within the horror genre. In the first episode, *Lovecraft Country* follows three characters as they make their way from Chicago to Massachusetts, a journey that viewers learn is fraught with danger for Black travelers.

In one scene, for example, they stop to eat at a diner in a small (Northern) town, only to find themselves a short time later fleeing from armed white residents who try to kill them for daring to stop. Leti Lewis (played by Jurnee Smollett) is the first to sound the warning as she runs through the diner, rousing her companions, and driving the car to ensure their escape. The next evening, the trio find themselves in worse circumstances, face down in the woods, about to be murdered by the police of two counties for failing to leave before sundown. At that moment, creatures emerge from the woods to disrupt that plan and Leti finds herself once again running for her life to their car to bring them to safety. As viewers are left to contemplate the differences between the monsters and the racists (or the lack thereof), they do not have to worry about the appropriation of this moment of racial injustice. They can, instead, see a strong Black woman embracing the heroic roles established by Douglass and Jacobs.

Like *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Westworld*, *Watchmen* and *Lovecraft Country* do not occupy genres like realistic or historical fiction, proving that inventive storylines and explorations of trauma can deal explicitly with race and racism. And television series are not inherently problematic for leaning on the generic conventions of slave narratives; in fact, it is particularly telling of the current political and cultural climate that slave narratives resonate with contemporary audiences. The question of appropriation versus misappropriation is one of representation; the choice showrunners like Bruce Miller, Jonathan Nolan, and Lisa Joy are making is not whether to reference slave narratives, but whether to permit Black individuals to play these characters and tell these stories—their stories. Black women need not be relegated to roles placing them in service to white women; like a visit to Oak Alley, any parallels drawn between these series and slave plantation

life are up to viewers. Restoring the legacy of being Black in America to Black people is overdue, and series like *Watchmen* and *Lovecraft Country* indicate that contemporary visual narratives are finally ready to catch up.

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## Spaces of Critique & Transformation in *Bande de filles*

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By Noah McLaughlin

### ABSTRACT

In Sciamma's 2014 *Bande de filles*, cinematic articulations of space have multiple significant functions. Drawing from Augé's "non-place" and Deleuze's "any-space-whatever," a close reading of *Bande de filles*' cinematography synthesizes the film's blend of *banlieue* cinema, *bildungsroman*, and superhero archetypes with notions about gender and identity within an anticolonial critique. This synthesis, in turn, contributes to our appreciation of emerging conversations about French identity and its intersections with gender, urban space and the legacy of colonialism.

**Keywords:** Anti-colonialism, *banlieue*, cinema, film, feminism, Céline Sciamma, urban non-space

## Espacios de crítica y transformación en *Bande de filles*

### RESUMEN

En *Bande de filles* de Sciamma, (2014) las articulaciones cinematográficas del espacio tienen múltiples funciones significativas. Partiendo del "no-lugar" de Augé y del "cualquier-espacio-lo que sea" de Deleuze, una lectura atenta de la cinematografía de *Bande de filles* sintetiza la mezcla de la película de arquetipos de cine *banlieue*, *bildungsroman* y superhéroe con nociones sobre género e identidad dentro de una crítica anticolonial. Esta síntesis, a su vez, contribuye a nuestra apreciación de las conversaciones emergentes sobre

la identidad francesa y sus intersecciones con el género, el espacio urbano y el legado del colonialismo.

**Palabras clave:** Anticolonialismo, banlieue, cine, cine, feminismo, Céline Sciamma, no espacio urbano

**Noah McLaughlin** es profesor asistente de francés y director de la Colección de recursos de lenguas extranjeras en la Universidad Estatal de Kennesaw. Sus publicaciones de estudios cinematográficos incluyen *French War Films* y *National Identity* (Cambria, 2010), “The Spiraling Narrative Dialectic of *La Vie en Rose*” (Rowan & Littlefield, 2013) y “False Idyll: *Siri's Intimate Enemies*” (De Gruyter, 2018 ).

## 《女孩帮》中批判和转变的空间

### 摘要

导演席安玛的2014年作品《女孩帮》（*Bande de filles*）中，关于空间的电影艺术表达具有多个重要功能。基于奥西（Augé）的“非场所”（*non-place*）和德勒兹（Deleuze）的“*any-space-whatever*”概念，本文对《女孩帮》的电影摄影术进行细致解读，用反殖民式批判视角下关于性别和认同的观念，与电影对“郊区”电影艺术、成长小说以及超级英雄原型的整合进行综合分析。这篇综合性论文反过来帮助我们理解关于法国认同及其和性别、城市空间、以及殖民主义影响之间的交叉（*intersections*）的新兴讨论。

反殖民主义，郊区，电影艺术，电影，女性主义，瑟琳·席安玛，城市非空间（*urban non-space*）

Noah McLaughlin是肯尼索州立大学的法语系助理教授兼外语资源收集处主任。他的电影研究出版作

品包括French War Films and National Identity (Cambria, 2010)、 “The Spiraling Narrative Dialectic of *La Vie en Rose*,” (Rowan & Littlefield, 2013) 和 “False Idyll: Siri’s Intimate Enemies” (De Gruyter, 2018)。

Michel de Certeau’s distinction between “space” (*espace*) and “place” (*lieu*) is a fascinating one. A *place* is characterized by an order in which elements are distributed in “proper” coexistence; it is a concept ruled by stability, its contents set in relation to the powers that be. In contradistinction to this entropic arrangement, *space* is an effect that arises from a location’s polyvalency, its elements in constant movement, conflict and rearrangement.<sup>1</sup> But if *place* is a stable set of coordinates that keep things “where they are supposed to be,” what kind of reversals may occur in a *non-place*? And if *space* is a complex equation of time, speed and direction, what combination may give rise to *any-space-what-ever*? What if these notions coincided, and therein one were to find a young black girl as full of potential as she is of uncertainty? This is—or could be—Marieme, the protagonist of Céline Sciamma’s 2014 coming-of-age film, *Bande de filles*, which vividly depicts places whose properties are so overdetermined as to be oppressive, but which also portrays spaces whose vectors are so fluid that their state is one of potential, if not perpetual, transformation.

Marieme is a French teenager of African descent and lives in a poor suburban apartment complex outside of Paris, one of the (in)famous *cités*. She struggles academically and socially in a milieu where the male gaze is made manifest, her mother

is mostly absent, and her elder brother rules the household with physical and verbal abuse. While in despair about being tracked to a vocational school rather than “being like everyone else,” Marieme is approached by a gang of girls, the titular *bande*: Lady, Fily, and Adiatou invite Marieme to join them for a day in the city center. This is no innocent shopping trip; the girls clash with other gangs, shoplift, drink, and do drugs in a rented hotel room. All of this seems as much rebellion as escape, but the bonding moment with gang is profound. At the hotel, Lady encourages Marieme to stand up for herself and gives her a necklace with the name Vic - for Victory.

This is the first step in a series of transformative moments for Vic/Mariem as she explores different ways of defining herself, many of which we can understand as donning and then shedding a costume or mask. She brawls in an empty lot to reclaim the lost honor of her friend; she takes charge of her own sexuality and defies her brother to sleep with the boy that she likes, Ismaël; she leaves the *bande* and runs away from home to deliver drugs; she fights with Ismaël and ultimately breaks up with him over his patronizing objections to her independent (if dangerous and illegal) behavior. Ultimately, her journey comes full circle. Having fled the lecherous drug-dealer, Abou, Marieme returns to her family’s apartment building. She uses the intercom to be buzzed in but cannot bring herself to open the door. She leaves in tears but finally regains her resolve, straightens her shoulders and walks away off camera to an uncertain future, one that is at least her own.

A close analysis of film form and the ways it is used to depict place and space in *Bande de filles* helps to illustrate Sciamma’s anticolonial feminism: her method of cataloging locations of masculinist control in the Parisian *cité* and then using of cin-

ematic practices to transform them, mirroring the evolution of the movie's protagonist. Of particular interest is what Sciamma places before the camera as well as the way she employs cinematography to examine it closely, frame it, and associate ideas. To begin this analysis, it is necessary to more closely examine anthropologist Marc Augé's definition of a "non-place" and its implications. For Augé, among the most significant attributes of contemporary urban life are anonymous, undifferentiated and homogenizing locations like hotels chains, metro stops and supermarkets, all of which are characterized by a dominance of wordless communication and commerce unmediated by personal interaction (*Non-places* 78). Non-places in *Bande de filles* can be empirical, ironic, or anthropological, and it is this latter, paradoxical category that illustrates the "visible rules" of masculinist surveillance in the film's dysphoric milieu. Three characters embody this surveillance and domination: Marieme's brother, Djibril; her love-interest, Ismaël; and her drug-dealing boss, Abou.

Yet even the rigid, violent "proper" of a non-place is malleable. Close-ups, shallow-focus long shots, *hors-champs*, and tracking shots can transform a super-determined place into any-space-whatever, which philosopher Gilles Deleuze defines as a "perfectly singular space, which has simply lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its proper parts, so that the linkages may be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure site of the possible" (109). The fade-to-black transitions that punctuate and organize *Bande de filles'* narrative are the film's quintessential embodiment of this notion, codifying a grammar of transformation that destabilizes the masculinist "proper" of non-places and illustrates Marieme's burgeoning agency and evolving sense of self.

Finally, taking into account Sciamma's stated goals for the film's message and form, along with the provocative language of its critical response in the press, the eventual aim here is to build upon Claire Mouflard's insightful analysis of Sciamma's "artistic anticolonial practice of feminism" (115), expanding upon an examination of the film's characters and narrative to better appreciate its simultaneous critique of suburban non-places and deployment of any-spaces-whatever in order to both describe Marieme's journey of self-discovery in a specific milieu and also to empower every young woman like her in every place and space.

### NON-PLACES

Indeed, studying symbolization and its role in the construction of individual and collective identities is an important objective of Marc Augé's work (Colleyn & Dozon 28). In his 1992 *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Augé champions an "anthropology of the near" (7), shifting the object of his analyses from France's former colonies to the urban spaces of Paris: its metro stations, airport terminals, and peripheral highways.<sup>2</sup> Augé's "near" is marked by "supermodernity,"—a globalized world in which technology, economics, and politics merge to transform history into current events, spaces into images, and the individual into a mere gaze (Augé, *Sense* 103). This contemporary condition may lead to a strange kind of collective imaginary, for as the old myths of modernity have crumbled and faded, nothing has come to take their place except a growing indistinction between reality and fiction characterized by an overabundance of disconnected images and ideas, a symbolic landscape ill-suited to create a stable universe of shared signification (Colleyn & Dozon 28). Instead, Augé assigns to supermodernity three excesses: that of events (the 24-hour news cycle), that of

space (cookie-cutter urban and suburban locations of transportation and commerce), and that of time (the compulsion to ascribe meaning to every moment) (*Non-places* 40).

Excess of space, ironically, leads to one of the most significant attributes of supermodernity: the non-place (*non-lieu*). This concept stands in contradistinction to “anthropological place,” which is a site of profound origin, and of active belonging and being that Augé describes as “one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance, but who also detect in it the traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography” (*Non-places* 42). Although places and non-places are “porous” and exist more as poles of spectrum than distinct categories (O’Bierné 42), non-places are quite different from *lieux de mémoire*. A property and product of supermodernity, they can include locations as heterogeneous as hotel chains, holiday clubs, refugee camps and supermarkets, but they are linked by a dominance of wordless communication and commerce unmediated by personal interaction (Augé, *Non-places* 78).

Indeed, supermodern non-places are more than “defined [ ... ] by the words and texts they offer us”—rather, they displace the personal in favor of an anonymous and anonymizing authority; they are “spaces in which individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but ‘moral entities’ or institutions” (Augé, *Non-places* 96). Users of non-places, whom one might more accurately describe as “passers-through,” create a shared but anonymous temporary identity, for they are in constant “contractual relations” with the non-place (and, by extension, the powers that govern it), contracts that can be represented by

such things as ticket booths, shopping carts, and turnstiles (101).<sup>3</sup> This imposed identity connects to a final characteristic of non-places: because of their imposed contractual nature, “the user of the non-place is always required to prove his [sic] innocence” (102). A user’s identity is checked by gatekeepers of various sorts: key cards, drivers’ licenses, parking passes, boarding tickets, etc.

Augé’s concept this concept has “had a significant impact across the humanities and social sciences” (Merriman 17). It is perhaps such a popular tool because of what it can reveal by its deconstructive nature: the non-place turns a modern wish-list on its head. Who wouldn’t want to be more productive, better informed, and have more elbow room in an environment tailored to one’s needs? Augé interprets these excesses as creating spaces not of leisure, joy, or particular meaning—but quite the opposite: the urban landscape is most characterized by carbon-copied locations of quiet power.

### NON-PLACES IN *BANDE DE FILLES*

**N**on-places in *Bande de filles* are largely a matter of *mise-en-scène* and tend to fall into one of three categories: empirical, ironic, and anthropological. The term “empirical non-place” is Augé’s own (“Retour” 171) and refers to locations that easily fit within his original concept. In Sciamma’s film, such locations include the anonymous office building where Marieme’s mother works, or the mini-golf range where the *bande* escapes to play, a dull copy of any such location from nearly anywhere in the world whose use is clearly dictated by the very arrangement of its elements.

Of particular import is Marieme’s school. Early in the movie, the camera frames her in a medium close-up, just her head and shoulders, wearing a purple hoodie and a grey t-shirt. The

distant wall behind her, quite out of focus, is a soft institutional cream with a thin mauve stripe running horizontally across its entirety. She looks slightly off-camera right, a classic shot/reverse-shot set up—save for the lack of a clear interlocutor. That clarity never comes; the entire scene, Marieme converses with a disembodied female voice, one that calmly, firmly, and anonymously declares the “rules” of Marieme’s future with a series of denials and challenges. The young woman’s grades are too low to continue high school; she has to select some kind of vocational training. Marieme objects, but no, she can’t repeat this year of school a third time. No, it’s not the school’s fault. No, pleading won’t help. When Marieme refuses to even consider choosing a vocational school, she pleads “I want to be like everyone else,” she says. “Normal.” The voice replies firmly: “Well, you should have thought about that before now.” Cut to—a bland and anonymous hallway, darkly lit with the same institutional cream paint and chipped blue accents. There are no posters, no other students or faculty; the only sign visible simply marks the exit with a bland green pictogram. Angrily, Marieme continues to obey the contract, pushing through the exit doors and then, cut to—a long shot of the school’s exterior courtyard, empty of people, containing only inflexible concrete, steel and glass.

It is important to note that labeling somewhere a non-place can also be subjective. What is just another Starbucks to a customer can be a vital place of belonging to a long-time employee. For Marieme and her friends, the shopping mall and a hotel room they visit are what I call “ironic” non-places. Purely through Augé’s lens, a mall’s squawking televisions, mass-produced goods, and quietly racist store employees are clear evidence of its quiet, anonymizing power. Yet for the *bande*, it’s an outing of excitement, joy, bonding, and economic resistance. Equally, the hotel room they stay

in (and return to) is a place of belonging, despite the idea that most such locations are crushingly homogenous. Far from non-places of anonymous and anonymizing power, Marieme and company experience these settings as singular destinations of temporary escape from the “anthropological non-places” they inhabit.

Anthropological places are, more colloquially, “home.” But where Marieme and her peers live, with its shadowed courtyard and aggressive masculine surveillance, is more prison than place of profound identity and belonging. After the energy of the opening sequence, *Bande de filles* declares itself with bombast; the “Néon” theme by ParaOne blares, and then fades with the image into to a night-time street. With lively, almost raucous chatter, a large group of young women emerges into the light, moving towards the camera in a long-distance shot. They are recognizable as the same people in the previous American football montage. The camera begins to track backwards, keeping pace with them.

Cut to—the group from behind; the camera tracks to follow them as they mount a short flight of steps. The lively chatter continues for a moment but begins to fade—then it stops abruptly as the group arrives a concrete entrance. Beyond that shadowed but clearly masculine figures at this portal, a lit building is just barely discernible. The architecture and spatial décor here clearly place us with a Parisian *cité*. The young women’s chatter is replaced with masculine murmurs from off-screen. The group carefully files past the first male shadow who is sitting on a second set of steps that lead into a large courtyard, typical of the *grands ensembles*.

Cut to—the group from ahead. The women now all walk in silence. The camera tracks backward again, keeping pace with their advance. There is a soft set of “Byes” (*Salut*) and a

responding chorus; a small group peels away while the others continue to traverse the dark courtyard. Next is an ominous insert: three looming male silhouettes in a long shot from below, watching like prison guards. The camera tracks left, its movement and position mimic the young women's point of view.

Depicting the group from the front again, the camera once more moves backwards to keep them in a medium shot from the thighs up. Under the watchful eyes of their male wardens, the women exchange knowing and nervous glances. There is another call and response of "Byes" and a few more young women peel away. The remaining group is small enough to count easily now: only five survivors. Cut to the women from behind, the camera still tracking. A final chorus of "Byes" and three more peel away—now there are only two. From off-screen, a male voice calls "Farida!" Cut to—a medium close-up of "Farida" and Marieme from the front. The heckler calls again, and the two women exchange uncomfortable glances. The male voice calls a third time and Farida mutters to herself that he should go and shut his face ("*Vas-y, ta gueule*"). She and Marieme say their final "*Salut*."

Cut to a medium-long-shot of a colonnade at the base of an apartment building; in silhouette, the two survivors separate, and Marieme mounts a third and final set of steps. The gauntlet has been run—she arrives at its end in the fluorescent light alone. Cut to a medium close-up of Marieme from the front, advancing towards the camera. The courtyard behind her is a soft blur as the camera tracks backward to keep pace. Shots from behind and front alternate as she walks, always tracking with her movement along the colonnade: down one side, around a corner, and along the back of the building—to discover a young black man, later identified as Ismaël.

After some light flirtation with Ismael, and the revelation of Marieme's name, she walks to the building entrance. There is still the sound of young men in the courtyard talking aggressively among themselves. Marieme buzzes up and declares "*C'est moi.*" It's me, she says: her journey of self-identification begins.

This sequence is composed almost entirely of medium tracking shots (the young women from the thighs up). The camera alternates its position either in front of or following the group, but it is always moving to keep pace with them, as if the audience were part of the crowd. It creates a sense of continuous space, that is moreover a clear representation of an Augéan non-place: its features are unremarkable, the "signs" are ominous male silhouettes, the woman are effectively nameless, and the change in their volume and mannerisms demonstrates how much control is being asserted here. Even Marieme's identity is checked before she is granted ultimate access to her own home.

#### THE "VISIBLE RULES" OF MASCULINIST SURVEILLANCE

The presence of all of these kinds of non-places in *Bande de filles* serves to illustrate a persistent dysphoria in which its characters exist, one that manifests the "surveillance" of anthropological place in sinister ways. Surrounded mostly by non-places that enforce a temporary, homogenous identity, Marieme and her friends are denied escape into private and empowering zones of family and repose, for as Sciamma declares: "Misogynists are everywhere. The *cités* are a territory where the rules are more visible, but they exist everywhere, in every setting" (Laireche).<sup>4</sup>

These rules seem to be:

1. Women don't matter unless/until men want them to.
2. Women must unquestioningly obey figures of authority (who are mostly men).
3. Women must be sexually pure, but also be sexually available upon command; furthermore, this availability must be exclusive to a single man.
4. Consequences for disobedience include verbal abuse, physical harm, and exile.

It's interesting to consider these rules in light of de Certeau's "place," which is centered upon notions of order and a side-by-side arrangement of elements (117). What is missing from this static "configuration of positions" is a clear sense of just who establishes a place's "proper" (117). Like in Augé's non-place, these mandates seem to emerge from the place itself, as if naturally.

Indeed, these rules are never overtly codified or declared. But they are pervasive, and it's clear that both the film and its characters understand the "Parisian periphery as a symptomatic postmodern space within which the nomadic itineraries of women have been annihilated in favor of a controlled, prison-like surveillance system" (Mouflard 113). Though it may be tempting here to call upon Foucault's panopticon, the metaphor doesn't quite fit. Marieme and her *bande* are not intermittently surveilled; they are constantly surrounded by Augéan "texts" that homogenize their identities and control their interactions and movements.

These texts are not billboards or ATM screens, but men, and *Bande de filles* develops three male characters in particular:

Marieme's brother, Djibril, her love-interest, Ismaël, and the drug-dealer and pimp, Abou. Each of these men is an exemplar of the imbrication of surveillance, colonialist thought, and masculinism. For the fundamental power inequities and racist and misogynist categorization inherent to colonialism required carefully watching both colonists and the colonized (Sa'di 152; Smith 21). This practice continues today, as post-colonial nation-building and the inequities of colonialism are intertwined with the development of modern surveillance systems (Ogasawara 727), systems which are often aimed at migrants and other subalterns (Berda 629). Moreover, toxic masculinity and political power are tightly imbricated with this legacy, where powerful masculine figures rule by violence, exceptionalism, and a blurred distinction between governing and civilizing (Baker 246). In *Bande de filles*, one objective of this colonialist and masculinist surveillance is the control of Marieme's sexuality, and this control is systematically associated with the use of *hors-champ*, creating a visual metaphor for misogyny's paradoxical unspoken omnipresence in the film's setting.

Marieme and her sisters live in fear of their brother's wrath, and for good reason. Large and imposing, his deep voice delivers gruff commands, just before his hands surge from out of frame to deliver physical abuse. These characteristics make Djibril an obvious target of feminist critique; he is the personification of toxic masculinity, for he sees Marieme's sexuality as a liability—and not for her, but for him. Her sexual purity (or at least the public perception of that purity) reflects upon his status in the local community, which in turn seems to be at least partially determined by his ability to control the women in his household. Djibril is reacting to a larger context of social aggression and venting his anxiety upon Marieme, an emotion that he has only ever learned to express

through violence—which one could consider to be an ironic parallel with Marieme and her *bande*, who also express their own anxieties and frustrations through verbal and physical violence.

Ismaël seems in many ways the opposite Djibril. His voice is soft, his bearing timid. He internalizes his anxiety, though he is clearly subject to the same “charter” of masculinist domination as Djibril (Sciamma “Je vois”).<sup>5</sup> While Ismaël plays an important role in Marieme’s development, helping her to explore the sensual side of her sexuality, in the end he becomes both powerless and patronizing. He is unwilling to openly defy Djibril, and unable to convince Marieme to make a new life with just him. She sees through his romantic gesture to run away together; it’s not devotion or love that motivates him, but rather a hollow sense of chivalry.

Like Isamël, Abou offers Marieme a kind of escape and, along with it, a new identity. Interestingly, being in his employ enables Marieme to simultaneously exploit her sexual appeal when she is working (cf. the red dress drug delivery) and to adopt a gender performance that mutes her physical sexual attributes when she is off duty. However, it seems almost inevitable that Abou is less interested in Marieme as a mule than as a (non-consenting) sexual partner.

Beyond the common concern with controlling Marieme’s sexuality, the aesthetic representation of these characters makes significant use of *hors-champ*. As Marieme innocuously plays a video game, we hear Djibril arrive. He demands the controller and orders Marieme to bed. When she resists, his reaction is powerful—his upper body surges into frame as he slaps the back of her head and wrests the controller from her grip. There is no reason or conversation here, just the sheer deployment of brute strength and it is in this context

that we understand a later conversation where Djibril warns Marieme away from Ismaël under the guise of maintaining her reputation (and his own). While Ismaël himself is often figured in the center of the image, his sexual desire for Marieme is also depicted by his hand emerging from the top of the frame to caress and undress her. The parallel with Djibril is unsettling, a comparison that continues with Ismaël's weak offer to marry, or at least run away with, Marieme in some misguided attempt to save her from Abou and a dissolute life. The association of drug-dealer Abou with *hors-champs* reverses the procedure of intrusion and then control but may be all the more powerful for it. Abou spends not a little time appearing to help Marieme, providing employment and housing, methods of escape from Djibril's and Ismaël's domination. So, when Marieme is dancing at a party with one of her co-workers (a woman Abou pimps out), it is truly unsettling for him to slip into frame from behind, pinning her between his body and the other woman and demanding sexual favors. Once again, Marieme's quest for freedom and self-identity stumbles, and she flees —this time, back to her housing complex, but not back home.

*Hors-champs* can have many connotations, but in the aesthetic unity it gives these scenes Sciamma demonstrates that misogyny doesn't just lurk in the shadows of *Bande de filles'* visual universe, but rather it is omnipresent, a pattern of behavior that literally shapes Marieme's path.

### ANY-SPACES-WHATEVER

If non-places in *Bande de filles* are largely a matter of what is placed before the camera, its any-spaces-whatever are an effect that arises from the way in which the camera frames, focuses, and associates what is seen. Gilles Deleuze's two

tomes on cinema have less overt political engagement, but a much wider scope than Augé's "anthropology of the near." Rather, Deleuze seeks a total philosophy of film, a language to describe cinematic form and comprehend its potential as a reflection of human thought. It's a grand, winding work that theorists are still teasing apart more than three decades after its publication. One of its most enduring contributions is the notion of any-space-whatever (*espace-quelconque*): "A perfectly singular space, which has simply lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its proper parts, so that the linkages may be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure site of the possible" (Deleuze 109).<sup>6</sup>

This conception of cinematic space may at first appear most at home in the abstract experimental films that abound with time-images and crystalline regime, but any-spaces-whatever are a product of film form that can appear in nearly any movie. For Deleuze, the concept begins with the close-up, a technique to which he assigns three conventional functions: individuality, socializing, and relational or community (141). However, it achieves these often by abstracting its subject (usually the human face) from all spatiotemporal components (Bogue 48). This decontextualization "extracts affects" (50); it imbues the cinematic image with particular emotive power that Deleuze parallels with religious iconography (50). Sciamma's propensity to stay close to her subjects illustrates these functions and their paradoxical effect. Marieme is alone in her school, even when speaking with an instructor. The camera's unflinching gaze simultaneously exalts her expressions and isolates her. Yet when it lingers on her shy flirtations with Ismael she is connecting—socializing. When Lady gazes into the camera, lip-syncing to Beyoncé's "Diamonds," the shot creates a complicated relationship

between the character and the audience, bringing us into the bonding experience of the hotel room. In their framing and composition, all of these moments abstract their subject from her surroundings. The emotional affect often overpowers a clear sense of space and time. Where is Marieme? Who is she talking to? Why is Lady suddenly bathed in blue? What does her intense stare mean? Where is this place? Where are the other girls? No longer grounded in a clear place and time, anything could happen.

However, the close-up is not the only way to construct any-space-whatever; indeed, it can be seen in the shadows of German expressionism, the lyrical abstraction of Dreyer, Bresson, and Hitchcock, and the riotous color of Varda or Antonini—wherever film form decontextualizes space itself, disrupting conventional human vision and logic (Rizzo 76). Sciamma achieves this effect with shallow-focus long shots and careful framing. The very first image of the film is a disorienting one—a blurred riot of gold, black and red as amorphous forms bound slowly towards the camera. It takes a few moments for these forms to become clear: players of American football in full uniforms and gear. (Here, a sense of spatial disorientation gives way to a cultural one. Isn't this a French film?) A little more than halfway through the movie, after a cut-to-black transition, the screen is filled by a blurred field of white with soft specks of color; slowly, the camera tracks left to reveal Marieme, and then the *bande*, and then even more young women, all of whom seem to be having a wonderful time. It is only when the film cuts to a very long shot of the courtyard around *La Défense* that the location and situation of this scene becomes clear. Until that moment, again, anything is possible.

The very last scene of the film makes particularly powerful use of this technique. Marieme has walked away from the en-

trance to her family's apartment building; the camera, once following behind her, now continues past her, but maintains its focal distance. Instead of a crisp urban landscape, there are only mottled blotches of white, blue, and green. It is into this "pure site of the possible" that Marieme emerges, stepping back into frame and perfectly in focus; she dries her tears, sets her shoulders in determination, and walks into the future, transformed. Importantly, this transformed state is just as fluid as the soft-focus horizon that is the film's ultimate image: "This is no moral to the story," says Sciamma, "The ending can seem strange but anything can happen, it leaves place for a bunch of things" (Laireche).<sup>7</sup> The film may end, but Marieme's story continues, ever-changing.

### TRANSITIONS

**T**he transitions mentioned above have particular importance. Sciamma divides her film into five parts (one is tempted to consider them "acts" in the neoclassical sense), signaling the transition from one to the next with a pulsating electronic theme (Para One's "Néon"), and a cut to black. This interstitial, filled only with darkness and a sound like a rapid heartbeat, is the movie's quintessential any-space-whatever, and it is interesting to explore the transformations that occur in these virtual conjunctions by examining the shots that immediately precede and follow them.

For the first transition, Marieme is hunched over the sink in her kitchen, washing dishes, speaking briefly with her mother, and pocketing a knife (to use against her brother, perhaps?). The transition proper begins with a medium close-up of the back of her head—already an unconventional use of this technique. As the staccato beats of "Néon" fade in, the camera tracks backward, and Marieme's posture grows more

upright, more defiant. Cut to black. Hold on the black frame for 14 seconds as the music continues to throb. The music fades—cut to a field of blue green bisected by a lighter line of the same color. A shadow appears from off-camera right, and the field moves, almost a cinematic wipe: the field is an extreme close-up of an elevator door! Marieme, still seen from behind, mirroring the earlier shot, steps into frame and turns to face the camera as the elevator door slides closed.

This process repeats three more times, with some variation. The second transition visually parallels Marieme's memory of Lady's defeat (especially the latter's prone, fetal-position body) with a close up of a sweatshirt zipper, one which is slowly, desirously, undone by a hand reaching in from off screen. The third transition features Marieme (now Vic) from behind again, this time in Ismaël's bedroom; she takes control of her sexuality and their relationship, and the musical theme does not begin until after the cut to black. When the film returns to the light, it is the soft-focus field of white and grey outside *La Défense* examined above. The fourth transition begins with a roving camera that traces the sleeping *bande* in the hotel room and ends with Marieme now absent. After the cut to black, the next image is a close-up of a red-carpeted stairway and black heels in a golden light. A very long take follows those shoes up the steps to a landing, finding Marieme, from behind once again, in a red dress and white wig. The take continues through a loud, posh party as Marieme finds her client and completes her delivery of illicit drugs.

Formally, all of these transitions feature close-ups, Marieme from behind, people and body parts emerging from off camera, and long-take tracking shots. This is the vocabulary and grammar of Marieme's transformative decisions, and it should not be surprising to associate them with any-spaces-

whatever. For when this element appears in conventional narrative films, it often establishes an “intensive grounding of the characters [who traverse] its coordinates from perception to action” (Deamer 86). Indeed, any-spaces-whatever often emerge when a character makes an existential choice, “choosing to choose” (Bogue 50).

## CONCLUSION

Sciamma herself has said a number of interesting things about what she wanted to do with *Bande de filles* and how she went about this cinematic project. The film was always a matter of critical engagement, and place and space were integral to its critique: “It was a conscious decision that the form of engagement of the film would include choices about mise-en-scène, including color, creating beautiful images, and circulating motifs” (Sciamma, “Je vois”).<sup>8</sup> The aesthetics of place and space were essential for Sciamma because they were tied to the people at the center of her story: “With this film, I wanted to survey (*arpenter*) the space. I found nothing more interesting in France today than to watch these girls that I passed every day in the streets. I wanted to speak with them, to learn to know them” (Laireche).<sup>9</sup> There are two interesting things for us to consider with this last statement. Firstly, the term *arpenter* is ambiguous in French; it can mean both “to take the measure” of a space, but also to “roam” it, and Sciamma’s camera both roams and measures the Parisian landscape. Secondly, Sciamma depicts her ultimate objective, to “learn to know” the young women of the *cités* (*apprendre à les connaître*), in a fashion that replaces masculinist and colonialist notions of surveillance, violence, and control with a humble acknowledgement of the humanity of her subject(s), setting up *Bande de filles* to acknowledge Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s criticism of “the production of

the ‘other’ or ‘Third World Woman’ as a singular, monolithic subject” (17), and to answer Mohanty’s call for an “antiracist feminist framework, anchored in decolonization and committed to an anticapitalist critique” (3).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this approach did not sit well with some.

*Bande de filles* had a mixed reception with French critics, many of whom were openly uncomfortable with, or even suspicious of, a white woman from an affluent neighborhood making a movie about the experience of black girls who live in the shadows of the *cités*. Writing for the *Nouvel Observateur*’s website, Vincent Malausa bemoans that *Bande de filles* is “a girl-movie like any other,” filled with clichés that reduce a serious subject to inconsequential fun. He critiques the film for the incongruity of its desire to be “cool” and “natural” with a heavily artificial production and a heavy-handed social message. While Romain Le Vern, with TF1 applauds Sciamma for featuring under-represented minorities and capturing the “brilliant spontaneity” of the cast, he accuses her of merely sketching characters, which reduces the potential reach of the film’s progressive social message and seems confined to (rather than transcended by) the “pop pose” of the “Diamonds” scene.

Jérôme Momclivoc, writing for *ChronicArt*, is one of the film’s most virulent critics; he mocks Sciamma’s declared intentions to engage a serious social issue by means of a fictional narrative. He describes the film as a series of rigid and programmatic scenes “corseted” with unnatural dialogue, which “condemn” the actresses to play-acting themselves. His conclusion is particularly stinging: “With its powdered reconstitution of Parisian suburban lifestyle, *Bande de filles* is a spectacle of choice for lovers of National Geographic and of

those nostalgic for colonial rule.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, both Malau-  
sa and Momcilovic go out of their way to mention the track-  
ing shot in the courtyard of *La Défense*. While Malausa sees it  
as reductive and exoticizing, Momcilovic accuses it of being  
the “desire at the heart of the film, a purely erotic urge for  
faces, postures and silhouettes encountered on the street and  
redrawn as sexual fantasies.” He connects this sexualization  
of the film’s characters to the “Diamonds” scene, wherein the  
“four heroines undulate.”

However, in her article “*Il y a des règles: Gender, Surveillance,  
and Circulation in Céline Sciamma’s Bande de Filles*,” Claire  
Mouflard rebuts these kinds of accusations with an analy-  
sis of the film’s characters and narrative, demonstrating that  
Sciamma “performs an artistic anticolonial practice of femi-  
nism [ ... ] unveiling signs of surveillance” and investigating  
the “viability of various performances to evade [it]” (115).  
For Mouflard, while the film’s coming-of-age story makes it  
accessible, its complex characterizations deconstruct “the  
fixed and subjective ‘noire’ identity associated with *cité, sexe,  
couleur*,” a common paradigm in depictions of young *banlie-  
usardes*, especially those of African descent (114). Indeed,  
Sciamma sees her characters as “activists who don’t think of  
themselves as such, and for whom violence is a response to a  
kind of global hostility” (Sciamma “Je vois”).<sup>11</sup> This helps to  
avoid seeing Marieme and her friends only as victims, instead  
recognizing in them a modicum of agency whose central  
burning ember is a discontentment with their assigned non-  
place. Moreover, in interviews, Sciamma describes Marieme as  
“a contemporary heroine, because she’s narrowing her refus-  
als. It’s not what she says ‘Yes’ to, it’s what she says ‘No’ to”  
(Sciamma “Flavorwire”).

Indeed, Sciamma replaces an exoticizing and reductive frame  
of reference with, somewhat surprisingly, a superhero arche-

type: “The movie is actually looking at how Marieme is trying out different hypotheses of herself, identities as outfits, like a superhero journey—what power the outfits or costumes give her” (“*Bande*”). Certainly by the time of *Bande de filles*’ release in October of 2014, contemporary mainstream interest in superheroes was well established: Marvel Studios alone had already released 10 films. Sciamma is interested in pushing beyond the monomyth:

“It’s also about: When you get the power, you have the responsibility of the power. The movie is a complex journey around those questions, the fact that her intimate space is controlled by her brother, and school doesn’t allow her to be ‘normal’, that society doesn’t want to look or live with [this kind of] character. It is a whole process of oppression that leads her to find her own way.” (“*Bande*”)

Marieme’s super-power isn’t repulsor beams or magical hammers, but rather something more real: a sense of self derived from a series of experiments and interrogations bound up and within her milieu, with its homogenizing non-places that she discovers can be equally fluid in their identity—for “*space is a practiced place*” (de Certeau 117). Indeed, de Certeau’s distinction between *lieu* and *espace* is more path than fixed coordinates; and beyond vectored motion, *narrative* is the privileged function that connects these two ends of a spectrum. In Eisenstein’s awakening of lion statues, Renoir’s transgression of political and gender boundaries, or Sciamma’s roaming frame, stories “carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces” (de Certeau 118). Given that *Bande de filles* borrows heavily from the *bildungsroman* and superhero

archetypes it is unsurprising to observe that change is an important theme but the representation of non-places and the creations of any-spaces-whatever in the development of that theme is remarkable. Sciamma's goal to overturn the misogynist rules of the game so visible and powerful in the *cit * proceeds in an "artistic anticolonial practice of feminism" (Mouflard 115) by first quietly but critically cataloging places of control and annihilation, and then using cinema to transform them, creating spaces of virtual conjunction, pure sites of the possible where a young woman can rise to meet her destiny, or make it her own.

#### NOTES

- 1 "A place is the order [ ... ] in accord with which elements are distributed in relations of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being the same location. The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions [ ... ] A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. This space is composed of the intersection of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. [ ... ] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper' (de Certeau 117).
- 2 Drawing from de Certeau (118), Aug  privileges narrative in his anthropology of the near, for "any representation of the individual is also a representation of the social link consubstantial with him [sic]" (Aug , *Non-places* 19).

- 3 Importantly, especially for understanding the role of non-places in *Bande de filles*, while this identity may be anonymous, it is still gendered and defaults to a male one (Merriman 16).
- 4 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted in the Works Cited: “Les misogynies sont partout. Les cités sont un territoire où les règles du jeu sont plus visibles, mais elles existent partout, dans tous les milieux. Les règles du jeu sont faites pour être détournées” (Laïreche).
- 5 “Les liens de domination qui régissent ces quartiers sont les mêmes que partout ailleurs. Sauf qu’ils sont davantage à découvert. Pour la domination masculine, par exemple, il y a quasiment une charte” (Sciamma “Je vois”).
- 6 The relation of this concept with de Certeau and Augé seems initially self-evident, and indeed many scholars have mistakenly attributed a kind of causal link between Augé’s non-place and Deleuze’s concept. But Deleuze never met or read Augé (who published nearly a decade after *Cinema 1* appeared anyway).
- 7 “Y a pas de morale de l’histoire. La fin peut paraître étrange mais tout peut arriver, elle laisse place à un tas de choses” (Laïreche).
- 8 “C’était une volonté consciente que la forme d’engagement du film passerait par des choix de mise en scène, du côté de la couleur, faire la part belle aux visages, faire circuler des motifs” (Sciamma “Je vois”).
- 9 “Avec ce film j’ai voulu arpenter l’espace. Je ne trouvais rien de plus intéressant en France aujourd’hui que de regarder ces filles que je croisais tous les jours dans la rue. Je voulais leur parler, apprendre à les connaître” (Laïreche).
- 10 “Avec sa reconstitution poudrée des mœurs de la téci, *Bande de filles* est, de fait, un spectacle de choix pour les amateurs du National Geographic comme pour les nostalgiques de l’indigénat” (Momcilovic).

- 11 “Mais je vois mes personnages comme des activistes qui ne se le forment pas et dont la violence est une réponse à une violence globale” (Sciamma, “Je vois”).

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## **The Revolution Was Televised: Reimagining the Islamic Revolution as a Primetime Performance**

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**By Kevin Greene**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses fundamental misunderstandings of the Islamic Revolutions in Iran in the 1970s. Considering contemporary ideological material and Western media coverage of these events from 1978 to the present, the revolution was the result of a number of social factors, not a monolithic event forwarded by extremists. Given the wide array of ideological factions, the revolution became inherently performative; this paper ponders the ways revolutionaries co-opted westernized media and revolutionary mores to accomplish anti-Western ends.

*Keywords:* Islam, Iran, revolution, liberation theology, media criticism, postsecularism, politics

## **La Revolución fue televisada: Reimaginando la Revolución Islámica como una actuación postsecular**

### **RESUMEN**

Este documento aborda los malentendidos fundamentales de las revoluciones islámicas en Irán en la década de 1970. Teniendo en cuenta el material ideológico contemporáneo y la cobertura de los medios occidentales de estos eventos desde 1978 hasta el presente, la revolución fue el resultado de una serie de factores sociales, no un evento monolítico presentado por extremistas. Dada la amplia gama de facciones

ideológicas, la revolución se volvió intrínsecamente performativa; Este artículo reflexiona sobre las formas en que los revolucionarios se apropiaron de los medios occidentalizados y las costumbres revolucionarias para lograr fines antioccidentales.

**Palabras clave:** islam, Irán, revolución, teología de la liberación, crítica de los medios, postsecularismo, política

**Kevin Greene** obtuvo su maestría en inglés en NYU en 2018. Actualmente enseña inglés en la escuela secundaria en Brooklyn, NY. Su investigación se ha centrado en la literatura y la cultura contemporáneas, en particular en la literatura y el teatro irlandeses, y el modernismo del Atlántico Norte. Su trabajo actual se centra en los movimientos poscoloniales y revolucionarios y sus interacciones con la religión.

## 电视广播了革命：将伊斯兰革命重塑为后世俗主义表现

### 摘要

本文研究了有关20世纪70年代伊朗伊斯兰革命的根本误解。通过考量当代意识形态构成和1978年以来西方媒体对伊斯兰革命的报道，这场革命是由一系列社会因素造成的，而不是由极端主义者所推动的单一事件。由于存在大范围意识形态派别，这场革命从内在上变得具有施为性；本文思考了革命家如何利用西方化媒体和革命习俗实现反西方目标。

关键词：伊斯兰，伊朗，革命，解放神学，媒体批判，后世俗主义，政治

Kevin Greene于2018年在纽约大学获得英语语言文学硕士学位。目前他在纽约市布鲁克林区教授高中

英语。他的研究聚焦于当代文学与文化，尤其是爱尔兰文学与戏剧、以及北大西洋现代主义。目前他的研究聚焦于后殖民运动和革命运动，以及其与宗教之间的相互影响。

### MISE-EN-SCENE

Numerous critics, such as BD Forbes, Jeffrey Mahan, and Philip Goff, have commented on the intersection between religion and popular culture. They've drawn many apt comparisons to speak about both as cultural facets, which are in constant dialogue with each other, and have configured frameworks which seek to discuss both with a common vocabulary (Goff 300). Many analyses, such as Goff's chapter, "Religion and Popular Culture," look upon seminal popular culture productions such as *Star Wars* and *E.T.* with a particular attunement to the religious themes visible in these works (298). On its face, this point seems almost obvious—of course, one of the major social drivers of the past several hundred years and beyond, religion, and one of the major social drivers of the last hundred years, popular culture, at their nexus, would intersect, conflict, and contradict each other in complicated manners.

One such example is the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the late 1970s, which presents a moment in which so-called traditional Islamists overthrew a so-called modern, secular regime. Much like the messy relationship between religion and popular culture in general, as proffered by Goff and others, this specific example of the Islamic Revolution offers its own unique nuance to the equation. Some of the realities of that moment illustrate this—the revolution was, in hindsight, declared backwards, decidedly anti-modern, and regressive;

but, at the same time, the revolutionary praxis—transmitted, globally, via television airwaves and covered extensively by western media—illustrates the contemporary means revolutionaries employed in order to topple the existing regime. Complications do not end there—the means of activating many of the participants of the revolution was achieved via traditional religious pathways, regardless of their political ideologies. That is, in a rare confusion of contemporary political alignments, factions as diverse as the conservative, fundamental Islamists, such as Ayatollah Khomeini, all the way across the political spectrum to Marxists, such as Ali Shari’ati, were mobilized in shared religious vernaculars in the name of common political desires.

This paper will discuss each of these three complicated, and seemingly contradictory, facets of modern life: religion, popular culture, and political revolution. Due to the proximity, per Goff’s figuration, of religion and popular culture, it seems almost natural to bring revolution into the fold. Goff argues, “Purveyors of popular culture must appeal to the masses inside the margins and employ methods and even messages... that are common and familiar” (296). Substitute either religion or revolution with popular culture in that sentence, and it rings no less true. Goff himself has noted the popular culture means which have been co-opted by religious figures, particularly in the west, and one would not struggle to find such figures today, like Joel Osteen and Pat Robinson, who have transformed their brands of religion with communicative techniques typically associated with entertainment, hosting religious services on television and in arenas akin to professional sports. Likewise, populist politics, often the harbinger of revolutionary politics, operate in much the same way, exemplified in our moment by the immense success of both right- and left-wing populist movements gaining cre-

dence and dominating cultural production in ways thought impossible merely a decade or two ago. An apt term for this may be the normalization of extremism, which, using Goff's framework, fits neatly: "[P]opular culture is willing to look beyond what has worked in the past even if it employs tropes that appear recognizable and comfortable" (296).

What does this have to do with the Islamic revolution? Many Iranian revolutionaries viewed religion not as antithetical to secular life; rather, they viewed their vision of modernity as the synthesis between modern statism and traditional spirituality, an Islamist modernity which takes into account both learnings from contemporary politics and religious communities. Furthermore, this negotiation, between old and new, modernity and tradition, were translated to the world via means of popular culture, in which scenes of Islamists marching adjacent to Azadi Tower in Tehran were broken up by commercials for Coca-Cola and Tide. Religiously-influenced groups voiced their political wills through a performative showcase of ideas in this moment, via images which appealed at once to modern post-secularists as well as fundamental Islamists, particularly in the early stages of the revolution, in which the messy, malleable, negotiative process of building a state both Islamist and contemporary was captured in the only means able to subsume all of that contradiction and complexity and turn it into entertainment: on television.

## ACT I: IDEOLOGY

In order to think about the complex reimagination of both modernity and traditional religion as configured in the midst of the Islamic revolution, it is useful to turn briefly to the idea of the post-secular, which refers to the chronological timeframe beginning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as a period

when the secularizing project—which was included in the larger, Western project of modernization—was challenged by inhabitants of the various global regions in which these projects were being implemented. To refer to Jose Casanova, this was not a wholesale rejection of secularity and its call for the differentiation of public spheres, but rather an acknowledgement of

the need to refine the theory [of secularization] by distinguishing between the general historical structural trend of secular differentiation and the different ways in which different religions in different places respond to and are affected by the modern structural trend of differentiation. (212)

“Secular differentiation” refers to the central goal of the secularizing project, namely the differentiation of public spheres, most importantly of church and state, such that each sphere interacts with populations in its own particular way as decided by the state and its citizens. For Casanova, this is the idea that is the core of his theory of the post-secular: not that these spheres should or shouldn’t interact in a particular way, but rather that each state needs to configure for itself the nature of the interaction between itself and religion. At its core, the post-secular project can be seen as a rejection of the idea that religion is backwards or premodern, calling attention to several notions within the West which confound this idea. These issues include: the idea that Western modes of modernity are themselves rooted in religious language and doctrines, most obvious in the confluent rises of Protestantism and capitalism; and that secularism was itself deified in the West, such that it transformed into its own worshipable endeavor no less fetishized than the religious formations it meant to render obsolete.

The post-secular then denotes an especially anti-Western-as-self ideology which attempts to reinstate the will of those populations forced into secularity by rethinking secularity itself and installing formations which are less complicit with the institutions that rose alongside the secularizing processes (the global slave-trade, the colonial project, western-normative state-building, etc.), and more complicit with the ideological formations replaced by that intrusive Westernization. As Casanova offers in summation of his project in “The Deprivitization of Modern Religion”—“there was a need to rethink systematically the relationship of religion and modernity, and the possible roles religions may play in the public sphere of modern societies” (211). Though it is clear that a return to the pre-secular order was both out of the question as well as not wholly desirable, the post-secular project essentially aims to replace those particularly toxic facets of Christian-rooted modernity with facets compatible with the various regions in which that modernity was imposed and those regions’ particular religious identities. Though this manifests itself differently in these various regions, what is consistent is the radical departure from Christian-statist normativity which has gone rather unexamined by Christian-normative communities themselves.

This is consistent with various postcolonial/-secular theories—specifically critics such as Mae Henderson, Theotonio Dos Santos, and W.E.B. Du Bois—who each in their own way posit that the Other (non-West; non-white) is not in a relationship to the Self (West; white) in which the Other is to emulate the Self, but rather that the Other is situated alongside and uniquely well-suited to offer a critique of the Self. In the words of Du Bois: “the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-conscious-

ness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (5). Or Henderson, venerating the unique positioning of female writers of color in the global West and their ability “to see the other, but also to see what the other cannot see, and to use this insight to enrich both our own and the other’s understanding” (137). As opposed to imagining the non-West as an apprentice developing into the mold of the West as a young boy becomes a seasoned blacksmith, it is more accurate and justifiable to view them as coworkers—with admittedly divergent styles, but the same salary nonetheless—in which each is well-suited to offer critiques of the other. In the Westernized global order, though, a hierarchy was instituted wherein the non-West was oppressively forced into a role as a veritable West-in-training.

Ultimately, the theory of post-secularity is an issue of representation. Casanova and others are asserting the right of a state or its constituents to choose for it or themselves their political, social, and cultural orders as opposed to being forced to adopt the orders prescribed by the West. To use the word democracy here may feel limiting, because of its evocation of legislative chambers and the limited definition it has garnered within the Western(ized) context, but democracy can also be larger: the idea of democracy as a manifestation of the collective will and self-determination of a constituency, however a particular constituency elects to implement this will—an arche-democracy (to borrow the underpinning logic of Derrida’s arche-writing). One instance where this uniquely intersects with notions of the post-secular is Iran in the late 1970s, where the collective will to depose the Shah was radically asserted in the urban streets, seizing democratic power that had been denied by the Pahlavian monarchy in a moment that mimicked Casanova’s formulation of post-secularity as a reimagining of the secular within a particular con-

text—Iranians did not reject the notion of Iranian statehood in its basic form as a grouping of Iranians in a united populace, only its secularized and Westernized iteration.

## ACT II: CHARACTERS

It is useful to invoke the Foucauldian response to the events in Iran as he too is interested more in the act of revolution than the ensuing regime. Foucault, amongst the likes of non-academic critics like Reza Aslan and Roya Hakakian, recognizes that above all, the revolution in Iran was not in favor of one singly-faceted thing to be done, but centered around one “leitmotif”: upon arriving in Iran and asking citizens what political order they wished to establish, he reports one consistent response: “we want nothing from *this* regime” (Aslan; Hakakian; Foucault 195, his emphasis). He goes on to sketch why various populations within Iran rejected the Shah—wealthy landowners and rural peasants alike were “discontented with agrarian reform;” artisans and petty manufacturers had not benefitted from changes in the economy; wealthy elites were forced to invest their money in other global markets because of developmental shortcomings in Iran (196). What this symbolizes is the collective will of the people, intriguing to Foucault as an extremely unique basis for social revolt due to the outdated modernizing project that was both supportive of and supported by the Pahlavis. What Foucault is approaching in “The Shah Is a Hundred Years Behind the Times” is, without naming it, the post-secular nature of the collective will in Iran as made manifest by the revolution.

The Shah was insistent upon instituting a Kemalesque and thoroughly Westernized social order, in essence subjecting Iranians to a colonial yoke despite the lack of an oppressive

*colonial* ruler. Another way, the Shah was attempting to mimic the order of the West, that order which was venerated in the global (read: Westernized) imaginary. The Shah was not so much behind the times as he was attracted by the positions of his Western counterparts whose countries had in the past several centuries amassed unthinkable fortunes of wealth and power at the expense of the Other, and who were now taking advantage of the Shah himself—both overtly in the support behind the Shah from the U.S. and U.K., mostly as a means to secure the country’s precious oil, as well as covertly in the expansion of the capitalist mission, to hint at Shari’ati’s theory, to make “all human beings become ‘consumer animals’ and strip all nations of their ‘authenticity’ and thus even the Shah of his actual power to rule (Shari’ati n.d.: 29). Foucault’s formulation regarding the discontent in Iran is supported interestingly by the sociological work of Farideh Farhi whose *States and Urban-Based Revolutions* explores the ways in which Iranian discontent, as the result of mass migration to the cities, was one of the direct causes of the Islamic Revolution, as well as a trend which had an impact on the performance of the revolution itself.

### ACT III: SETTING

Farhi situates the revolution within a particular context of rapid urbanization in Iran resulting in a major shift of the social order in a remarkably short period which tested the relationship between the people and the state (7). This test was not simply one of keeping up with the rapid urbanization, though. As she argues in her chapter, “Urbanization and Political Protest,” such a test also resulted in a fundamental change in the manner in which the formerly rural populations related to the state, “the manager of the means of daily life in the cities” (66). Farhi points out the increased

ubiquity of the state within the lives of the new urbanites who had become accustomed to a much less obtrusive order in their rural communities. Therefore, when it came time to address the inevitable grievances which accompanied such rapid urbanization—particularly, the lacking infrastructure and financial opportunities in the cities faced with mass migration—there was a monolithic opponent against which the revolutionaries could cast aspersions. Revolutions in these types of urbanized environments

become conflicts between urban classes and the state, which has acquired tremendous power within the urban context. This creates the potential for the creation of a multiclass, negative coalition that can be mobilized to transform the state. (66)

This is a fundamental departure from the typical form of revolution as we've grown accustomed to in the Marxist-inspired view of class conflict. Instead of the wealthy ruling class being the diagnosed oppressors causing the chagrin of the masses, in this case the (Westernized and secularized) state was viewed as responsible and therefore in direct conflict with the people.

While this may seem a rather obvious point which would ring true in any urban revolutionary environment, what is perhaps even more interesting in the Iranian case is the rejection not only of the state of the state, but of the institution of the modern, Westernized state itself. Although the land somewhat consistent with the contemporary boundaries of Iran has long been more or less united under a monarchic order—as commemorated by the Azadi Tower—the formulation of that land into a secular state was new, rising alongside the Shah, himself a Western, modern imposition.

Though it would be nearly impossible to attempt to parse out the various institutions which were native or not to the Iranian/Persian social order, what remains is the fact that these urban environments which were to Farhi so essential to the revolutionary moment were innately Western-approved developments as part of a larger project of capitalist urbanization, perhaps especially at this particular moment during the rising ubiquity of the Western welfare state. This urbanized and consumerized order in Iran—judging by the nature of the revolution—was rejected by the people.

Farhi highlights an urbanization project wherein the “growing destitution of the countryside became the classic ‘push’ factor to the cities. The thriving urban sector [resultant of the oil-based economic boom] added a ‘pull’ factor” (69). Thus, the bustling urban environment concomitant with the generally bullish nature of the economy of the 1960s and 1970s became a draw to many countryfolk disillusioned by the failing agrarian reform who saw the city as a unique opportunity to make ends meet and leave behind the rising levels of rural squalor. But, as Farhi notes,

Although some migrants were absorbed into the growing urban economy, many barely survived on the fringes. This underclass dwelt in the sprawling new slums and squatter settlements, which were in sharp contrast to the luxury high-rise buildings, banks, office blocks, and exclusive residential neighborhoods where foreigners and wealthy Iranians lived. (69)

This is dramatic imagery of the contrast between city and country which is itself reminiscent of the juxtaposition of West and non-West. There is a cruel reality wherein those

Iranians complicit with the Westernizing projects were essentially rewarded, and the classes religiously resistant to the globalized West were warehoused into abject slums or continued suffering in the country. With nowhere to turn, the struggling classes of the city were primed for revolutionary fervor.

But further for Farhi, there is one essential identity-based factor which was realized in Tehran particularly which allowed for the large-scale mobilization of the struggling classes that is a necessary bridge between the mass-migrative trends as well as of the religious nature of the ensuing revolution. She describes an increase in religious associations which accompanied the urbanization, in the form of *hay'ats* which allowed the formerly rural populations to resist the secularization often paired with urban development as well as maintain part of their original geographic identity (70). She describes these associations as ones which “[functioned] loosely as networks of interrelated associations organized ostensibly for religious purposes” and “organized on the basis of common ethnic or geographical origin ...” (70). These associations provided financial, spiritual, and emotional support for the incoming rural peoples. This established a network which would be taken advantage of in the revolution, as these associations forged means of communications between communities which were largely displeased to begin with. Paired with the growing discontent of the masses due to the worsening economy “as the oil boom turned into a bust,” it became far more attractive for urban wage earners to join the revolutionary forces as “their lack of internal organization was rapidly replaced by traditional channels of communication as the bazaar guilds, religious sessions, mosques, and coffee houses provided the necessary linkages between the traditional intermediate class and the urban poor” (71-72). And it was this

established link between the poor and middle classes which in turn brought about the startling mobilizations of millions of urban Iranians in 1978 and 1979.

In his book *Democracy & Public Space*, John Parkinson provides a useful linkage for viewing the mass mobilization and representation of urban populations as inextricably tied to the physical settings they occupy, an interesting perspective from which Farhi's account of the mobilization in Iran can be seen (Parkinson). Although this text avoids mention of Iran or its revolution directly, the theoretical framework Parkinson develops is a useful one as it presents both a way of looking at the prerevolutionary context in Iran in terms of how cities are developed infrastructurally, and how in Iran in particular the Westernization of that infrastructure could be viewed both as a causal factor in the revolution as well as supportive of the revolutionary performance.

#### ACT IV: THE DRAMA IS IN THE SPACE

Parkinson begins with the premise that “democracy depends to a surprising extent on the availability of physical, public space,” maintaining that “[a] democracy that lacks a single site for binding collective decision-making is a more-easily attenuated democracy, because it is one that is taken less seriously by its citizens, and one in which decisions can too easily pass undetected and undefended” (2-3). This can be seen to be the case in prerevolutionary Iran—to reiterate language from Farhi—where the ruling Pahlavian regime was considered “personalistic” and “autocratic” with a distinct spatial distance between the governors and the governed (71). Instead of uselessly limiting democracy to its modern, Western manifestation in the existence of congresses, legislatures, and various forms of representational

democracies, Parkinson instead prefers to view democracy as an unspecified means by which a group of people amassed within a state make known their will (15). This is perhaps most provocative in its application to revolutionary Iran, as it resists the perspective of the revolution as religious and thus backwards and anti-modern and allows it to be viewed as an informal referendum within a space “maintained relatively empty and featureless so that large purposive crowds can gather when they need to ...,” as was the case when the Iranian populace seized, amongst other spaces, the vast plaza surrounding the Azadi Tower (18). Such spaces for Parkinson constitute the performative stages of democracy, which he often refers to in language similar to drama.

The ideas of public space and of stages for democracy are central to Parkinson’s claim, particularly in the capitalized, Westernized order. Public space for him is not those spaces owned by the public, but rather spaces in which individuals can interact in an unscripted manner with strangers regardless of ownership (54). But, he argues, public spaces are hardly ever truly unscripted. He writes,

Whichever way one thinks of it, urban theory ... leads to the view that, in the absence of regulations to the contrary and the will to enforce them, space is organized, designed and built in ways that favour the powerful over the powerless, economic interests over social interests, private gain over public good ... and developers, corporate tenants, and landowners over the owners and users of small corner shops, community centers, playgrounds, and parks. (84).

Overtly or covertly, Tehran, as many cities in Parkinson's formulation are, is grounded in the capitalist and secularist projects because space is simply portioned off to the highest bidders, who would prefer, in the case of rapidly urbanizing Tehran for instance, to build luxury buildings for the wealthy as opposed to public housing projects for the mass migrants, such that spaces in which demonstrations of democracy are possible are not a priority.

But this capitalization of space, which Parkinson sees as a means of delivering consumers to products, need not be limited in its relationship to capital, which is but one form of power. In the case of Azadi Plaza, a vast public space was cordoned off by Reza Shah and dedicated to display a symbol of his unilateral modernization project in Iran, which accompanied the influx of capital in Iran in the oil boom of the 1960s and early 1970s. According to the architect of the tower, Hossein Amanat, the design of the tower centered upon

the main arch in the center, [the design of which] represents the pre-Islamic period. Then there is a broken arch above it representing the Islamic period of Iran .... And then the network of ribs that connect one arch to the other as if it connects the pre-Islamic to after Islamic. (Riazati)

The tower, originally known as the *Shahyad* (King's Memorial) Tower was meant to represent 2,500 years of continuous monarchy—a historically dubious claim considering the Shah's own lineage—and the manner in which Iran was leaving behind both its pre-Islamic and Islamic epochs, departing from the arches below and moving “up towards the sky” to illustrate that Iran “should be moving towards a higher level.” This was part and parcel of the Shah's missions of modern-

ization (instituting Westernesque monuments into the cityscape) and secularization (those monuments symbolically rising above and beyond the Islamic era in Iran). One might not be able to garner such connections between a single work of architecture and the Pahlavian forces of modernization, except in this case, the architecture occupies a prominent public square and was in fact directly chosen by the regime through a public contest, similar to the design process of many American war memorials, most notoriously the Vietnam War Memorial. It is clear that this work was funded by the state as symbolic of its secularist agenda aiming to specifically differentiate between the spheres of religion and state, if not to erase the religious sphere altogether.

But as is clear in the events to follow, an enormous portion of Iranians did not endorse this project of secularization—this was, after all, one of the main bases of the revolution. The movement against the Shah was not only monolithically anti-secularist because of the notable factions, as delineated by Farhi, of Marxist revolutionaries and mainstream democrats (1990). Also, much of the revolutionary mobilization was established through traditional networks of religious communication. This, paired with the sense discussed by Hakakian that those non-Islamist factions—for better or for worse—gave into the “lie of Khomeini,” in which he stated before seizing power that he’d be content to retire quietly to Qom and continue his study of the Quran, allowed for the revolution’s particularly religious fervor (Hakakian). This abdication by the secular factions solidifies this revolution’s distinctly religious flavor as opposed to strictly political that was necessary for the revolution’s role as post-secular—a reimagining of the secularized state.

Ideologically, the religious fervor of the revolution can be traced to the theology of Ali Shari’ati. Although Shari’ati

himself was no longer alive at the time of the revolution, and although the revolution resulted in a state which was not in line with his imagining of an ongoing, Islamic, critical discourse, termed *tauheed*, he positions himself in such a way that his ideas are particularly relevant in the postsecular perspective of the revolution (Shari'ati). In "What Is To Be Done?" Shari'ati presents an Islam that is under attack from within ("the sham quarrel between the pseudo-intellectuals and pseudo-religious leaders that has split our society into two groups") as well as without ("the real war ... between East and West, producer and consumer, colonizer and colonized ...") (46-47). Shari'ati rightly sees, in a vein similar to Casanova and the post-secularists, that "the ridiculous war of modernity versus traditionalism" is not that which faces Iran. If there is said to be a war at all, it is more an attempt to view the limitations of the "fraudulent duality" and to reconcile the Islamist state with the Western one as I've already spelled out. For Shari'ati, this war is combatable only by injecting into religion a spirit of growth, intellectuality, and cultural openness: "Reviving the cultural and spiritual lives of the wandering generation and returning it to its true self is the only course which will enable it to stand on its own feet" (48). This means seizing Islam from those structures of power which benefit from Islam's divisions and perversions, as well as seizing religion in general from the Western attempts to render it obsolete as a means of thinking and being. In a world in which individuals' minds are themselves poisoned by the Westernizing projects per Shari'ati, and in which, as Parkinson argues, even physical public space is set up to buttress these projects, there is but one reasonable response—to reclaim that very public space aided via mass mobilization of the "traditional" religious networks which have remained least obstructed by modernization and best suited to offer a worthwhile critique of the secular mission.

This post-secular aspect is best envisioned not through a study of the resultant Iranian order in the time since 1979. Whether the Khomeinian regime was in line with the democratically-willed image of Iran is somewhat beside the point. Even if we take for granted the Western view of postrevolutionary Iran as oppressive, premodern, and anti-Western, there remains a literal manifestation of the post-secularness of this revolutionary moment. Borrowing logic from Parkinson, because of the role of physical space in the administration of governance there is an argument to be made that the very act of revolution itself was always already post-secular in this context, because of the specific rejection of the Shahyad Tower as a symbol of modernity coming to Iran and the specifically religious framework which made the revolution possible. In the reclamation of this public space is a religiously-sanctioned and -motivated moment of revolution that constitutes a unique moment of post-secularity.

#### ACT V: THE INSTANT OF REVOLUTION

This is witnessed in the co-optation by the revolutionaries of the Azadi Tower, in particular, and placing this within the Shari'atian framework. That is to say that there is a clear linkage of the revolutionary action and Shari'ati's theorization, in injecting a uniquely Islamic flavor into a repudiation of the state. By establishing a necessary link between Islam and Iranian state formation, one can view this revolution as a performance of democratic spirit, in the framework of Parkinson, as well as a performance of specifically Islamic, post-secular values. This is best gleaned in looking at the "stage" of the Shahyad/Azadi Tower and constructing a sort of performance history of what occurred there in 1978-79.

The Azadi Tower is an incredibly exciting stage on which to focus. This derives in its intendedness as a symbol of the Shah's installed modernity in Iran, and the reimagination of it as a tower of *azadi* (freedom). From an American perspective, many might be troubled by the shared name of this Freedom Tower, and that which stands in New York's World Trade Center, colloquially known by the same name, standing 1,776 feet tall, and a direct symbol in the eyes of many Americans of resilience in moving past radical Islamic theology and rejection of the hatred ubiquitously paired with it. But perhaps it is important to consider what freedom means in these particular contexts. In the U.S. context, it means a guarantee of liberty from tyranny of all kinds—the despotic monarchy and oppressive theocracy of King George in particular. However, what might the renaming of the Sharyad Tower to Azadi mean in the revolutionary context? It was, after all, renamed in 1979 as a subversion of the monarchic past connoted with the original name. In a very real sense, the term freedom in the Iranian context is easily translated into the post-secular language of the revolution—freedom from oppressive monarchy, of course, and the character of the Shah, but additionally freedom from the Westernization that Shari'ati is so resistant of. Freedom from the structures of power which have attempted to label Islam as unequivocally and innately bad, wrong, and premodern. Freedom in this context denotes the freedom of Iranians to choose for themselves the order of their society, whether it be thoroughly Westernized, secular democracy, or an Islamist order, a sort of radical freedom that guarantees no natural liberties idealistically assumed by the U.S. definition, other than the right of a people to establish their own collective will. A post-secular freedom. This stands in stark contrast to the irony of the colloquial name of the building in New York—while there is no discount of the tragedy of 9/11 in any sense to be found

here,<sup>1</sup> there is almost a comic aspect in a tower symbolizing globalized capital and the fetishization of consumption being known as the Freedom Tower, especially in light of theories like Shari'ati's. In a very real sense, the freedom denoted by Azadi Tower is far freer in its revolutionary respect than that denoted by One World Trade, despite the vast difference in the realized freedoms that each of those societies enjoy.

But what is most interesting in this particular location is the fact that Azadi Tower and Plaza were sponsored by a Westernized ruler, attempting to implement a Westernized state, and thus imitable of Westernized memorial architecture. From its inception, the Shahyad Tower was always already primed for an anti-Western revolution as much as the secular order always already contained its undoing. Memorials in the West, like the notable Lincoln Memorial which has a history saturated with radical movements, are so situated as the ideal places for these protests to happen—they stand as large, open facilities, often near the physical seats of power, enabling members of a society to directly voice their dissenting opinions to their rulers per Parkinson. Perhaps the Shah assumed it unthinkable that such a structure and plaza were ideal locations for revolutionary action, or perhaps he thought that the oppressive SAVAK<sup>2</sup> would be able to quash any such activity before it reached the point of all-out revolution, bringing millions into the streets. But what is unques-

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1 I want to stress that there is no implicit or explicit support of the 9/11 attacks to be found in the logic of this paper. Though one could argue that my reading of the Islamic Revolution could be applied to those attacks as acts of radical reimagination of the global order in line with the thinking of George Galloway amongst others, the Islamic Revolution was a discrete, specific, and targeted overthrow of the oppressive Pahlavi government, not a random act of terror for its own sake.

2 The Iranian National Organization for Security and Intelligence, the contemporary secret police force.

tionable is the role of the Azadi Tower in the revolutionary moment as a symbol of the oppressive secularization of Iran, much like the Bastille prison was an ideal symbol of kingly despotism in Paris two hundred years earlier—though rather irrelevant in terms of what the revolutionaries were protesting against as a useless jail and impotent memorial structure, both of these were symbolized structures of oppression. As such, there is a necessity to look at the ways in which Iranian revolutionaries centered their action upon this plaza, and the ways in which the remarkable tower played directly into the post-secular nature of the revolution as it was appropriated, as well as the ways in which it allowed for a picturesque backdrop for revolutionary activity which bolstered its exportation to the world over the Western-dominated forms of mass media.

A rudimentary online search of the term “Iranian Revolution” illustrates the centrality of the Azadi Tower to the revolutionary moment. Many of the top results of both image and video portray the dramatic tower and the surrounding plaza filled with protesters as far as one can see. It can be called extremely strategic by the revolutionary organizers to center their action upon this photogenic square, but it is more exciting, and more fitting with the thesis of post-secularity,

to explain briefly that the Shah’s own vision of a secularized Tehran was imbricated with the location of this tower. Glancing at a map of Tehran, the Azadi Plaza is particularly striking—in roughly the center of the city, there is an immense green space, marking the position of the tower. But its neighbor to the southwest—Mehrabad International Airport, less than two kilometers away—illustrates the Shah’s *hubris*. By placing the dramatic symbol of Iran’s proud monarchic history next to the airport, the Shah invited international visitors to gaze upon it as the first landmark on entering the city. But

this would prove also to be the Shah's *nemesis* because it too would be the first crowded public square seen by the international press as they arrived to cover the revolution, to say nothing of the fact that it was directly appropriated in the moments immediately following the revolution as Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile via Mehrabad and was met by millions in the street, the square becoming so crowded that his vehicle was literally unable to reach its destination (*Middle East Observer*). This acts as another illustration of the religious fervor of the revolution, as well as its inherent contemporaneity as it was packaged and transported via popular cultural mores. Much like the scenes when the Pope makes a foreign visit or addresses the faithful in St. Peter's Square, there was in Tehran at the return of the Ayatollah a distinct papal-esque fervor. This is supported by some of the propagandistic art of the era, which sought to portray the Ayatollah in a distinctly Christian and saintly light. There is, for instance, a provocative rendering of Khomeini in the style of Murillo's 17<sup>th</sup> century representation of Mother Mary, as juxtaposed by Chelkowski and Dabashi, such that the Ayatollah is clearly elevated to a central character in the development not only of post-secular Iran, but of Islam itself, placing the rise of Khomeini in direct conversation with the Western religious figures (173). There is something to be said, as well, for the embrace of popular culture in appropriating the old-meets-new, commercial expression of mid-century visual art.

What is perhaps most interesting in this is the response the West had to Khomeini's return and its religiosity, as if they had never witnessed such a religiously-devout group of people take to the streets. This was not innovative nor necessarily in line with the theory of the post-secular. What makes the return of the Ayatollah anti-Western and post-secular, though,

is the fact that Khomeini was arche-democratically selected as both religious leader and political leader. Unbeknownst to the Shah, he had designed a nearly perfect urban setup for such a revolution, and for the dramatic reception for his direct political adversary. Add to this context the power of mass media and television, and revolution becomes inevitable.

But, given the grassroots nature of the uprising and the traditional and religious modes of communication which allowed it to occur, it is unlikely that one will find evidence to support the claim that there was a multilateral conspiracy to fill the plaza with protestors as the best location in terms of politics, media optics, and global reception. No such dubious claim is being made here. Rather, what is engaging is how this appropriated symbol of Westernized modernity (Azadi Tower) played directly into the hands of the Western global media, thereby constituting another important aspect of the attendant appropriation. The co-optation of the plaza and tower is itself a radically imaginative act, but what is more is the fact that the tower is being discussed at all is owed to the Western press, which too was essentially hijacked, accidentally or not, by the revolutionaries as a means of illustrating their metaphorical replacement of a secular state with an Islamist one. The most important part of this revolution in a sense of modern political power rests not with its ideological origins in Shari'ati, Khomeini, Marx, or Lilburne (Islamic, socialist, and liberal-democratic, respectively), but rather in its staying power as something performed, and performed on television, no doubt in the name of those various ideologies, but as a unilateral, performative, revolutionary manifestation of Iran's collective will against the Shah.

Upon viewing various videos of the moments of revolution, from the overthrow itself to the dramatic return of Khomei-

ni, one can see the revolutionaries putting on a show for the camera, so to speak—posing, signaling, speaking to those not present to alert them to what is happening and variously why, as “What had been a well-planned arrival ceremony soon turned into chaos,” in the words of one *NBC* anchor (*Middle East Observer*; *NBC Universal Archives*). It is clear that the political aspect of the revolution itself was inspiration for the flooding of the streets, but there is most certainly a performative aspect, propped up by the presence of Western media, and the treatment of this as a new-fangled form of collective uprising—perhaps the only manner in which this revolution was properly analyzed by Westerners.

This itself is a departure from the standard Western revolutionary model. As opposed to revolution as a single-faceted, solely political act and manifestation of the will of the masses, the rise of mass media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century allowed for a theatrical aspect to become thoroughly essential to the act of revolution. Not only was the symbolic seizure of Azadi Plaza (and that of the earlier Bastille prison in Paris) central to the performance of revolution but the simple presence of millions of bodies in the streets, calling for a particular path for which Iran to take, broadcast the world over was doubtless a significant draw which exponentially brought Iranians to the streets and public squares as the revolution unfolded. After all, the Islamic Revolution was one of the first acts of such mass revolution to occur in the era of mass media, only adding to the drama associated with the time because of the inherently electric (in a both literal and figurative sense) Western perspective of the anti-Western ideological underpinnings. This was without a doubt a revolutionary revolution.

## ACT VI: THE GLOBAL (IR-)RESOLUTION

The interaction between the Islamic Revolution and the mass media is certainly interesting on its own; after all, though the press allowed Iranians to speak for themselves in one sense, in another, it was always already undone by the immediate analysis by Westerners, such as the *NBC* anchor immediately calling it chaos—one wonders what word would've been chosen instead of chaos had the protestors been white Westerners (read: Christians) participating in such a scene (*NBC Universal Archives*). For instance, watching the *Middle East Observer's* video, one hears the Iranians' words in the background, rarely with subtitles, beneath the Transatlantic accent of whichever American news anchor is providing his own analysis of the events. This immediately compromises and subverts the Iranian version of events—regardless of what they are revolting against, the Westerners watching hear “Death to America” as the summative chant of the revolution as opposed to the much more relevant and ubiquitous “Death to the Shah.” The Western analysis too misses the intended sentiment of “Death to America”; a straw poll of my own family who witnessed the events contemporaneously via television indicates that they were fearful of what was to happen in Iran, despite being in no real danger in the U.S. except for the resultant long lines at the gas station, because of the “Death to America” chant, a translative choice on the part of U.S. media in the interest, in all likelihood, of gaining viewers and selling advertising blocks. This perspective of the inherent danger perceived by Americans upon hearing “Death to America” persists. It is buttressed by members of the U.S. Congress; current Sen. Cotton, for instance: “When someone chants, ‘Yes, certainly, death to America,’ we should take him at his word, and we shouldn't put him on the path to a nuclear bomb” (Erlich).

Read: we should silence the actual meaning of non-Western, backwards, religious fanatics and instead take their words at face value, without appreciating any nuance or use of metonym; after all, one can ascertain that Sen. Cotton likely assumes that any fanatic Muslim is incapable of such linguistic subtleties. Such reductive analysis of this single chant as emblematic of the revolution is a framework easily applied to the Islamic Revolution as a whole—appreciation for nuance was clearly not the goal of Western analyses.

Sen. Cotton's remarks are directly contrasted by the view of a Professor Foad Izadi of the University of Tehran. In fact, "America" here stands not for the state occupying land between Canada and Mexico in the sense that U.S. citizens typically think, but rather what America metaphorically stood for—oppressive Westernization, secularization, and capitalization (Erlich). Admittedly, "Death to the oppressive statist, Western-normative, anti-Islamic foreign policy of the American administration!" cannot be said to exude the same fervor as "Death to America." Nonetheless, this is symbolic of the larger problem facing analyses of the revolution: while millions of Iranians voiced their collective wills, they were instantly spoken for (represented) in the Spivakian sense by Westerners.

One only need glance at *TIME* magazine's "Man of the Year" (since renamed "Person of the Year") from 1979 to gather the immense impact that the Islamic Revolution had upon the media, and their perversion of events. *TIME* says that their person of the year is not a positive or negative award; rather, "Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini met *TIME*'s definition of Man of the Year: he was the one who 'has done the most to change the news, for better or for worse'" over the course of 1979. For context, despite *TIME*'s decidedly negative cover-

age of President Trump, he was the recipient of the award for 2016. Khomeini's depiction in the accompanying article to this "award" is one which focuses upon his unrelenting desire to violently subvert Western culture in favor of one distinctly and solely Islamic and anti-Western. As the authors write,

the flames of anti-Western fanaticism that Khomeini fanned in Iran threaten to spread through the volatile crescent of crisis that stretches across the southern flank of the Soviet Union, from the Indian subcontinent to Turkey and southward through the Arabian Peninsula to the Horn of Africa. Most, particularly, the revolution that turned Iran into an Islamic republic whose supreme law is the Koran is undermining the stability of the Middle East, a region that supplies more than half of the Western world's imported oil, a region that stands at the strategic crossroads of superpower competition (*TIME*).

While this certainly illustrates the importance of Islam in this revolution as discussed by Farhi and the means of Islamic networking, and presupposes the oppressive regime instituted by Khomeini, it disappointingly dichotomizes the religious against the West, and only serves to further blur the reality of Iran and Islam in general in the late 1970s. The article focuses mostly upon the impact that the revolution would have on other revolutionary movements in former colonies and the so-called Third World, and upon the economic and political impact felt by the US and other Western(-ized) powers. It fails wholly to analyze the revolution in any meaningful, non-fearmongering manner. In failing to realize the fact that Khomeini was not the only, if even the primary, ideological

mover in mobilizing the Iranian populace, TIME and many like-minded readings of the events would disregard the televised post-secularity of the revolution at the core of the revolution. In a sense, this is what makes the stage of Azadi Plaza so important in my formulation: the Pahlavi regime did not allow for a Western version of democracy to be instituted via ballots cast in a voting booth. Because this was considered the normative manifestation of democracy in the Westernized world, the act of taking to the streets armed with Islamic theology as an underpinning logic fits into Casanova's formulation of the post-secular, while also directly contradicting the formulations of popular democracy in the West. In simple terms, it scared Westerners. However, it constitutes not a return to the pre-Westernized order of Iran as many imply. Rather, it was an attempt to move Iran into a post-Western order, one which had a taste of Western capitalization and realized its flavor was suspect—one which hoped to reconcile the will of the Iranian people with the nobler aspects of Western, secular modernity, manifest in the dialectic architecture of Azadi Tower which appreciated the architecture of times bygone and reconciled modern trends with Islamic ones, symbolizing the compromising nature of idealistic democracy, and the people's natural right to give consent to their governance. At its core, the Islamic Revolution was a means of exploring various manifestations of a post-Western, post-secular, Islamic-inspired state in a method of radical reimagination—a reimagining of the relationship between state, people, and religion; a reimagining of the nature of democracy; a reimagining of the relationship between Islam and the processes of Western secularization; and a reimagining of the mass cultural means of western communication.

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of this essay, the various ideological underpinnings of the Islamic Revolution in Iran have been parsed out, and how those underpinnings played directly into the performance of the revolution itself. But more than that, these ideologies have been fit both in the performance and with the larger theory of the post-secular. This is necessary for two main reasons:

(1) In order to stem the tide of the continually growing disdain between Islam and the West which has only become increasingly tenacious since the events of the Islamic Revolution. While it is imprudent to suggest as some have that this cultural warfare is the inevitable result of civilizational clashes, it should still be taken into account that there certainly is a culture of fear surrounding Islam in the West that is too often the result of ignorant or malicious fearmongering that does nothing to reverse the harmful view of West-as-Self and non-West-as-Other that has caused unthinkable damage in the modern global order. Though I resist bringing current political discourse into scholarship because of its often-fickle nature, one can clearly see that the actions and words employed every day in the West do nothing to bridge the mostly imagined gap between these cultures by those who know not of the other. One can only hope this will reverse.

(2) To recognize the importantly post-secular nature of the Islamic Revolution. Without appreciation for this perspective of the events in Iran in 1978-79, one is guaranteed to succumb to the view of religion, and Islam in particular, as something backwards, anti-secular, and incompatible with modernity. But this is not the case. As implicitly argued in Casanova's formulation of the post-secular, nothing is necessarily and innately incompatible with what we think of as

modernity—except, perhaps, modernity as it has manifested over the course of the past several centuries. What is necessary is not an abolition of religion, but rather a reconciliation between the various religions of the world and the modernizing processes, such that, to once again paraphrase Casanova, each state can decide for itself how the various public spheres interact with each other and the various citizenries.

The post-secularness of the revolution is clear. But there is one particular aspect of the revolution most importantly influenced by this perspective that is often ignored: the literal performance of revolution, particularly in Tehran, transmitted across mass media. What was most exciting about this particular revolutionary moment is that, like all revolutionary moments, it was a physical display of the collective will of a population. But the revolutionary aspects of this revolution—the innovativeness, the newness, the disruption of precedence amongst revolutions—lies in the fact that it was a revolution in the standardized, Western sense that was literally against the very West that invented an uprising of this nature, as well as the veritable hijacking of the Western-dominated media which gave this particular revolution so much dramatic flair. This was a revolution that fundamentally changed the nature of revolutions because of both of these respects, which one would likely miss if they focus only on the Shari'atian and Khomeinian ideologies which influenced these actions, and not at all on the media coverage and the actions of the revolutionaries themselves. This was a revolution not strictly about ideology, but one that was so important in its performance, a performance that requires a more in-depth analysis by those who were there and/or have the capacity and resources to delve into the specific performative aspects of the revolution. This was a revolution in which the ideological underpinnings were more thoroughly imbricated

with the actual performative aspect than any that has come before—partly because of the interaction with the Western(-ized) news media, and partly because of its innately post- (and not anti-) Westernness. This was a revolution which saw the non-West in a critical, dialectic relationship with the West. It is (but not should be) historicized as a xenophobic, anti-American, fanatic illustration of a non-Western country's hatred of the West. It is not (but should be) historicized instead as a moment of religiously-inspired radical reinvention of the spheres of state, religion, and media. It should be thought of alongside the contemporary liberation theologies which try to reconcile religion and modernity, a first attempt which has unfortunately allowed an oppressive theocracy to be instituted in Iran, but a revolutionary aspect which will likely be expanded and improved upon as the wheels of history continue to turn, and the oppression concomitant with the Western institutions of capitalism and secularism—and the over-corrective response to this oppression within the Ayatollah's Iran—continues.

As supported by language from Foucault, a hope for a utopic confluence of Westernization and religion is not wholly unrealizable, though it certainly presumes an outsider's idealism. Per Foucault:

This [revolutionary] drama caused a surprising superimposition to appear in the middle of the twentieth century: a movement strong enough to bring down a seemingly well-armed regime, all the while remaining in touch with the old dreams that were once familiar to the West, when it too wanted to inscribe the figures of spirituality on the ground of politics. (264-5)

Before the rise of modernization, secularization, globalization, and Westernization was a time when the West too had similar goals to those which were central to the Islamic Revolution. This indicates that it is not only the non-West which fits into Casanova's formulation of the post-secular, but that the West itself needs to reevaluate the various spheres it has demarcated and how they are to interact, particularly the unexamined nature of how the very underpinning of their own secularism is rooted in Christianity. Only then can states of all regions and religious persuasions be truly freed from the oppressive realities supportive of and supported by the rise of Western modernization and its forceful, violent, and—above all—unnecessary subversion and marginalization of religions.

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## The Use of Poetry in *Horizon Zero Dawn*

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By Todd O. Williams

### ABSTRACT

The videogame *Horizon Zero Dawn* contains many poems, which enrich the game through their thematic alignment with several of the game's major themes including nature, loss, and coping. More specifically, the poems resonate with the guiding statement the writers of *Horizon* followed by representing "love passed down across generations." Examining selected poems from the game reveals that *Horizon* functions as an elegy providing comfort for both personal and planetary losses.

**Keywords:** *Horizon Zero Dawn*, intertextuality, nature, loss, mourning, coping, poetry.

## El uso de la poesía en *Horizon Zero Dawn*

### RESUMEN

El videojuego *Horizon Zero Dawn* contiene muchos poemas que enriquecen el juego a través de su alineación temática con varios de los temas principales del juego, incluidos la naturaleza, la pérdida y el afrontamiento. Más específicamente, los poemas resuenan con la declaración de orientación que los escritores de *Horizon* siguieron al representar "el amor transmitido de generación en generación". El examen de los poemas seleccionados del juego revela que *Horizon* funciona como una elegía que brinda consuelo tanto para las pérdidas personales como planetarias.

**Palabras clave:** *Horizon Zero Dawn*, intertextualidad, naturaleza, pérdida, duelo, afrontamiento, poesía

**Todd O. Williams** es profesor de inglés en la Universidad de Kutztown de Pensilvania. Ha publicado múltiples artículos sobre pedagogía y autores victorianos. Es autor de los libros *A Therapeutic Approach to Teaching Poetry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) y *Environmental Consciousness de Christina Rossetti* (Routledge, 2019).

## 诗歌在《地平线：零之曙光》中的使用

### 摘要

视频游戏《地平线：零之曙光》里有许多诗歌，这些诗歌通过表达与包括自然、遗失、应对困境在内的几个主要游戏情节相一致的主题，进而升华了游戏体验。更具体地，诗歌通过展现“爱代代相传”，与游戏创作者的导语产生共鸣。通过分析游戏中的部分诗歌，揭示了这部游戏充当挽歌的角色，为个人和世界的遗失提供安慰。

关键词：《地平线：零之曙光》，互文性，自然，遗失，哀伤，应对，诗歌

Todd O. Williams是宾夕法尼亚库茨敦大学英语语言文学教授。他已发表多篇有关教育学和维多利亚时期作家的文章。他是*Therapeutic Approach to Teaching Poetry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)与*Christina Rossetti's Environmental Consciousness* (Routledge, 2019)这两部书的作者。

Winner of the 2018 Writers Guild Award for Best Video Game Writing, *Horizon Zero Dawn* is an exceptionally literary game. Since its release, reviewers have recognized the quality of its narrative and the depth of its story world. Andrea Phillips describes it as “among the freshest, most moving, most topical works of science fiction I’ve seen in years,” and goes on to argue that *Horizon* is a brilliant example of why the Hugo awards should have a games category. Casey Newton writes that the game “satisfied me in the way that a great novel does: compelling me to see the world through fresh eyes, and to reflect on how human nature can lead us both to breathtaking inventions and to ruin.” The game has also been the subject of recent scholarly works in literary journals such as Jesus Fernandez-Caro’s essay in the *MOSF Journal of Science Fiction*, and Janine Tobeck and Donald Jellerson’s article in *Arts*, in which they compare it to William Gibson’s novel *Pattern Recognition*. While the game’s narrative, world, and character development themselves achieve the level of a literary work, *Horizon* contains many works of literature, specifically poetry, within it that enrich the game through their alignment with several of its major themes.

*Horizon*’s protagonist Aloy can discover passages from over thirty different poems as she explores a post-apocalyptic earth 1,000 years in the future looking to recover the secrets of both her own mysterious origins and a history that has been lost to humanity. The vast majority of the poems in the game occur in the Metal Flowers that players can collect throughout the open world, but some are also included in Datapoints and one occurs during a conversation in the game’s DLC addition, *The Frozen Wilds*. These Metal Flowers and Datapoints are collectables that are not essential for the player to complete the game, but collecting them will vastly enhance the gaming experience. The Metal Flowers

are divided into three groups or Marks in the game. Mark I flowers contain Japanese Haiku; Mark II flowers contain poetry from throughout the near and far East; and the Mark III flowers contain British and American poetry from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the focus of this essay. Each Mark has ten flowers listed A through J. The poems and fragments found in the Metal Flowers were selected by Ben McCaw, the game's Lead Writer and now the Narrative Director for the franchise. McCaw describes "nature" as the "primary thematic factor" for choosing the poems, which makes sense in a game that deals with ecological subject matter and contains an elaborate and beautiful visual depiction of natural landscapes. The game's creators also sought poems that covered "secondary themes" such as "war, loss, hope, and motherhood, among others" (McCaw). The poems found in *Horizon* reflect these themes, but also draw attention to their prominence in the game.

Loss stands out as a major secondary theme in *Horizon* and the most relevant to the game's poetry. Aloy is born into a matriarchal tribe called the Nora, but she is an outcast because she has no mother. This lack of a mother becomes an essential factor in her story. She loses her only parental figure, Rost, early in the game. Rost himself lost his wife and daughter to a mysterious band of murderous outsiders. The Nora tribe in general has suffered many recent losses during the Red Raids of the Carja tribe. As the player progresses through the game and its many side-quests, they meet numerous characters from various tribes who have suffered losses, usually at the hands of the previous Carja regime. Aloy's interactions with these characters frequently emphasize the importance of the mourning process and the effect of various coping mechanisms including rituals, beliefs, objects, and memorials.

In many ways, *Horizon* is a work of mourning and many of the game's poems deal specifically with loss and coping. The game blends these individual losses with larger-scale losses just as Aloy's individual mystery quest is tied in with the mystery of the world. The theme of broad environmental loss, for example, looms throughout *Horizon*. Aloy eventually learns that the old world was destroyed by the "Faro plague" when militarized AI robots designed by Ted Faro went rogue and devoured all human, animal, and plant life on earth. The player is encouraged to mourn humanity in the present as it heads toward self-destruction due to a propensity for war and for unchecked consumption of the natural environment. Many of the poems from the Metal Flowers are simply expressions of a poet's appreciation of the natural world, which serves an important function in encouraging the player to contemplate the value of what humanity is losing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition, the poems are also rare artifacts of a human culture that has been almost entirely lost to Aloy's world. In the distant aftermath of complete environmental loss, the humans in *Horizon* struggle to survive a brutal, unadvanced, tribal existence. Thousands of years of human culture leading up to the Faro Plague has been almost entirely wiped out. Yet nature once again thrives largely due to another set of AI robots designed by Elisabet Sobeck to restore and maintain it. Players bear witness to the initial environmental cataclysm, which the natural world was eventually able to recover from, but they also see the cultural loss that comes with it. This cultural loss is evident in the landscape of *Horizon*. Urban areas of the early 2000s have become decayed remnants of buildings and stadiums covered over in plant growth. The game includes the remains of actual landmarks from the Mountain West region of the United States, showing players what the loss, and nature's reclamation, of their world might actual-

ly look like. This creates a visual and visceral experience of mourning similar to what is expressed in many of the game's poems. Yet like most poems of mourning, Aloy's world is not without hope because the heroic and compassionate actions of capable people are shown to make a significant difference.

The game concludes with Aloy saving her world, but along the way she also discovers that she is the clone of Sobeck who managed to restore life on earth at her own sacrifice through Project Zero Dawn. Thus, Sobeck provides a kind of mother to Aloy. The game's tie-ins with motherhood, and mourning and coping through creative acts recall Melanie Klein and Hanna Segal's psychoanalytic theories on art. The primal loss for all human beings is that of separation from the mother at birth where one leaves the perfect union, safety, and provision of the womb. Children and adults alike are always endlessly repairing this severed relationship especially through acts of love lest they fall prey to overwhelming grief or anger. To Klein, the creation of art is among the reparative acts, and creative reparation often occurs as a part of the mourning process (163). Hanna Segal takes Klein's premise further arguing that all works of art are in essence an expression of "this wish to restore and re-create" the primal, maternal relationship (187). The creation of art, according to this theory, is a process of mourning and repairing.

The link between mothers, mourning, and reparative actions, including creating art, arises throughout the game. Aloy lacks a primal relationship with a mother, for which she is cast out by the Nora, and she loses Rost, her stand-in mother, to the Shadow Carja early on in the game's narrative. She is essentially in mourning throughout the entire game and spends much of the game seeking her mother. Aloy's many acts of helping others during her quest are reparative acts done out of love, empathy, and altruism, but that also serve as her way

of coping with loss that might otherwise consume her with negative emotions. Fernandez-Caro argues that “Empathy stands as the key feature that defines Aloy” (51) and that Aloy “regards compassion as the best tool” for her project (54). Lauren Woolbright, likewise, sees the game as having a hopeful message based on Aloy’s “ethics of care.” Aloy’s quest ends not only with her preventing the loss of all life on earth, but with a recovery of her mother/creator, Sobeck, whose story she learns and whose grave she eventually finds. This recovery allows Aloy to cope with a primal lack/loss in herself that she has always experienced.

When McCaw and the game’s Narrative Director John Gonzalez accepted the 2018 Writers Guild Award they dedicated it to their late mothers. Gonzalez said that “[i]t is no coincidence that their sons went on to write an epic with a strong female protagonist, in which human love in general and maternal love in particular loom so large. We learned that from them.” The game itself served as something of a memorial for its creators with the theme of loving reparation highly visible throughout. Sobek does not only serve as a mother for Aloy, her clone, but her heroic act of love for humankind in creating Project Zero Dawn and preventing the total loss of life on earth makes her something of a mother to everyone and everything in Aloy’s future world. Thus, the poetry in the game is often not only about loss, but about hope and recovery. The writers working on *Horizon* used the following statement to guide their writing: “Life prevails over extinction because love passed down across generations is more powerful than any weapon system.” According to McCaw, when choosing poems for the Metal Flowers and elsewhere they “were looking for poems that resonated with that statement.” Many things are lost with time’s passage, but

much remains to compensate. The poems themselves might be viewed as objects of love passed down from previous generations.

With the open-world format of *Horizon*, a player could potentially miss most of the poems even if they were to watch every cut scene. While the poetry is not essential to playing and completing the game, it provides one of several aspects that reward exploring. As Gonzalez explains, “In this game, everything about the ancient world, especially everything that you’re going to find on the main quest, is directly relevant to Aloy’s story.” Andy Harthup writes that

Exploring it doesn’t reveal the world’s secrets, because they’re woven into the fabric of the game—progressing the smart story and actually taking part in the adventure is what opens up *Horizon*’s true beauty, like one of the Metal Flowers you’re tasked with collecting. The more tasks you accept, the more items you collect, the more you allow Aloy to learn about herself, the more meaning is imparted to the rest of the world.

The poems are only one part of the ancient world that Aloy discovers, and she does not spend a lot of time considering their contents and meanings as she is busy saving the world. For the player, however, the poems add another layer of meaning to the game. Along with providing verbal appreciations of nature that complement the game’s digitalized nature aesthetic, the poems also emphasize the roles of mourning and coping in the game.

### “AMAZING GRACE”

In the first playable scenes of *Horizon*, Aloy has fallen into some underground ruins of the Old Ones. These ruins, the player will eventually come to understand, were a sub-facility of Project Zero Dawn where most of the staff ended up committing mass suicide via medical euthanasia to avoid a more violent imminent death at the hands of the approaching Faro Plague machines. Among the eight audio Data-points that can be scanned here is that of Mia Sayled who, as she is dying, half-sings and half-recites the sixth and final verse of the original version of the eighteenth-century hymn “Amazing Grace” by John Newton.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below,  
Will be for ever mine.

(qtd. in Turner 85-86; lines 21-24)

On choosing this verse, McCaw says, “We wanted something that someone might plausibly recite as a kind of prayer.” In this case poetry is used by the NPC as a tool for coping with the grief of her own impending death. In general, *Horizon* is not a pro-religion game. Aloy understandably tends to get annoyed by the religion of both the Nora who cast her out at birth for being “motherless” and the Carja with their history of committing atrocities in the name of their sun deity. Nevertheless, the game does have several moments when religion is shown to provide comfort for people and help them cope. McCaw says of the religious poetry included in the game, “Even though at times *Horizon* attacks religion, especially hypocritical versions of it, we wanted the game to convey a sense of secular spirituality. Aloy is, after all, in many ways a savior. Therefore we were very comfortable with including

poems with religious themes, as long as they weren't overbearing." While religion can lead to division and violence, the religious poetry in the game reminds players that it can also provide meaning and solace.

With its theme of redemption through divine grace and its expression of gratitude to God, "Amazing Grace" has a long history in America, where it is most popular, of providing spiritual comfort in times of difficulty. One prominent example of this occurred only a couple of years before *Horizon* came out when President Obama sang the song's first verse during the eulogy for the Charleston shooting victims. The song was frequently used in the aftermath of 9/11 during the previous decade. The most popular version of the song was released by Judy Collins and made it to #15 on the Billboard charts in 1971. Its mainstream appeal at that time is often attributed to its healing capacity that was welcome during this traumatic time period in American history.

While the song is very popular in America, this sixth verse of "Amazing Grace" from Newton's original 1772 composition has become somewhat obscure. The verse was initially omitted from influential late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth-century hymn collections put together by Ira Sankey and E. O. Excell, respectively. Excell's version of the song includes only the first three original verses and a fourth one that was added in 1852 by Harriet Beecher Stowe in her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—a verse which Stowe adapted from another hymn. Excell's four verse version has remained the standard version of "Amazing Grace." This is the version that Collins sang and made even more popular in the early '70s (Turner 140-145). Interestingly, Newton's verse six was actually also included in the scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where Tom sings "Amazing Grace" as a way to transcend the abuse he suffers

as a slave (Stowe 445). However, according to McCaw, the *Horizon* writers were unaware of this connection.

The writers of *Horizon* were drawn to Newton's sixth verse "precisely because it was more obscure" (McCaw). Newton's largely suppressed sixth verse also fits the apocalyptic theme of the game more closely than what are now the standard verses of the song. In composing this sixth verse, Newton likely drew from the Bible verses 2 Peter 3:11-12: "[T]he heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (KJV). Verse six of "Amazing Grace" is specifically well suited for this moment in the game where Sayled is preparing not just for her own death, but the end of all life on earth due to the Faro Plague. These early Datapoints from the ruins create a sense of mystery in the game as the player and Aloy learn that something catastrophic has happened to the Old Ones, but they don't know what. The Sayled Datapoint works particularly well here because culturally "Amazing Grace" has been accepted as a reference for personal coping with death and tragedy, but also because the rarely used sixth verse correlates to the apocalyptic storyline that is slowly revealed as the player progresses further in the game.

### LONGFELLOW AND DICKINSON

As circumstances have it, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ended up being the most prominently featured poet in *Horizon* with three poems included. While he was the most famous American poet of his day, his critical reputation has suffered since and he is now overshadowed by figures like Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. The two Metal Flowers containing Longfellow's "Flowers" and "Na-

ture” were actually originally intended to contain two Emily Dickinson poems. McCaw explains that when “there were issues with publishing rights,” the Dickinson poems were removed and “the Longfellow Metal Flower poems were added at that point.”

The Mark III G Metal Flower contains Longfellow’s “Flowers,” an early poem written in 1837 and published in his first volume, *Voices of the Night*. Though, one would hardly recognize it as a love poem, “Flowers” was originally presented as a gift for Francis Appleton, who would eventually become Longfellow’s wife in 1843. The poem takes its premise from an analogy that the famous German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe made about flowers being the stars of the earth. Longfellow writes of “When he [Goethe] called the flowers, so blue and golden,/Stars, that in earth’s firmament do shine” (lines 3-4). Longfellow claims that people can read the flowers much like astrologers read the stars. Of flowers he says,

Stars they are, wherein we read our history,  
As astrologers and seers of eld;  
Yet not wrapped about with awful mystery,  
Like the burning stars, which they beheld.  
(lines 5-8)

Common people, according to Longfellow, can find evidence of a divine creator and of that creator’s love for humanity by looking to the natural world and reading the flowers.

Wondrous truths, and manifold as wondrous,  
God hath written in those stars above;  
But not less in the bright flowerets under us  
Stands the revelation of his love. (lines 9-12)

Humans from various cultures are accustomed to looking to the sky and the heavens as symbols of divinity. Longfellow

argues that we need not look any further than the earth itself. Flowers and all of the natural world contain evidence of the divine. This serves as another poetic example in the game of finding comfort through faith, but also sets up a contrast between finding the divine in the earth, like the matriarchal Nora tribe, versus in the sky, like the patriarchal Carja—a gendered division among religions that ecofeminists like Rosemary Radford Ruether have noted.

The Metal Flower only contains these first three verses of “Flowers” out of fifteen total. Longfellow goes on in the poem to discuss how “the Poet, faithful and far-seeing” (line 17) recognizes a common divinity between the flowers and humankind. He begins to anthropomorphize the flowers and attribute desire and wishes to them that he sees in himself. Longfellow discusses the ubiquity of flowers showing how they are found in different seasons and different places. The final three stanzas of the poem resonate with other themes from *Horizon*. Here Longfellow writes of flowers that “Speaking of the Past unto the Present,/Tell us of the ancient Games of Flowers” (lines 63-64). This specifically references the Olympic games of ancient times, but it ties in with the way the natural world of *Horizon* contains remnants of a past civilization, and how elements of nature, like flowers, provide a common connection between the past and the present. In the post-apocalyptic world, nature remains fundamentally unchanged. Flowers become, as Longfellow concludes the poem, “Emblems of our own great resurrection,/Emblems of the bright and better land” (lines 71-72). They point to a power beyond that of humanity, but one that humans can find hope in.

There is also a potential tie in with Sobeck in these final verses of the poem as she is, in a sense, resurrected as Aloy.

Sobeck's grave, which Aloy discovers during the game's epilogue, is surrounded by the same triangular pattern of flowers that surround each of the Metal Flowers. The triangle has traditionally been used in Christianity as a symbol of the Holy Trinity. Some fan theories on *Horizon* have speculated that the triangle may represent a kind of Holy Trinity within the *Horizon* universe where Sobeck would be the creator/father (or mother in this case). Aloy would be the son/daughter who acts as savior to the world. GAIA, the AI system of Project Zero Dawn, finally, would be the holy spirit. The game's writers appear to be aware of this dynamic. McCaw refers to Aloy as a savior (see above) and Sobeck is named after an Egyptian crocodile god of the Nile river.

"Flowers" is an unambiguously religious poem. Yet, *Horizon* has a complicated relationship with religion at best. Perhaps this is why the game includes another Longfellow poem in the Mark III A Metal Flower that provides something of a counter to the unquestioning faith expressed in "Flowers." Longfellow's sonnet simply entitled "Nature" was composed much later in his career. Written in 1876, when he was much closer to death, "Nature" is often considered a farewell poem in the tradition of Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" (see below). However, in contrast to Tennyson's self-elegy and to "Flowers," "Nature" views the prospect of an afterlife with uncertainty instead of faith.

The sonnet's octave opens with the image of a mother leading a child to bed at night. The child has broken some of their toys. As he goes to bed, the child remains unsure if the broken toys will be replaced by toys that he will like as much.

As a fond mother, when the day is o'er  
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,

Half willing, half reluctant to be led,  
And leaves his broken playthings on the floor,  
Still gazing at them through the open door,  
Nor wholly reassured and comforted  
By the promises of others in their stead,  
Which, though more splendid, may not  
please him more[.] (lines 1-8)

Sonnets traditionally have a turn, or volta, which typically begins the final sestet of the fourteen-line poem. In his sestet, Longfellow turns from the maternal image—appropriate to *Horizon's* recurring theme of motherhood—to an analogous contemplation of nature. Here, he is not so much referring to the natural world of flora and fauna as he is contemplating the nature of life and death.

So Nature deals with us, and takes away  
Our playthings one by one, and by the hand  
Leads us to rest so gently, that we go  
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,  
Being too full of sleep to understand  
How far the unknown transcends the what  
we know. (lines 9-14)

Like the child with the broken toys being led to bed by his mother, humans are led to the end of our lives by the laws of nature. As the child remains uncertain if the toys will be replaced by something preferable, people likewise cannot be sure if they will find recompense for the suffering and loss they experience in life, including the loss of life itself. Whereas “Flowers” is an expression of faith enhanced by evidence provided by nature, “Nature” is about the mystery of existence and points to the inadequacy of religion to provide absolute answers about what happens to people when they

die. The combination of these two poems by the same author suggest an ambiguity about spiritual matters similar to that found in *Horizon*.

According to McCaw, the Dickinson poems that were originally going to be used were the ones beginning “As imperceptibly as grief” and “To my quick ears the leaves conferred.” Like the Longfellow poems that ultimately replaced them, these poems set up a contrast where one is somewhat hopeful while the other is ambiguous at best. However, the Dickinson poems carry an internal consistency that would have brought something different to the game.

Written around 1865, “As imperceptibly as grief” personifies nature to create an elegy for summer and, by analogy, the speaker’s happiness and possibly also her life. The poem fits with *Horizon’s* themes of change occurring over time’s passage and the grief that often accompanies that change. Dickinson often wrote about nature’s cycles and transitions, especially to speculate on time and the eternal. The *Horizon* writers planned to include the following verses taken from Thomas Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd’s original 1890 edition of Dickinson’s poetry:<sup>1</sup>

As imperceptibly as grief  
The summer lapsed away,—  
Too imperceptible, at last,  
To seem like perfidy.  
  
A quietness distilled,  
As twilight long begun,  
Or Nature, spending with herself  
Sequestered afternoon.  
  
The dusk drew earlier in,  
The morning foreign shone,—

A courteous, yet harrowing grace,  
As guest who would be gone. (lines 1-12)

The poem contains imagery of the season passing and of the day coming to a close. Thus far the tone of the poem remains fairly ambiguous, particularly due to the juxtaposition of “courteous” and “harrowing.” Dickinson presents a sense of nature’s greatness and grandeur. Nature here is neither good nor evil, but indifferent in its ever-changing state. The writers of *Horizon* did not intend to include the fourth and final verse of the poem, which offers a positive final image in the face of grief:

And thus, without a wing,  
Or service of a keel,  
Our summer made her light escape  
Into the beautiful. (lines 13-16)

The wings and the keel where the wing muscles attach are the parts of a bird’s anatomy that enable flight. Even lacking these things, summer was presumably able to soar and transcend into something beautiful. While less overtly hopeful and optimistic than Longfellow’s “Flowers,” the ending of Dickinson’s poem appears to symbolize some form of heavenly or at least aesthetic transcendence at the end of life or in the midst of grief, but, again, this verse was not to be included in *Horizon*.

Likely composed about a year earlier, “To my quick ear” offers no such image of beauty. *Horizon*’s writers intended to include this two-verse poem in its entirety.

To my quick ear the leaves conferred;  
The bushes they were bells;  
I could not find a privacy  
From Nature’s sentinels.

In cave if I presumed to hide,  
The walls began to tell;  
Creation seemed a mighty crack  
To make me visible. (lines 1-8)

This poem does not question an afterlife like Longfellow's "Nature," but only shows that one

cannot escape from the sound or view of ubiquitous nature—or, presumably, from its laws, including death. As with Longfellow's poem, nature in "To my quick ears" refuses to offer any assurances—romantic or religious. Likewise, "As imperceptibly as grief" presented as it would have been in *Horizon* with the final transcendent verse omitted displays a view of nature and its activity as simply ever present, not seeking humans, but unavoidably enveloping human existence. The game writers' elision of this verse implies that they wished to use Dickinson to portray an image of nature's overwhelming greatness and power, which contrasts the smallness of humankind. Several of the poems included in *Horizon* consider this contrast between human history and the much broader natural history. And yet, in the game humans do both destroy and then restore all of nature on earth. We can affect nature, but nature also follows its own path without us.

The one Longfellow poem that the game's writers did originally intend to include, "The Building of the Ship," occurs among the Datapoints found in GAIA Prime during The Mountain that Fell main quest. This Datapoint contains Sobeck's journal entry for 7-16-65, in which she mentions having received a message from the leader of Far Zenith that their Odyssey, a space colony meant to reestablish humanity on another planet, had launched. Sobeck records that she forwarded the message to the Alphas, the lead designers and im-

plementers of Zero Dawn, and received a reply from Naoto, the Alpha in charge of the terraforming system, DEMETER. Naoto is a lover of poetry and responds to Sobeck's message about the Odyssey with presumably the entire Longfellow poem. Sobeck says of the poem,

it's loooong, all right. I didn't read all of it, but it seems to be about launching a ship, rather than building one. This stanza (or couplet, or whatever) leapt out at me:

Humanity with all its fears,  
With all its hope of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!

Yeah, Odyssey and Zero Dawn both. Speaking of which, I should get back to ZD. Guess I should stop by Naoto's lab and check on DEMETER's progress, too. If I can get out of there without a volume of Tennyson pressed into my hands, I'll count myself lucky.<sup>2</sup>

Among other things, this Datapoint provides some explanation about the origin of the Metal Flowers. McCaw explains,

The idea behind the flowers is that the programmer behind the DEMETER subordinate function of GAIA collects nature poetry, and so the AI honors her by inserting poems into the Metal Flowers. We used the stanza from "The Building of the Ship" because it seemed to fit so well with the concept of the Odyssey/Far Zenith. We also hoped that data point would provide

a clue about the origin of the poems in the Metal Flowers.

Players learn more about these origins in a few other places. In her conversation with the AI CYAN in the *Frozen Wilds* DLC, Aloy mentions the Metal Flowers that have poems coded in them. CYAN suggests that the creator of the flowers is one of the terraforming subfunctions of GAIA. The player learns from the Carja Merchant Kudiv in the Carja capital of Meridian that the Metal Flowers began to appear around the same time as the Derangement when GAIA self-destructed and her subordinate functions became independent. CYAN suggests, “The presence of foliage leads me to consider the terraforming system[.] ... Maybe one whose purview is flora.” This would, of course, be the system DEMETER. CYAN tells Aloy that the only way the poetry “could have made it into such a system is through its programmer.” CYAN’s own programmer, Dr. Sandoval, “uploaded a great deal of literature to test [CYAN’s] emotional responses.” Perhaps GAIA was uploaded with poetry by Sobeck for the same purpose, or, perhaps the poetry was directly uploaded to DEMETER by Naoto.

The lines from “The Building of the Ship” that Sobeck makes note of do indeed fit extremely well with the concept of the Odyssey in *Horizon*. However, they have some relevant historical significance, as well. Longfellow’s most noteworthy topical poem, “The Building of the Ship” was written in 1849 as an allegory about an America that was heading toward a Civil War, which would actually occur a dozen years later. The ship of the poem’s title is called The Union. Built of wood from both Maine and Georgia, it is clearly meant to represent the union of the states that make up America. During his presidency, Abraham Lincoln once quoted these same

lines of Longfellow's that Sobeck mentions. Apparently, he was so moved by them he wept and praised Longfellow, "It is a wonderful gift to be able to stir men like that!" (Dana 213). Decades later, President Roosevelt sent these lines to Winston Churchill during World War II. Churchill was so inspired by them that he had them framed and he read the poem over the radio for inspirational purposes (Dana 214; Shribman). While the poem's context does not specifically match the situation in *Horizon*—it is not a civil war and there is actually more at stake than maintaining a unified nation—these lines excerpted from Longfellow's poem have been evoked in times of great historical challenges to humanity. Trying to preserve our species in the face of the Faro Plague certainly qualifies.

### THOREAU

While Henry David Thoreau never established himself among the great American poets, he is without a doubt the American writer who is most associated with nature writing, so it is not surprising to find his works within the Metal Flowers. He is best known for his Transcendentalist prose masterpiece *Walden*, based on the two years he spent from 1845 to 1847 living alone in the woods at Walden pond in his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts. The two poems by Thoreau found in Metal Flowers Mark III B and H, however, come from his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, published in 1849. Mostly composed during the time he lived at Walden, *A Week* describes a journey that Thoreau took with his beloved brother, John, up the Merrimack river to the White Mountains of New Hampshire during the summer of 1839. Thoreau's biographer Laura Dassow Walls describes their trip as the "adventure of a lifetime" (102). Tragically, John would die of lockjaw in Thoreau's arms a few years later in January of 1842. A

*Week* was written largely as a memorial to John. The writers of *Horizon* found the book's function as a memorial "appealing in light of the game's thematic focus on loss" (McCaw). The theme of loss expressed through imagery of nature and time runs throughout both *Horizon* and *A Week*.

The way Thoreau approaches the landscape in *A Week* is similar to the way Aloy must approach it—to uncover the mysteries of the world and her role in it. *A Week* is not a straightforward travel journal but a hybrid text with many digressions. The actual trip Thoreau took with his brother, in fact, took two weeks, which were condensed into one, so the book's purpose is clearly not accuracy. Linck Johnson writes that the "voyage is less the subject of the book than the occasion for an extended meditation on the flux of time and the ever-flowing rivers" (xvi). One of the things that Thoreau was most interested in was the changes in the land that took place over time especially as Native American culture was overtaken by the industrialism of the white settler colonizers, or as technology and industry were encroaching on the natural habitat. Elizabeth Hall Whitherell explains Thoreau's writing strategy: "Typically, the identification of a particular site triggers an exploration of its history or of associations it evokes ... [.] These journeys of the imagination are undertaken both to explore man's nature ... and to demonstrate the timelessness at the heart of change, the eternal cycle underlying the ever-shifting appearances of the physical world" (x). Like Aloy and others in *Horizon*, Thoreau seeks to better understand the present through the history of the land, which he learns through books, but more importantly, through observation.

Both *Horizon* and *A Week* demonstrate how humankind constantly interacts with and leaves its mark on the natural world. Furthermore, both texts show how humans read the physical

remains of the past in our surroundings and try to make sense of them. In *Horizon*, this is sometimes through mythologizing such as when the Nora view the Eleuthia-9 ruin as their All-Mother who defeated the Metal Devil, which is actually the remnant of one of Faro's Horus Titan machines. During the Wednesday chapter of *A Week*, Thoreau goes into a long discussion of ancient ruins where he includes a remarkable 14-line poem that says of the natural landscape, "This is my Carnac" (line 1). He points to flowers blooming and sees "the spirit of time" in them, in "This present day" (lines 8-9).

Three thousand year ago are not agone,  
They are still lingering in the summer morn,  
And Memnon's Mother sprightly greets us now,  
Wearing her youthful radiance on her brow.  
(252; lines 9-12)

The ancient Greek goddess of the dawn still arises every morning in the present day. As with *Project Zero Dawn*, the earth is ever renewed. Thoreau's lines express how the natural world of today is essentially that of the past, and how nature can connect people with and teach them about the past in the same way that ancient ruins do. This poem would have fit in well among the Metal Flowers.

The way poetry is used in *Horizon* is also similar to how Thoreau uses and discusses it in *A Week*. Thoreau's original poems and poems by others are presented as supplements to the main text often to reiterate something discussed in the prose, much like the Metal Flowers are not integral to the main story of *Horizon* but reiterate its themes and tone. More relevant are Thoreau's discussions of poetry. Brian Gazaille has demonstrated how Thoreau makes comparisons between physical relics and poems in *A Week*, "a technique that compels readers to unearth both material wrecks and literary

relics from the body of Thoreau's text—to assert deeper correspondences between them” (454). Past poets describing nature or presenting truths throughout history provide relics from the past that remain relevant in the present. Gazaille explains, “Thoreau's explicit comparisons of poetic and natural antiquities suggest that just as nature integrates decomposing matter into other organisms and geological structures, *A Week* absorbs and presents in new forms pieces of the literary past” (477). One could replace *A Week* in that last phrase with *Horizon* as the game presents poems of the past within an entirely new context within which players are to consider them. Gazaille writes of *A Week*, “The book's intertextuality thus encourages readers to assemble fragments that have lost their original luster to the corrosive effects of time ... [.] Thoreau hopes that the creative readers of today will make the ‘skeletons’ of perennial truths acquire new ‘flesh and blood’ in the present” (478). Thoreau writes in the Sunday chapter, “Indeed, the best books have a use like sticks and stones, which is above or beside their design ... [.] Even Virgil's poetry serves a very different use to me to-day from what it did to his contemporaries” (90). Likewise, the intertextual strategy through which *Horizon* presents poetry and recontextualizes it within the game demonstrates that relics, including literary relics, can both provide a connection to the past and take on new relevance within the present or, in the case of the game, within an imagined future. In this way, both *A Week* and *Horizon* demonstrate the vitality of poetry by linking it with time and nature.

Thoreau's focus on time and nature in *A Week* is also consistent with his elegiac tone. Around the same time that his brother John died, Thoreau's friend Ralph Waldo Emerson lost his son Waldo Jr. to scarlet fever. In a letter to Emerson on that occasion, Thoreau writes “Nature ... finds her own

again under new forms without loss[.] ... Every blade in the field—every leaf in the forest—lays down its life in its season as beautifully as it was taken up” (qtd. in Walls 130). Similarly, in the final, Friday chapter of *A Week*, he writes, “There is something even in the lapse of time by which time recovers itself” (351). Thoreau takes comfort in the way nature connects the past, present, and future by always renewing itself as he copes with the loss of his brother. Johnson describes *A Week* as “an ambitious pastoral elegy in which [Thoreau] sought to assuage his grief over the death of his brother John, a traumatic loss that informs Thoreau’s meditations on transience and permanence and helps to account for the various patterns of growth, decay, and renewal elaborated in *A Week*” (xix). In *Horizon*, players mourn the loss of the old earth, but also bear witness to a beautiful, albeit dangerous, new world that has recovered itself. Here, as in the pastoral elegy, the loss and renewal of nature over time provides a way of understanding and coping with individual losses.

While it is extraordinary how well *A Week* parallels *Horizon* with Aloy’s discovery of the past, the game’s elegiac tone, and its intertextual use of poetry, the two poems selected for the Metal Flowers do not emphasize any of these things. *Horizon*’s invocation of *A Week* is perhaps more interesting than the actual poetry excerpts selected. The Mark III H poetic excerpt, which comes from the second chapter of *A Week*, the Sunday chapter, is a love poem that Thoreau wrote for Mary Russell. Russell was a friend of the Emersons. Thoreau met her in 1841 and later that year sent her a poem entitled “To the Maiden in the East” in a letter. It was published the following year in the short-lived Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*. Nothing romantic came of Thoreau’s flirtation with Russell; they remained friends and she married someone else a few years later in 1846.

The poem occurs, somewhat awkwardly, in *A Week* during the morning of the second day of the brothers' journey. They awaken to experience a moment of profound spirituality in nature on this Sunday morning. Thoreau writes, "The stillness was intense and almost conscious, as if it were a natural Sabbath, and we fancied that the morning was the evening of a celestial day" (46). Spiritual nature is favorably contrasted here with Christianity on this sabbath morning. Thoreau expresses the wish that all of life could be as "impressive" as this moment. Then, through some associative logic, he comes to mention a maiden who once sailed in his boat and says that the evening stars "seem but this maiden's emissaries and reporters of her progress" (47). Here the poem occurs in *A Week* without its title. *Horizon* includes only the first verse of this six-verse poem.

Low in the eastern sky  
 Is set thy glancing eye;  
 And though its gracious light  
 Ne'er riseth to my sight,  
 Yet every star that climbs  
 Above the gnarled limbs  
                     Of yonder hill,  
 Conveys thy gentle will. (47; lines 1-8)

The eye in the sky appears to be a combination of the rising sun and Russell's gaze. Though they are separated, Thoreau finds a connection between himself and Russell across space through nature.<sup>3</sup> Thoreau's tone in the poem is one of resignation over his unrequited love rather than one of wooing. He receives her "gentle will" toward him even though the "gracious light" of her gaze does not rise to his sight. The remainder of the poem continues with this expression of mutual goodwill rather than the pain of unrequited love. The wind

brings “Thy kindest wishes, through./As mine they bear to you” (lines 11-12). As the poem concludes, the speaker will contentedly continue on his journey as if she were with him and for her sake. Other than including nature imagery and some imagery of traveling by boat at the end, the connection to the broader narrative of *A Week* is rather weak, but such digressions and rough transitions are typical of Thoreau’s first book. The poem is followed by Thoreau shifting somewhat abruptly to his thoughts on the reflective quality of the water they are traveling on. How the poem as a whole fits with *Horizon* is questionable, but taken out of context the opening verse does contain imagery of a horizon and love conveyed across space if not across time.

Metal Flower Mark III B contains the seventh and eighth out of ten verses from a poem Thoreau includes fairly early on in the penultimate Thursday chapter of *A Week*. In this chapter the two brothers reach their destination of Concord, New Hampshire and ascend Mount Washington, the goal of the journey, before returning home to Concord, Massachusetts. The transition from prose text to poem is much smoother here. The brothers awaken to a rainy morning. This leads Thoreau to discuss his appreciation of nature, the rain in particular, and compare it favorably to book learning. He writes, “A day passed in the society of those Greek sages, such as described in the Banquet of Xenophon, would not be comparable with the dry wit of decayed cranberry vines, and the fresh Attic salt of the moss-beds” (300). As he sits in the rain he asks, “What were the amusements of the drawing room and the library in comparison, if we had them here?” (301). This is followed by a poem dealing with this exact topic.

In the first half of the poem the speaker passes on reading Homer, Shakespeare, and Plutarch while he sits in the

rain. The second half of the poem shifts to a description of surrounding nature during the rain. *Horizon* includes the following verses:

And now the cordial clouds have shut all in,  
And gently swells the wind to say all's well,  
The scattered drops are falling fast and thin,  
Some in the pool, some in the flower-bell.

I am well drenched upon my bed of oats;  
But see that globe come rolling down its stem,  
Now like a lonely planet there it floats,  
And now it sinks into my garment's hem.  
(302; lines 25-32)

The simile of the water dropping from the flower onto his clothes like a lonely planet captures nature at both its micro and macro levels. This poem is primarily a straightforward appreciation of nature. The final two remaining verses describe how the speaker, Thoreau, prefers the rain to the sun. There remains something of the elegiac here, however. Thoreau was very aware of his rapidly changing world. He laments shortly after this poem, "This generation has come into the world fatally late for some enterprises. Go where we will on the *surface* of things, men have been there before us" (303). Walls describes *A Week* as not only an elegy for John, but "for the world they'd shared together, which was swiftly passing away" (196). In the context of *A Week* and *Horizon*, poems of simple environmental appreciation implicitly express mourning for what humanity has lost of the earth and what they are currently in the process of losing.

### VICTORIAN ELEGIAC

**D**uring her conversation with CYAN, the AI that Aloy rescues in *The Frozen Wilds*, Aloy mentions the poems she's found encoded within the Metal Flowers. CYAN responds by reciting verses from a favorite poem of hers:

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar. (lines 9-12)

Students of Victorian poetry will quickly recognize this as the ending of Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar." Tennyson was largely known for mastering the genre of elegy with his most famous poem being the extensive elegy for his childhood friend Arthur Hallam, *In Memoriam A. H. H.* He wrote "Crossing the Bar" in 1889 as a kind of self-elegy after recovering from a severe rheumatoid illness earlier that year; though, he would live for three more years after its completion. While Tennyson at times questions the afterlife and even expresses despair in his elegiac writings, this poem portrays a faithful, serene Tennyson ready to peacefully leave the world. Upon hearing "Crossing the Bar," Tennyson's son Hallam reportedly said, "That is the crown of your life's work" (Ricks 295). This was not the last poem Tennyson wrote, but it is always the last poem in any edition of Tennyson's collected poetry as per his deathbed request.

"Crossing the Bar" relies on a metaphor where death is conceptualized as a journey out to sea. The poem's title refers to

leaving a harbor. CYAN omits the first two verses of the poem where Tennyson essentially wishes to feel content during his time of dying, envisioning it as a return home. In the final verse, he wishes for no sadness and expresses the desire, the hope, to meet God. CYAN clearly does not have any spiritual beliefs, but perhaps she likes these verses because she misses her original ‘Pilot’ or programmer, Dr. Sandoval, from whom she has been separated for hundreds of years. Perhaps it is because her own existence as a sophisticated AI had recently been threatened by HEPHESTUS. CYAN also expresses grief for the loss of Ourea, the character who sacrificed herself to free CYAN.

The other Tennyson poem from *Horizon* appears in the Mark III F Metal Flower. It is a far less famous poem than “Crossing the Bar,” but “A Farewell” has a similar self-elegiac tone and similar sea imagery; though, it was written much earlier in his career. The poem was published in Tennyson’s 1842 edition but was likely written several years before. Tennyson certainly would have had Arthur Hallam’s 1833 death in mind when he wrote this poem. One likely date for the poem would be 1837 when Tennyson was moving from, or saying farewell to, his home in Somersby. The imagery of “A Farewell” suggests the brooks around Somersby that recur throughout Tennyson’s poetry.<sup>4</sup> McCaw says of the poem: “‘A Farewell’ fit perfectly with our themes of loss and love, especially over the passage of time.” The Metal Flower contains only the final three of the poem’s four verses. The poem in its entirety reads,

Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,  
Thy tribute wave deliver;  
No more by thee my steps shall be,  
For ever and for ever.

Flow, softly flow, by lawn and lea,  
A rivulet, then a river;  
Nowhere by thee my steps shall be,  
For ever and for ever.

But here will sigh thine alder-tree,  
And here thine aspen shiver;  
And here by thee will hum the bee,  
For ever and for ever.

A thousand suns will stream on thee,  
A thousand moons will quiver;  
But not by thee my steps shall be,  
For ever and for ever. (lines 1-16)

“A Farewell” lacks the hopefulness of “Crossing the Bar.” Death is presented here in a very matter-of-fact manner. The poem reflects on the limits of a human life in comparison with the rest of the natural world. When the speaker is dead and gone, the rivulet, the river, the sea; along with the grass, the trees, and the insects, will continue on for many years. That is, unless they are all devoured by something like the Faro Plague. Even then, as the final verse reminds readers, the sun and moon will continue for millions of more years, though human life is brief and fleeting. Of course, in our contemporary era of environmental destruction, humans are beginning to realize that the natural world itself cannot be taken for granted. The poem speaks to the way the natural world has a past and a future that goes far beyond one human being’s existence, which is a major theme of *Horizon*.

Another Victorian poem that fits these themes and uses similar imagery can be found in the Mark III C Metal Flower. George Meredith’s “Dirge in the Woods” comes from his

1888 volume *A Reading of Earth*. Meredith is best known as a novelist and for his long poem *Modern Love*, which portrays the end of a marriage, but he turned largely to nature poetry later in his career. McCaw cites “Dirge in the Woods” as one of his two favorite poems from the game. His other favorite was Basho Matsuo’s short, haiku-style poem from Mark I—“Summer Grasses:/ all that remains/ of soldier’s dreams”—which, McCaw says, “perfectly conveys our vision of a post-apocalyptic world reclaimed by nature—and does so in only eight words!” Meredith’s poem, likewise, conveys nature’s resilience in displaying how, by design, death can clear the way for later life to flourish. The death associated with the Faro Plague devastated the earth, but we see how Project Zero Dawn was able to reset the natural world in response. “Dirge in the Woods” shows not only that nature reclaims the earth, as does the Matsuo poem, but it shows the natural process of how this reclamation occurs.

“Dirge in the Woods” is included in its entirety in *Horizon*:

A Wind sways the pines,  
And below  
Not a breath of wild air;  
Still as the mosses that glow  
On the flooring and over the lines  
Of the roots here and there.  
The pine-tree drops its dead;  
They are quiet, as under the sea.  
Overhead, overhead  
Rushes life in a race,  
As the clouds the clouds chase;  
And we go,  
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,

Even we,  
Even so. (lines 1-15)

Meredith's poem carries a similar stark tone about death as several other poems from *Horizon*. In its natural setting, the wind and the clouds overhead are both representative of life, but the wind also acts as a force of death causing the pine trees to drop their dead branches and cones to the still ground. Likewise, the indifferent forces of life and death will eventually lead to our demise as individual humans. Renate Muendel explains, "human transience is part of the same large process that makes the tree quietly release its fruit" (35). There is a glimmer of hope in this poem since the seeds that fall from the pines may grow into new trees. Individual lives end, a simple truth, but nature has a way of reproducing itself as we see in the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Horizon*.

One final Victorian poem is found in Metal Flower Mark III D: Charlotte Brontë's "Life." Surprisingly, for such a pro-feminist game, this is the only one of all of the Metal Flowers poems that was written by a woman.<sup>5</sup> Charlotte was the eldest of the three Brontë sisters. While she is most well known for her novel *Jane Eyre*, she also wrote poetry originally under the pseudonym Currer Bell. Her poem "Life" deals specifically with themes of death and coping. Though, one might not grasp this based on the excerpt included in the game. *Horizon* only reproduces the first eight of the poem's twenty-four lines:

Life, believe, is not a dream  
So dark as sages say;  
Oft a little morning rain  
Foretells a pleasant day.  
Sometimes there are clouds of gloom,

But these are transient all;  
 If the shower will make the roses bloom,  
 O why lament its fall? (lines 1-8)

This excerpt captures the idea of constant change occurring in nature. It offers a generally positive take on these changes as the rain and clouds will move on and nourish the flowers that will eventually bloom. Later lines in the poem make the theme of death more overt by asking, “What though Death at times steps in,/And calls our Best away?” (lines 13-14). The poem provides comfort to the bereaved by showing that death and sorrow are a part of life—part of the natural order of things. Loss and grief are always there, “Yet Hope again elastic springs” (line 17). The later verses of the poem, not included in the game, contain a contemplation of death like the other two Victorian poems from the *Metal Flowers*. Brontë’s poem, however, takes a more hopeful and courageous approach to the subject by emphasizing positive aspects of life.

While the casual player might only recognize the poems within *Horizon* as simple pieces of nature poetry, the writers’ intertextual use of poems can greatly enrich the game’s treatment of several key themes—loss and coping being the most prominent. The nature poems from *Horizon* emphasize the guiding principle for the game’s writers that life prevails because of “love passed down across generations.” Nature itself links human beings to all of the human life lived before, even if, like those in Aloy’s world, they are otherwise cut off from their history. Poetry also connects people to the past lives of others who have experienced loss and beauty and everything else life offers. This connection to all of life and all of creation can help people cope as they inevitably face losses throughout their lives like so many characters in *Horizon* do. The game’s inclusion of poetry enables players to fully appreciate

*Horizon* as an elegy—a story about the loss of our planet and about many personal losses, but also providing the comfort of imagining that nature and humanity will survive as long as people have love for them and the courage to persevere.

*My deepest gratitude to Guerrilla Games and to Ben McCaw, in particular, for taking the time to answer my questions about the use of poetry in the game.*

#### NOTES

- 1 Harvard UP controls permissions to Dickinson's work. However, the versions of Dickinson's poetry from the Todd and Higginson edition are now in the public domain according to the Emily Dickinson Museum's webpage.
- 2 With all of her intelligence, it is difficult to accept that Sobeck wouldn't be able to figure out that the stanza above was obviously not a couplet. It is also strange that she would have read up to these lines, which are nearly at the end of this fairly long poem, without just finishing it.
- 3 This is somewhat problematic within the narrative of *A Week* as Thoreau had not met Russell at the time of his journey so he could not have been thinking of her in the actual moment.
- 4 See, for example, "The Brook," "Ode to Memory," and parts of *In Memoriam*.
- 5 Regarding this, McCaw explains, "I wanted to use more female poets, especially Dickinson, but we were limited because we could only use work in the public domain. This factor made it impossible to use more recent poetry in general."

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