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—ESTRANGED REALITIES—

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The Harbour is a bi-yearly, blind peer-reviewed graduate students journal launched by the English Graduate Students' Society (EGSS) at the Université de Montréal in 2020. Its purpose is to promote the diffusion of the work of students from Canadian and international universities on literature and other cultural productions and the role they play in a variety of cultural imaginaries. Each student contributing to the operations of the journal has specialized knowledge in specific fields such as Post-Colonial studies, Canadian studies, Indigenous studies, popular culture studies, and others. This offers diverse approaches in the journal's editorial vision throughout all of the journal's issues.

Université de Montréal is situated on land where, long before the arrival of the French, people of many Indigenous nations came together and interacted. We wish to acknowledge these nations, their descendants and the spirit of fraternity that presided over the signing in 1701 of the Great Peace of Montreal, a treaty that fostered peaceful relationships between France, its Indigenous allies and the Haudenosaunee federation (pronunciation: O-di-no-sho-ni). The spirit of fraternity that inspired this treaty serves as a model for our own university community.

English Graduate Students' Society
3150 rue Jean-Brillant
Montreal, Qc., Canada, H3T 1N7

https://udemegss.wordpress.com/

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Journal design & layout by Ashley-Marie Maxwell

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Estranged Realities

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Editors' Introduction

The Harbour

—Estranged Realities—

We are thrilled to introduce *The Harbour*: a biannual, peer-reviewed journal run by graduate students in English Studies at the Université de Montréal. The title of our journal was chosen to reflect our mission: to create a safe literary space for different perspectives and ideas to come together. Our first issue, *Estranged Realities*, was inspired by the theme of our department's 2020 conference and presents five essays on a variety of subjects that touch on estrangement. In addition, we are pleased to include an interview with acquisitions editor, Ashley Hearn. In line with our mission to bring in different perspectives, we wanted to explore and introduce students to potential literary careers outside the world of academia. Ashley's interview proves insightful to anyone interested in the field of publishing or becoming an author.

Hauntology serves as the main theme that struck inspiration for most contributors; and each author offers a unique perspective on the topic. To start, Ariane Legault focuses on Laura Oldfield Ford's work *Savage Messiah*, which explores London through the frame of the rejected. By using the theories of edgework, waste studies and hauntology to structure her work, Ariane Legault creates a compelling case for those who were rendered ghosts through gentrification, and how such individuals still have agency through resistance. Next, Patrick Aura, our resident Canadian Literature enthusiast, studies Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger*. The essay analyses how the villagers are haunted by ghosts, of both the past and future, and reveals the anxieties of a new Canadian nation-state. It identifies Canada as a contradictory place that must face up to these ghosts and possible futures. We then dive into the world of cinema with Suzy Woltman's analysis of Robert Mitchell's film *It Follows*. A film not beholden to traditional tropes, this postmodern horror plays with the relationship society has with reality by developing its narrative through uncertainty. Suzy Woltman argues that *It Follows* defies horror tropes by analysing how it structures its plot through sexuality and the supernatural. Camille Houle-Eichel discusses two works of science fiction—one literary and one cinematic. Combining Nnendi Okorafor's novel *Lagoon* and Kon Satoshi's film *Paprika*, her essay explores the theories of cyborg feminism and the disappearing shōjo throughout these works. She argues how women are not sacrificing bodies, but rather subjects of power that can enact positive social change. In our final essay, Aishwarya Singh's analysis of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is anchored in the refusal of violent forms of care. She argues that rather than simply being haunted, Sethe is confronted with the revisiting of the loss she has suffered by the choice she had made.

We conclude with our interview with Ashley Hearn, who discusses the role and tasks of an acquisitions editor and how to break into the industry.

This year proved challenging for all because of the pandemic. We are incredibly grateful to our editorial team and our contributors for all their hard work during such stressful times. We hope readers enjoy this first issue of *The Harbour* as much as we did working on it.

Hoda Agharazi and Camille Houle-Eichel
Editors-in-Chief
November 25th, 2020

Essays

Savage Messiah: A Spectral Waste of Time

Ariane Legault

Abstract

From a philosophical standpoint, hauntology presents spectral presence as a force to be reckoned with. In acknowledging the impact that emptiness carries, the center-periphery model is questioned and reconsidered. This essay combines edgework theory with waste studies in order reframe the narrative of those rejected by the gentrification processes of a neoliberal government. Pushed to edges of an ideal designed to generate profit, these social spectres retain agency. In *Savage Messiah*, Laura Oldfield Ford explores the traces they have left behind. As this essay will argue, Ford creates a new form of mapping—one utilizing a labyrinth model—that recontextualizes the layout of London, in order to emphasize the defiant potential of those rendered ghosts by a parasitic system. The resistance is here; spectral, fragmented, dismantling as you read.

Developed at the close of the twentieth century, hauntology and edgework are prodigious spatio-temporal tools of resistance to processes of normativity. As reminders of the waste generated by neoliberalism, spectres and edges challenge the hegemony of linear thought. Laura Oldfield Ford's *Savage Messiah* is an emblem of this resistance; a hauntological collection of fragments that is both a wasted and a wasteful creation that harnesses the defiant potential of socio-political abjection. While hauntology, edgework, and waste discourse are three theoretical frames rarely addressed in relation to one another, it is my contention that their nature aims at contesting what Mark Fisher coined "capitalist realism—the widespread belief that there is no alternative to capitalism" (*Ghosts of my Life* 19). If hauntology's sense of broken time is defined as the spectral resurgence of the lost futures eradicated by postmodern nostalgia, then it is indivisible from the notion that edges are productive sites of discord. As the rejected reminders of the system's inconsistencies, hauntology and edgework attest to the contradictory function of waste as that which simultaneously maintains the status quo *and* possesses the potential to dismantle it.

Theorized by Jacques Derrida, hauntology is a product of deconstructionist thought. As a pun on the word ontology, hauntology contributes to Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence; while ontology approaches being in relation to "self-identical presence" (Hägglund 82), hauntology thinks of being in terms of absence. Adhering to the logic that meaning is derived from that which a thing is not, it posits that existence "is possible only on the basis of a whole series of absences,

which precede and surround it" (*Ghosts of my Life* 18). To think of existence in terms of absences is to grapple with processes of temporality. The spectre offers a model for causality that is not dependent on linear time. As Hägglund aptly states, "what is important about the figure of the specter […] is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*" (82). Haunting is therefore not about the presence of a supernatural being, but about "*the agency of the virtual*, […] that which acts without (physically) existing" (*Ghosts of my Life* 18). It is a force whose impact relies on the simultaneity of its presence and absence. In *Specters of Marx*, the temporal indeterminacy of ghosts is enabled by the prevalence of "repetition compulsion" (Derrida 173), which Ruth Parkin-Gounelas summarizes as the idea that "*everything* is a ghost" (128). As Derrida puts it, "everything [the Holy spirit, truth, law, the 'good cause'] comes back to haunt everything, everything is in everything, that is, 'in the class of specters'" (146). If everything haunts everything, then spectrality has no origins. Derrida argues that any attempt to locate the origins of spectres would lead to a system "installed prior to its 'originary' moment" (Buse and Stott 11), whose own origins is contingent on an already-established structure. Although this wild goose-chase may seem tedious, it demonstrates that engrained in the very concept of hauntology is the necessity of contesting boundaries. Haunting exposes origins as a sham: at the origin of *everything*, there are only ghosts (revenants).

To understand hauntology's intervention on the twenty-first century, one must first grasp the cultural context within which it operates. This context is best explained via an exploration of nostalgia. In *Retromania*, Simon Reynolds identifies two types of nostalgias proper to the twentieth century: reactionary and radical. While the former tends to develop in a conservative direction—that is, "longing for a social order considered more stable owing to its clearly defined class structure"—the latter is concerned with a restoration of "social equilibrium and justice […] interrupted by […] ruling-class machinations" (Reynolds xxvi). What both these post-Industrial Revolution forms of nostalgias have in common is their poignant dissatisfaction with the present coupled with a fervent desire to make it change. This modernist zeal for improvement has been laid to rest; the postmodern condition is one of disillusionment which always already assumes that it is impossible to accurately represent the current experience. Consequently, postmodern reminiscence does not involve a return to an idealised past whose values and ideologies can be transposed onto the present moment, but rather a "*formal* attachment to the techniques and formulas of the past" (*Ghosts of my Life* 11). The combination of current technology with dated tropes produces narratives set in a seemingly "undefinable nostalgic past […] beyond history" (Jameson qtd. in *Ghosts of my Life* 12). In other words, postmodern nostalgia is attached to the *aura* of the past, an unspecified basin of temporo-cultural referents to pick from at random.

Suffice to say that, if postmodern nostalgia is an anachronistic condition that has induced temporal stasis, then the radical potential of democratisation has simultaneously been impeded. Indeed, postmodern nostalgia and neoliberalism are forceful allies; the cultural rut we find ourselves in is both caused by late capitalism *and* allows it to thrive. The logic is simple: raising the cost of living and systematically eliminating cultural subventions results in a population that has not the time nor the financial freedom to create without the pressure of producing something immediately profitable. This culminates in a tendency to recycle the winning formulas of old ideas. Cultural consumption is not spared from this contingency; "simultaneously exhausted and overstimulated" by the expensive and fast-paced lifestyle of late capitalism, "we demand quick fixes. […] Retro offers the quick and easy promise of a minimal variation on an already familiar satisfaction" (*Ghosts of my Life* 15). Artistic production and consumption are trapped in a cycle; to make the money necessary to live, the artist must abide by capitalism's rules—which, at best, means reshaping their creative output and rendering it marketable for companies who generate profit by rehashing archaic styles to a public too exhausted by everyday life to desire new alternatives. Neoliberalism has managed to cut down government spending *and* make the population feel as though this cultural rut is of their own volition.

The level of complacency involved in a postmodern nostalgic age that has abandoned attempts to locate aesthetic representations of the cultural present for the sake of dwelling in a familiar eternal past is precisely what hauntology aims to dismantle. Since a ghost is neither "being nor non-being" (Derrida 11), the spectre of the twenty-first century is not the reminder of a preferable past, but rather the absence of potentiality: "What [haunts] is not the *no longer* of actually existing social democracy, but the *not yet* of the futures that popular modernism trained us to expect, but which never materialised" (*Ghosts of my Life* 27). By (dis)em-bodying the disappearance of all that the future could be, the spectre functions in direct opposition to the cultural rut of late capitalism; its very (non-)existence deconstructs formal nostalgia, thereby exposing the dreadfulness of stasis. The spectre is creepy precisely because it raises unwanted awareness of temporo-spatial disjunction that induces panic. Contrary to postmodern nostalgia, which maintains us in a state of complacent lethargy by depicting the eternal past as a source of comfort, the spectre's unwelcomed resurgence disrupts Groundhog Day by revealing the bleakness of never going anywhere. Hauntology is a nostalgia with a broken sense of time; therein lies its potential for resistance.

Hauntology's broken sense of time will benefit from being analysed in relation to theories of edgework. Edges are an integral aspect of resilience—a concept which, as Susie O'Brien argues, has been co-opted by neoliberalism. Ecological resilience posits that survival through renewal depends on a system's ability to self-organise—whether it can reconfigure itself by continuously increasing its capacity to adapt. However,

ecological resilience theory has a clause. Although it provides an understanding of how systems can work through change without being undone by it, the theory recognizes that a system's ability to repair itself should not be taken for granted. Under neoliberalism, resilience becomes a value stripped of its conditional limit; it proclaims that since unpredictability is at once normal and healthy, people must always be willing to subject themselves to sacrifice—to do *whatever it takes*. The concept of complex adaptive systems has provided neoliberalism with a rhetoric that validates free-market economy. Too complex to be controlled by a centralized authority, capitalism turns crisis-prevention into a "culture of resilience" that replaces "short-term relief effort […] with a call to strengthen permanent adaptability" (Walker and Cooper 154). *Regeneration* is engulfed in the logic of adaptability, becoming not only an emblem of progress but also a justification for social cleansing disguised as security measures—a false testament to a nation's resilience.

Since resilience has been hijacked by neoliberalism to ensure a smooth transition from a government's decisions to the population's reaction, it must be reworked to allow for discontinuity. As sites of discord, edges are productive only as long as they do not facilitate integration; once positioned as enablers of synergy, edges become a neoliberal tool that renders differences marketable and boasts of gentrification as a marker of socio-political progress. Their productivity is contingent on their inability to be reconciled. This reworking of edgework is evocative of "contact zones" (Pratt 4). In contrast with an understanding of cosmopolitan centers as areas that facilitate the integration of differing cultures, Pratt highlights the importance of mutual struggle in social spaces that jumbles up thousands of years of historical baggage. Contact zones "should be viewed as sites of contamination, negotiation, and conflict, and not simply as opportunities for inter-ethnic conversation" (Sabo 378). Instances of fractured communication must be harnessed, not because they prevent harmony, but because they engender a process necessary for negotiating one's place in a long Imperial history of power politics. Just as hauntology interrupts nostalgic time to resist late capitalism, edges-as-irreconcilable-frag-ments defy the hegemonic power of linearity.

Laura Oldfield Ford's *Savage Messiah* is concerned with the resistance potential of fragmentation. Her depiction of the city as a site where millennial 'yuppie' flats clash with disintegrating buildings in unpredictable ways presents edges as sites of uncertainty and socio-economic discord. Stylistically, it is a collection of zines filled with cut-and-paste segments of text, drawings, and photographs. The superimposition of images suggests that parts of the whole are always hidden under layers of pictures and text. We are confronted with—haunted by—the absence of their totality. This forces us to consider the broken parts in relation to each other, without knowing their full context. The confusion is not cleared by attempting to analyse the photographs as isolated entities since they are not detailed enough for the reader to understand their original

purpose. Consequently, we are left with the text positioned on or beside the image as explanation, which may or may not be directly applicable or even remotely relevant. For instance, the first zine portrays the scanned mug-shot of a man with a fence-like insignia on his forehead (which may or may not be part of the original photograph), and the words "victim: Jason Batley is still in hospital after being run over by a truck" ([1]*Savage Messiah* 1.9). While the use of a colon suggests that the victim is Jason Batley, there is no certainty that these words refer to the man displayed above, especially considering the conspicuous nature of the photograph. This raises a panoply of inquiries: who is Jason Batley? What does he or his death have to do with the larger theme of the work, or even with the text situated on the page besides it—a stream of consciousness depiction of a drug-induced, sleep-deprived, encounter with police brutality? This lack of clarity is key insofar as it prevents the reader from assimilating the disparate elements on the pages into a coherent whole.

Ambiguity is not only maintained through form; it is also an integral aspect of the narrative(s). Given the constant shifts between first- and third-person narration, it is unclear how the narratives connect. Moreover, the identity of the speaker is never clarified. In the account describing the eruption of a riot led by an off-duty police officer, blowing off steam in "Bermondsey boozers" (*Savage Messiah* 1.32), the narrative voice is subtly obfuscated. Since the episode is told from the first-person point of view, the reader assumes that Ford is the speaker—one of the many involved in the riot. However, the line "I was thinking fucking hell not again cos I'd only been out of Belmarsh a year" (*Savage Messiah* 1.32*)* sheds doubt on that assumption. A quick research indicates that Belmarsh prison is (and always has been) a men's correctional facility. In this case, who is the speaker? Or does it simply not matter? It is my contention that it does matter, but not because it attests to the artwork's failures. On the contrary, the irreconcilable edges that saturate *Savage Messiah* create absences that function as spectres; the confusion they produce is a disruptive force that resists notions of linear development. The ambiguity of disconnected form and narrative—"when I finish the story it isn't the end just the end of that moment, then ther'll be another rush and it's another episode" (1.24)—enables *Savage Messiah* to harness the hauntological potential of broken time.

Hauntology's broken sense of time has an important spatial dimension; the spectre haunts both the temporal *and the spatial* homogenization engendered by postmodernism. Globalization has often been described as a shrinking of the planet. The erosion of space, which partly results from the rapid development of "tele-technologies" (Derrida 53), has been intensified by what Marc Augé calls "non-places": public spaces such as "airports, retail parks, and chain stores, which resemble one another more than they resemble the particular spaces in

[1] Since *Savage Messiah* does not have page numbers, the references function as follows: (Zine#.Page# [starting from the aforementioned zine]).

which they are located" (*What is Hauntology* 19). Emblems of late capitalism, these non-places generate a superb amount of revenue by following the same logic as postmodern nostalgia—it capitalises on the population's exhaustion and overstimulation by offering familiar spaces as a source of comfort.

Savage Messiah demonstrates that haunting can resist the contraction of space via (re)contextualisation. The collage is saturated with non-places that are dangerous precisely because they are un-specific, void of narrative: "all places become surfaces that can accept the neo liberal stamp. Representations of places are decontextualized. These are placeless places. Little alleyways boarded up, windows opening on tenement ravines. […] Security guards sit watching. Bored. No longer able to see" (*Savage Messiah* 6.34). The population is desensitized to its own misery, "no longer able to see" the potential of rebellion that once occupied the city. Therein lies the importance of approaching *Savage Messiah* as a palimpsest: "as I lay my palm flat against the wall I grasp past texts never fully erasing the traces of earlier inscriptions" (6.10). What is a palimpsest, if not a ghost? The constant resurgence of dates marking instances of social upheaval in the UK are spectres that (re)con-textualize space by staining it. The city is haunted by the *could-have-been*s of protests—potentialities which *Savage Messiah* reinforces through references to riots as well as the temporally fragmented narratives of dissenters and outcasts that non-places have erased: "Rockingham estate, traces of riots, dints on the pavements where crowbars and TVs were dropped over balcony railings. 1976, scorched terraces and battered sofas" (2.8). Thirty years later, the pavement remains dented by the spectre of protest—a dent that is situated on the grounds of a community center in an increasingly gentrified part of impoverished Elephant and Castle. The haunting reminds those who travel in the geographical spaces mapped out that the social numbness induced by neoliberalism is ephemeral and can dissipate once the fervor of resistance is reactivated.

Now, I wish to direct your attention to two phrases that have come up in this work thus far: the hauntological *staining* of time and edgework's *contamination* of encounters. These italicized terms are not arbitrary; in both cases, the impact engendered is wasteful. From a psychosocial perspective, waste discourse provides insight on the processes of normalization. The term *waste* is incredibly vague; it is "metaphorically capacious, encompassing categories of garbage, shit, sexual excess, economic surplus, unproductive labour, idleness, and aesthetic imbalance" (Schmidt 16). It is usually divided into two subgroups: organic (bodily waste) and inorganic (industrial waste). Notwithstanding categorization, the commonality to all forms of waste is its *otherness*. It is the unwanted that must be removed or repressed for social order to be sustained. Waste is integral to the maintenance of normativity because it functions as the excluded bracket in a structural binary that reinforces what is included/accepted. While the object and/or habits that are associated with excess may vary depending on culture—i.e., "wearing one's shoes in a

Japanese home is considered polluting, whereas wearing them in American homes is a prophylactic against pollutions" (Schmidt 18)—its status as excessive is universally constricting.

Yet, by virtue of its *otherness*, waste has a disruptive quality that allows it to challenge cultural normativity. Tied to civilisation, it is a trace of the past that haunts our present—whether that trace be pollution or the products of social stigmatization. Waste is the undissolvable reminder that prevents social amnesia. The impossibility of getting rid of waste without crumbling the entire system of norms is what gives it a "boundary-confusing property" (Sch-midt 19). It has the contradictory function of being that which is rejected, excessive, unwanted—thereby framing what is accepted and wanted—while simultaneously possessing the ability to disrupt what is accepted by being indelible.

To understand how *Savage Messiah* harnesses the potential of waste, it is helpful to think of it as a labyrinth. Labyrinths function according to a non-linear logic. However, this does not imply that they are not directional. While the structure is built to disorient the participant straddling through its discontinuous paths, labyrinths have a way out. They force one to get lost in a way that induces panic. In this sense, labyrinths are hauntological; their repetition is a trap aimed at reinforcing alarm rather than securing into a state of false comfort. In *Savage Messiah*, getting lost is a strategy to escape neoliberal homogenisation:

> The ghost of Rodney Gordon's design for the center, submitted in 1959, imagined a Kasbah interior with pinnacle tower block, concrete domes and spirals. The plans for this brutalist extravenganza, akin to his other hallowed idyll the Tricorn centre were cast aside in favour of the inferior Willets group design. Outside there's all these lost ravers, staggering through the dusk since Shoom! Glo sticks, white gloves luminous garb. Jacobs optical stairway—spatial disorientation. (2.12)

Two types of landscapes are contrasted in this passage. Firstly, there is the Tricorn Shopcentre area, an example of the homogenisation of space intensified by the replacement of brutalist architecture with standardised non-places. Juxtaposed with the landscape of non-places is the city-as-labyrinth, a nexus of alternative pathways the social outcasts are staggering through in "spatial disorientation." The disorientation propels the "lost ravers" in disjointed directions, which allows them to get reacquainted with the narratives of rejected spaces such as the "decaying fabric of a 60s precinct, jewelled mosaics now coated in a film of black grease" (*Savage Messiah* 2.13). As they aimlessly drift through taverns and alleyways—spaces (re)contextualised by filth—the "lost ravers" challenge the logic of non-places which are constructed to enforce constant "forward motion: movement as progress" (Scanlan 156). The ubiquitous quality of the Tricorn Shopcentre's postmodern architecture is exposed as that which

prevents the productive panic associated with labyrinths. In comparison, the underbelly of the city is a maze whose discontinuous edges disable the dangerous state of haze necessary for social complacency to be effective.

Savage Messiah is wasteful for the same reason hauntology and edgework are wasteful—its investment in dismantling hegemonic linearity. For neoliberalism to function, it must distance itself from the impoverished neighbourhoods and the cultural rut it either defines as *other* or ignores altogether. The act of *contaminating* and *staining* is an invasion that jeopardizes the integrity of the structure. By staining time, hauntology places emphasis on the lost futures that postmodern nostalgia has erased for the sake of using the past as a source of profit. Similarly, by contaminating encounters, edgework emphasises how the neoliberal agenda advocating progress through resilience ensures that the displacement of populations will go uninterrupted. Edges-as-sites-of-irreconcilability and hauntological broken time are the wasteful reminders that prevent social repression; the rejected that at once maintains the system and threatens to destroy it. In both cases, discontinuity is key since neoliberalism is upheld by the illusion of linear development.

As a labyrinth of alleyways stained by anachronistic narratives of rebellion, *Savage Messiah* is an emblem of waste's potential. This is rendered most obvious in the description of the increasingly gentrified Isle of Dogs/Canary Wharf district:

> I lived on the 23rd floor, never beyond E14, watching the river looping round, sometimes white gold or slate grey and mercury. The island, small from up here, you could hold out your hand and let it settle in your palm then blow it like a dandelion clock and it would always land like it was meant to be, with all the roads and houses back in the same place. (*Savage Messiah* 1.25)

In this powerful portrayal of one's attempt to negotiate their place in relation to a city that rejects them, London refuses to become disordered. *Savage Messiah* sets out to disrupt the tendency for the pieces to "always land like it was meant to be […] back in the same place" by confronting the city with the wasted and wasteful accounts of rebels that neoliberalism has attempted to erase in order to facilitate the fantasy of a happily complacent gentrified London. If the coherence of history depends on a denial of certain events/perspectives, then those perspectives are precisely what can expose historicity as a sham. The hegemonic power of linearity disintegrates and the pieces of the city, once blown in all directions like a dandelion clock, never land in the same place.

Anachronism is the *function* of ghosts. If the neoliberal agenda is predicated on a continuity of ideals enabled by a cooptation of resilience, *Savage Messiah* can be described as taking a sledgehammer to it. As the recurrence of anachronistic narratives—"London 2013. 1973, 1990-93, 1998 and 2001-2 2008 1973 returning 2012 2013"

(10.46)— broken time is a haunting that re-contextualises spaces. By staining place and contaminating encounters, the dates are fragmented instances of socio-political discontent that opposes the gentrification of London; the narratives of dissenters and outcasts haunt projects of regeneration, thereby complicating fantasies of a new and improved city. Operating as a model of waste, the narratives of *Savage Messiah* challenge the dichotomous logic of normativity by reminding us of what a society wishes to exclude but ultimately cannot. Linguistically, waste discourse and hauntology are forceful allies. As Schmidt points out, the etymological root of the term *waste* is "emptiness" (16), which denotes an absence. Ghosts can therefore be understood as wasteful—not in the sense that they are useless, but because they (dis)embody the relentless resurgence of what must be repressed for notions of wholeness to be sustained. The spectre of *Savage Messiah* is the absence of the spirit of social protest—a spirit that creeped out at different moments in time, inspiring riots and eventually fading out, but always inevitably returning. This process is *Savage Messiah*'s hopefulness. The labyrinth may be frightening, but it is discontinuous and therein lies its resistance: "always a return. A Mirror touch. A different way out" (*Savage Messiah* 2.30).

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The Ghost of Progress: Canada's Supernatural Anxiety in D.C. Scott's *In the Village of Viger*

Patrick Aura

Abstract

Analyzing Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* (1896), this paper demonstrates how the author expressed the anxieties of the relatively-new Canadian nation-state through supernatural means. While the book can be seen as railing against modernity – as characters go insane due to the mysterious forces of modern life that seem to haunt Viger – this essay argues that Scott is actually trying to balance conservative and progressive ideas. It is argued that *In the Village of Viger* presents its titular setting as being haunted by ghosts of both the past and the future. The inhabitants of Viger are simultaneously being destroyed by their attachment to an idealized version of Canada's past and a fear of its potential industrialized future. In short, Scott's novel presents Canada as a contradictory place that is best understood as supernatural in more ways than one. As a nation built on contradictions, it must face the impossible in the ghosts of what possibly never was and what could be.

By writing *In the Village of Viger*, D.C. Scott attempted to come to terms with the conflicting ideas he saw in then-contemporary Canada. He did so by placing the thematic emphasis on the bizarre aspects of Canada's past – most notably its continuous and occasionally forced attempts at forging a national community – and the fact that, as a nation, it cannot seem to overcome them. In the book, a small rural village with a tightly-knit religious community that lives off non-industrial jobs – an allegory for Scott's view of traditional Canada – needs to accept its contradictions (of being a multifaceted society rooted in homogenizing conservative traditions in a world bent on mechanical 'progress') in order to enter the future as a more cohesive society. Scott's hope was that Canada (as Viger) would become a country that concretely knew itself to not be swallowed by a dark outside force that threatens to erase it. In such a light, Scott may appear to be actively working against the forces of his era's modernity, that is to say "the replacement of Victorian society – agrarian, religious, adhering to a rigid set of philosophical and moral codes – with the modern age: industrial, secular, anti-philosophical" (Massolin 3). To read the story as against modernity though, would be reductive. Despite the perception of that intellectual movement, antimodernism[2] was not "the nostalgic flutterings of a 'dying elite,'

[2] Arguably an artistic reflection of Scott's sentiments.

[…] [it] was a complex blend of accommodation and protest which tells us a great deal about the beginnings of present-day values and attitudes." (Lears xiii) In his text, Scott offers Canada a choice draped in eerie language: to unite despite its people's differences or be engulfed by forces of assimilation beyond its control. Ironically, Scott seems to ignore his own assimilatory writing on Canada's Indigenous population when thinking of what he sees as a 'true' Canadian model.

The ways that Scott and many of his contemporaries addressed such issues of national unity may seem to be lacking in complexity and nuance. However, at its core, Canada is a country built on contradictions and multiplicities – ones that, to many who have examined Canadian society, the nation has not satisfactorily come to terms with[3]. In the context of late-19th century modernity, addressing the country's seemingly incongruous existence through fantasy is not so out-of-place. As such, D.C. Scott produced in 1896 one of his rare works of prose in an attempt to reconcile the seemingly unnatural chan-ges that 'traditional' Canada was going through. Much like his peers, the Confederation Poets, Scott was not above writing romantically about Canada. After all, the recognition of Canada as a nation-state was still new at the time Scott was writing his novel – a moment that elicited both nationalistic and anxious sentiments about what Canadians could expect of the future. Like his contemporaries, Scott was very much concerned about Canada's place in the world. In his mind, Canadians could not make sense of where they lived if they could not first recognize themselves. Therefore, the argument here is how *In the Village of Viger*, a slightly different take on the ghost story, is a narrative that does more than question where Canada's perceived traditional lifestyle lies in an increasingly industrial world. Instead, by having Viger being haunted by ghosts both past and future, D.C. Scott – situated here between the related ideas conveyed by his peers, Archibald Lampman and Bliss Carman – makes a case that Canada's multifaceted and oft-contradictory existence can most comprehensively be understood as something supernatural.

This reflects the type of haunting that Jacques Derrida talks of and that informed this essay's understanding of ghosts. *Specters of Marx* presents ghosts as attachments to the past that refrain us from making meaningful progress. Mirroring what Scott alluded to as Viger's fate, Derrida writes of the titular specters as being "with or without a people, some community with or without a leader—but also the less than one of pure and simple dispersion. Without any possible gathering together." (2) *In the Village of Viger* is to be examined as a supernatural story in a similar vein – one that grasps Canada's past, but does not attach itself to it out of a fear of being destroyed by its contradictions and redundancies as it moves forward, metaphorically leaderless and without a clear sense of self. The

[3] Neil Bissoondath's *Selling Illusions* offers an interesting, if controversial, insight into this cultural conflict.

subject is not specifically spirits, but of imperceptible or unrecognized influences on the present as Derrida suggests. (4-5)

In the Village of Viger is about a fictional Quebec village being overtaken by the city, feeling the terrifying effects of a quickly-changing landscape as some villagers go insane or have their worldview irreparably altered. The way Scott frames the novel's ten stories sets the city as an exterior force that always looms in the distance and the influence of which causes disappearances, insanity, and a sense of loss. Viger, as a little conservative village, is not exempt from Scott's criticism and apprehension either. Understanding that certain things cannot remain the same, Scott is not averse to making the ghosts of the future almost seem more benevolent and appealing that the traditional rural life at times. In this sense, Scott's novel is somewhere in the middle of Archibald Lampman's staunch conservatism and Bliss Carman's more progressive nature.

Lampman's poetry is perhaps most remembered for its nostalgic approach to Canada's landscape. As an example of his conservatism – and the lateness with which this country adopted such literary movements as Romanticism from the British 'motherland' – his work seems at odds with the already-established realism of English poetry at that time. Just prior to the publication of Scott's horror-fantasy book, Lampman used his talents to go after the very thing he felt was destroying the nature he wrote so lovingly about: the city. In 1892, *The City at the End of Things* painted a hellish and bleak landscape of a world in which the city is all that remains. This is a place where fire, iron, and noise have buried Lampman's idealized natural and 'empty' world. There are two options for Lampman, his nostalgic worldview – expressed through imitation British poetry – and the impassioned plea against industrialization and the madness that apparently accompanies it. We get a better understanding of the fears of Canadians at this time by applying to them Todorov's definition of the fantastic as "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). The industrialized future is terrifying because it does not clearly fit the 'natural' order of things. Lampman refers to it only in terms of the ultimate destruction of his specific Canada by means that are, by definition, beyond the natural.

This contrasts well with Bliss Carman, whose penchant for a more American lifestyle is perhaps indicative of his greater acceptance of the industrialized city life. Carman's foray into the supernatural in the likes of "The Ghostyard of the Goldenrod" does not touch upon the city *per se*, but indicates Carman's willingness to accept the death of one thing in order to build another, potentially better, thing. The city, in as much as it is supernatural, is not for Carman the destructive force that haunts Lampman's imagination, but a way to transcend the life of the traditional village. Industrialization is once again something vague and in-the-distance, as in his poem "The Winter Scene," but its arrival complements rural life, it does not result in its population spiralling into

insanity. Modernity upholds and maintains society in ways that the frail village cannot with its lack of solid steel beams and conservatism. There is no fear of the modern because it is a (super) natural progression of the traditional lifestyle. As he writes in "The Winter Scene", "The rutted road are all like iron; skies / are keen and brilliant; only the oak-leaves cling" (264) Where there is a natural beauty remaining with the oak leaves and brilliant sky, the modernity Carman describes complements and grows out of it, never replacing it but allowing it to keep existing in a changing world.

This brings us to the moment when D. C. Scott, Lampman, and Carman were writing their most recognized work. As *In the Village of Viger* was being published, Canada existed in its relatively contemporary form for only about thirty years. This seems like a long time, but the Canada Scott was living in was still struggling with growing pains and anxieties about the future. This anxiety came from the modern United States who may or may not annex the new nation-state (Smith 5). It came from Great Britain, the comforting source of tradition that was seen by many as a mother[land] increasingly letting its child go out on its own (Berger 259). The unease was produced from the very people within Canada's borders who could not agree about what to do concerning the influence exerted by either of those powers. The list of anxiety-inducing things could go on indefinitely, and that is obviously the point. In such a scenario, it is not surprising that Scott chose to talk about, as George Wicken writes in an biographical overview of the writer, a "village [that] is in danger of being swallowed by the metropolis of which it is one of the 'outlying wards'" (1044). Given this context, certain lines in the text become clearer: "on still nights, above the noise of the frogs in the pools, you could hear the rumble of the street-cars and the faint tinkle of their bells, and when the air was moist the whole southern sky was luminous with the reflection of thousands of gas-lamps." (13) The exterior aspects (the landscape, the setting, etc.) seem to blend seamlessly into Viger's natural state, to the point where the village might not notice that it is being engulfed, much to its detriment. Terms like "swallowed" and "outlying ward" demonstrate how Scott's story effectively portrays Canada and its issues with modernity as otherworldly. There is a monstrous image is conjured at the use of "swallowing" when used in reference to a city. It is something that has a life of its own, that is hungry for the new and different taste of an entity that once had a life. It is an insatiable force that hungers for more power from this "outlying ward". Viger is importantly placed outside of the city, deliberately so, but it is also intrinsically and inevitably tied to it as its ward.

The villagers of Viger, as much as they would like to think that they are independently rich and lively, ignore the invisible power that encircles their town; that simultaneously makes it thrive and kills it. Scott is warning his readers that Canada must be aware that it cannot have it both ways. It cannot be a thriving independent nation in its own little world, while also being intrinsically tied to powers like Britain. Although – due to

strong cultural ties – it is seen as benevolent compared to the American empire for many Canadians, the monstrosity of a greater force like the British Empire remains. Refusing to step out of Britain's comforting shadow is just as destructive to Canada as hiding within America's. Setting up the book's themes, Scott uses this imagery of comfort and non-action in reference to Viger in the opening lines. He describes the place using language that recalls passiveness: "sleepy, almost dozing, since the mill, […] had shut down. The miller had died; and who would trouble to grind what little grist came to the mill, when flour was so cheap? But while the beech-groves lasted […] it seemed impossible that any change could come. The change was coming, however, rapidly enough." (13) While activity is foreshadowed as coming to the inactive town, Viger is presented as unwilling to act in the face of it, almost out of a fear of making things change even more quickly should they do so. However, Scott was plainly warning that in staying on such passive paths, the outlying ward would just be swallowed faster.

In approaching this from the ghostly perspective initially proposed, we can start with that of 'traditional' Canada as Lampman and Scott perceived it as it haunts a present that is no longer its own. While Scott does place some positive aspects on Viger, especially in the interactions and the emphasis on its being a simple community, "it looked as if only happy people lived there" (51), they are ultimately surface-level qualities. In a consistent turning point in nearly every story of the book, ghosts of the past come to haunt Viger in more tangible ways once the city is recognized as having a greater influence on the place. For example, the "green slime […] working up to the surface" (Scott 14) of an abandoned gold mine is "proleptic of the evil effects of the pursuit of material wealth" (Lynch 5) that the city brings with it and that is continuously revisited, namely in stories like 'The Pedlar'. In what is represented by Scott as a defence mechanism, the despairing villagers tend to fall back on the comforts of nostalgia. Having the memory of the gold mine's wealth and its place as communal site coming "to the surface" of their minds instead of an overt symbol of destructive materialism is but one instance of this. The "slime", a conjuring of the past, presents "itself again, anew, as the new" (Derrida 61) in the present Scott portrayed. The ghosts of the past become those of the 'now'; Viger's villagers just believe it to be a product of modernity rather than a self-destructive process that originated long ago due to their nostalgia.

Another example of such nostalgia is the fixation on the France of old, one that has been especially mythologized in real-life Quebec, by multiple people in Viger. Both characters named Paul – one Arbique, the other Farlotte – as well the Desjardins family (who are the focus of a whole story themselves), experience bouts of insanity related to the glory of France's past. The Pauls have more of a religious experience concerning the Franco-Prussian War, whereas the Desjardins see themselves as tied to Napoleon Bonaparte. In the latter example, Charles Desjardins goes insane and imagines himself as the 19th-century leader whom many associate with

bringing a fractured France back together after the Revolution. "'I!' said [Charles]; 'I am the Great Napoleon!' […] 'The prosperity of the nation depends on the execution of my plans.'" (37). The past is framed by the villagers in a prideful way even when – as the Franco-Prussian War and Napoleon's reign would both fail – it should not. When it becomes a way of shielding oneself from the future, Scott tells us that the resulting conflict will only have one outcome: destruction – the collapse of the very thing that is trying to be protected, leaving only an abandoned place where "in every corner of the house the spiders are weaving webs, and an enterprising caterpillar has blocked up the key-hole with his cocoon." (29) Unsurprisingly, this is like the French in the examples given, who were destroyed by their own hubris. To Scott – in keeping with Derrida's later assessment – the ghosts of the past, as intangible beings, can inform traditions, but they cannot safeguard them. *Viger*'s final story shows through "two houses which would have attracted attention by their contrast" how the idyllic traditional household must learn to live with its "gaunt-looking" modern neighbour (119). The eventual balance struck between the two places' inhabitants signals Scott's insistence that a compromise is necessary for some traditions to remain. No matter how strongly one is attached to the past, traditions must find new meanings. An unflinching nostalgia would indeed only destroy them.

Whereas Derrida spoke of specters of the past influencing the present, Scott depicts the future and the "relics" of its ignored possibilities as having just as much of an influence (Fisher 34), as "already impinging on the present, conditioning expectations" (Fisher 16). Attempting to predict the future can seemingly have just as much of an influence on how villagers like those of Viger act. The ghosts of the future, on the other hand, are not specters haunting the present, but incoming shadows that are forcing history to go in the direction it wants. It is portrayed as an inevitability in the same type as the destruction of the past is. The city as a future ghost is described in the first story when Scott writes: "As yet its arms were not long enough to embrace the little village of Viger, but before long they would be, and it was not a time that the inhabitants looked forward to with any pleasure." (6) The presence is therefore felt as it starts to impact the villagers, but not yet seen as something tangible. If anything, the ghost of the future is portrayed like a type of poltergeist – bringing invisible havoc wherever it goes. Yet, this havoc also leads to something new that is not necessarily worse, as Lampman would indicate, but that is more along the lines of Carman's ideal. In the fifth story, a couple learns to move on happily into an uncertain future, despite their traumatizing relationship experiences – the city's supernatural influence allowed them to take control of what they previously had little control over, in this case: marriage. During that tale, Scott frames the city in more materialist-oriented terms, but the idea remains. What needs to be left behind is the old, unchanging, and heavy things that anchor people to an unhealthy past. "'Do you regret?' whispered Pierre. 'No, but I am leaving everything.' 'Yes, even the old furniture; if it had not been for that I

would never have known you,' he said" (77). The furniture is a symbol of things that must be left behind, with the unregretted experiences (of a married life, for example) being what allow Pierre to live more freely, moving forward after having grown from them. In this sense, we can think of the ghost of the future differently, as the possibility of things to come rather than a certainty. The restrictions of the past, if done away with correctly, can be remembered and built upon without cluttering (in this case, literally) the possibilities of the future – possibilities that are much more varied since they are not weighed down by unchanging masses like metaphorical pieces of furniture.

This can help bring us back to the point of Canada's supernatural existence as put on display in the short novel and the way the contradictions can be better balanced. The villagers stay together in their safe and comfortable environment, but *together* they live in fear of something they do not fully understand. They stay united not because their values or lives are so similar to one another's that they feel compelled to. Viger is the way it is because it fears the outside forces that threaten what little they do have in common, even if those values are potentially detrimental. As much as an outside force was responsible for them coming together into something larger than themselves (as a village in a province lumped into a country perceived as being unlike itself), a similarly exterior manifestation wants to bring it to apparently greater heights. In spite of its own ostensibly unnatural origins, the titular village sees the city as destructive because it must in order to justify its existence.

By returning to Todorov's ideas of the fantastic, a clearer sense of the supernatural contradictions of Canada can be understood. One of the main fixtures of Todorov's view of the fantastic is the hesitation felt by readers in explaining the bizarre events of the story in either a supernatural or natural way. In the context of Canadian letters, this tension becomes quite interesting when considering that much of the early output was so reliant on the fear the natural world provided. Northrop Frye's garrison mentality theory of Canada, for example, is founded on the ways the eerie outdoors – what Scott refers to as "these terrible winters" (63) – are seen as combatable only by staying together in unchanging groups (Frye 222). Ultimately, Todorov helps explain how the villagers of Viger do question themselves on the nature of their lives in a way that involves the bizarre. Will the unnatural become – or even, has it already become – the natural? Given this definition, the issue Scott then raises is that it has *always* been the case that Canada is a supernatural entity. Viger is a contradiction because its starting point as "natural" is a myth, a product of the ghosts of the past haunting its consciousness. These specters hide the fact that Viger had also been, and continued to be for some time, the ghost of the future for a significant part of the Canadian population. While this is not explicitly explored in the text, Scott wrote extensively about the impact of Euro-Canadian lifestyles on the Indigenous peoples in a very similar way than what is seen in his 1896 book. He was aware that Viger is an idealized village, a fiction in every sense of the word; what he was hoping for though was not the erasure of that fiction, but its

integration into the looming wave of so-called progress. It is not a coincidence that the city, just as Lampman made it, is a force, something that can be *manipulated*, but not eliminated. The contradiction of Canada is in its attempt to strike a balance between the two without losing the identity it is trying to preserve.

In the Village of Viger presents spectral figures in less of the conventional Hollywood sense, and more in line with those described by Todorov or Derrida. However, the story balances the terror of the popular specter and the estrangement of the philosophical ones. The eponymous village struggles with two significant haunting forces and the way they, in fact, merge into one. Both the ghosts of the past and the future are constructed, but because of their status as grand ideas, they become so much more powerful to the villagers of the small Quebec town. Within this context, Scott emphasized the 'natural' version of Canada, but cast a peculiar shadow over it. As a way to describe a country, one made of disparate communities, and the forceful way it came into being, Scott wrote Viger as a village that was afraid to let its past die. Consequently, this made the inevitable transition into the future all the more difficult and terrifying. The French-Canadians remember France, the community remembers the small village. Neither of which can perpetually exist but need to for the villagers trying to remain sane in a mad world. Thus, despite being a story about places on the surface, *In the Village of Viger* is more about time and the ways spaces are affected by it, not the other way around. Scott's traditional Canada is not intemporal, it must change. Canadians must let go of their attachment to a former time and place and move forward, remembering the past only so as to not repeat its mistakes.

As a ghost tale, *In the village of Viger* is less about the past coming back to haunt the present, but the scary nature of change and the over-reliance on intangible ghosts for a graspable support. While he is fearful of the loss of the past, Scott encourages us to remember and grow from it instead of living in it as if it were permanent; not to exacerbate the differences between past and future, but to integrate them. For a conservative nation in an increasingly industrial world, as Canada was in the late-19th century, few things are more threatening than being told that you have to move on. I believe we are meant to understand from this that, just as the tales parallel each other (namely with the multiple Pauls), so too does life parallel and repeat itself. The decision is then about choosing what is kept and what is left behind to avoid making the same mistakes that specter-like nostalgia hides from our view of the past. It is by learning from it that elements of the past remain. What D.C. Scott's short book tells us is that those ghosts, whenever they come from, are unstoppable, but certainly not im-movable. Scott accepts that while ghosts will never disappear, they can and should be integrated into the fabric of a new Canadian life.

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The Supernatural and Sexuality in David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows*

Suzy Woltmann

Abstract

This article argues that the 2014 David Robert Mitchell film *It Follows* provides a distinctly postmodern take on horror. The film does so by depicting an open-ended narrative, self-reflexively commenting on itself, and having a lack of hierarchy and rules as it explores the supernatural and sexuality. The supernatural in the film implies a state of hyperreality and functions as a simulacrum, or a copy for which there is no original; and sexuality itself becomes monstrous as a sexually-transmitted curse haunts Jay, the film's protagonist. This approach to horror is further meta-textually hyper-realistic itself. By denying any logical end to the narrative, *It Follows* creates a postmodern ambiance more unsettling than even the It that follows.

There is no aphrodisiac like innocence.
–Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.
–T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Although they are often regarded as little more than lurid entertainment, horror films depict something significant about societal norms, fears, and ideology. In fact, cinema highly affect how we interpret reality. Our artificially constructed interpretation of reality as evoked by movies has tangible consequences on how we perceive ourselves and our environment; thus, the simulacra of a fake filmic reality actually affects lived experiences. Postmodern film plays with this relationship between reality and un/reality by highlighting its tenuousness and encouraging destabilized meaning. This belies logic and therefore encourages a skeptical view of reality – a major tenet of postmodernism, which is induced through uncertainty, unverifiable discourse, and the dissolution of the metanarrative, or a grand narrative that provides a "transcendent and universal truth" (Lyotard xxiv). These qualities imbue David Robert Mitchell's 2014 *It Follows*, a film about a sexually transmitted curse and

what it means to witness horror in postmodernism. *It Follows* subverts normative horror tropes to create a distinctly postmodern narrative of uncertainty and open-endedness, especially as expressed through the supernatural and sexuality.

Postmodern horror breaks down the rules set up in modern horror films, which rely on a moralistic framework. Modern horror film usually comprises of films produced until the mid-to-late 20th century, while postmodern film tends to be films produced from the late 20th century until the present (Turnock 225). The term *postmodern* first entered the literary lexicon in Jean-Francois Lyotard's 1979 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Lyotard writes that the second half of the 20th century brought with it a transformation of how people approach art and literature (7). He defines "*postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narratives."

Jean Baudrillard further explains the postmodern condition in *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he writes that postmodernism is found in hyperreality, "t*he simulation of something which never existed" (1).* Postmodern horror induces hyperreality by causing us to cower in fear from the fictional terror found in ambivalence, estrangement, and destabilized meaning. As Jody Keisner, author of "Do you Want to Watch? A Study of the Visual Rhetoric of the Postmodern Horror Film," says, the general principles that make up the postmodern horror film include a disrupted social hierarchy, problematized binary between good and evil, feeling of disorder, and open-ended narrative (412). Bryan Turnock concurs in *Studying Horror Cinema*, arguing that "postmodern film simultaneously makes explicit and undermines generic codes and conventions" (226). In so doing, these films create an interactive viewing experience that relies on audience awareness.

The self-reflexive nature of *It Follows* illuminates the postmodern condition in a particularly potent way. Cinema itself is a form of hyperreality:

> Cinema also approaches an absolute correspondence with itself and this is not contradictory: it is the very definition of the hyperreal… Cinema plagiarizes itself, recopies itself, remakes its classics, retroactivates its original myths… *the cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent.* [emphasis author's] (Baudrillard 47)

In many ways *It Follows* is a coming-of-age story, albeit one filled with dread and anxiety, and its ambiance is oddly tender and dreamlike for a horror film. The film lacks hierarchy and rules; while it incorporates normative tropes found in horror films, it also subverts them from within in a lackadaisical, dreamlike fashion. We almost fail to catch the structures that are being destabilized because the movie does not point right at them but rather gently meanders around them, indicating them only with subtle clues and silent gestures.

It Follows uses a postmodern approach to the supernatural that continually invokes classic horror film tropes only to subvert them from within. The supernatural in the film is rife with

contradiction and self-reflexivity, which "has come to define what is commonly referred to as the postmodern horror film" (Turnock 232). Self-reflexivity creates an "'active audience,' one that is able to recognize references to earlier work in order to complete the cinematic jigsaw" (Turnock 232). *It Follows* does not rely on traditional horror film tactics that include gore, jump-scares, and blood, like many slasher films. Instead, its dread builds slowly and is punctuated only a handful of times by startling imagery. The first scene includes one of these images, ending with a young woman's leg snapped in half at the shinbone, her leg turned backwards. This jarring visual image is especially horrific because although we do expect something terrible to happen to the young woman, Annie, we do not yet know any principles making up the world of the film, and so are shocked to see the image of the grotesquely ruptured body. The film then introduces Jay, a carefree young woman living in the suburbs of Detroit. She has consensual sex with a casual dating partner, Hugh, who is later revealed to be living under a false identity and whose real name is Jeff. After their encounter, Hugh/Jeff tells her that he has infected her with a sexually transmitted curse. From here on out, Jay will be followed by It, a slow-moving but persistent and deadly supernatural creature who can take on anyone's form. If the creature catches her, she will die a horrific death. The only way to prevent this is to pass on the curse to someone else by having sex with them. However, if that person dies, the creature will start following her again. After being told about this curse, Jay and her friend group, comprised of sister Kelly, friend Yara, sleazy acquaintance Greg, and friend-turned-lover Paul try to figure out how to circumvent or defeat It. Their world, as depicted in the film, is largely without adult influence or intervention. This is a postmodern twist in that it denies any meaning found in symbolic order and authority.

As a supernatural creature that mimics reality but has no basis in it, the It in *It Follows* can be read as a form of simulacra. Simulacra is the "map that precedes the territory" (Baudrillard 1), evidence of a hyperrealistic postmodern universe created by "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1). Postmodern subjects believe representations *are* the reality. The entities that pursue those inflicted with the sexually transmitted curse in *It Follows* can appear as anyone: a urinating nude woman, an eyeless man, or people known and loved by the victim. While the monster can appear as strangers and often does, it also appears in its most frightening incarnations as Greg's mother and Jay's father, who tries to drown her in a pool until her friend is forced to shoot It multiple times. Though it may appear that the creature copies an original – it sometimes appears as people who already seem to exist – its ambiguity, constant transcoding, and ability to blend in or immediately be recognizable make it replace the real, an act of simulation. The first evidence of the entity as simulacra takes place when Jay realizes that her first view of It showed her Mrs. Redmond, Hugh/Jeff's mother. The film indicates that reality no longer matters; Jay now lives in a state of hyperreality in which the copy (the entity) appears

before and ultimately signifies something other than the real (Mrs. Redmond). It is not a copy of Mrs. Redmond or anyone else it simulates, but instead is a facsimile of Jeff's memory of his mother, transplanted onto Jay. When "the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death" (Baudrillard 95). When the second It is revealed onscreen, it signifies accompanying dread and fear for Jay's life.

Postmodern horror encourages subjects to trust no one (Keisner 419), not even themselves. Part of the horror of Jay's situation is that her introduction to the supernatural means that she cannot trust her sight, friends, or authority figures, and also finds she cannot trust herself. She constantly missteps and misinterprets the rules dictating It, which then puts her in further danger. Supernatural contradiction is also often aligned with the film's ambiguity. There seems to be no established temporal setting. The film takes place spatially in the suburbs of Detroit, but the fashion and technology seem to span from early 1980s to late 2010s. The cars are mostly 1980s, as are the televisions, but there is a mid-2000s car in the first scene. None of the main characters have cell phones, but in the opening scene Annie uses one to call her father. However, while that may seem to imply that the opening scene happens decades after the rest of the narrative, we know or at least think we know that it happens before the events of the film since It later appears as Annie. Or perhaps this is once again showing that the supernatural does not follow any rules and therefore It can appropriate future victims. The most explicit instance of this temporal confusion happens through the repeated recursive image of a clamshell compact from the 1960s, which one of the characters, Yara, uses as an e-reader and occasional flashlight. The clamshell seems simultaneously very dated and yet somehow futuristic. Importantly, Yara reads from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1889) on this device. The book tells the story of a goodhearted but simple individual who is brought down by the deceptive and sometimes purely evil people around him. This adds to the horror permeating the film and further emphasizes its contradictory nature. For example, the first quote Yara reads is: "I think that if one is faced by inevitable destruction – if a house is falling upon you, for instance – one must feel a great longing to sit down, close one's eyes and wait, come what may" (Dostoyevsky). In the film, characters try to deter the inevitable destruction coming their way by seeking ways to stop It. However, the audience longs for the destruction inherent in horror films. Since *It Follows* has an open-ended conclusion, the longed-for destruction is no longer inevitable.

It Follows also provides a postmodern depiction of sexuality by making sexuality itself monstrous. One of the most prevalent rules in modern horror films is that the impetus for punishment is construed through premarital sex (Keisner 418). It can be interpreted that the first to die often fits the whore/sexually promiscuous archetype, while the Final Girl (the last character left alive in horror) is allowed to live because her virginity implies she is morally pure and so

can triumph over evil. *It Follows* overthrows this by making the Final Girl the first to have sex in the film. Sexual repression usually emerges in horror films "as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror" (Wood 10).

However, unlike horror films that present "female sexuality as monstrous" and construct "femininity as a subject position impossible to occupy" (Lindsey 33), *It Follows* does not focus horror specifically around female sexuality. While the movie centers on Jay's experience, it can be transmitted by anyone regardless of gender. Jay is punished for having sex by being made victim to the curse, but she survives, and sex becomes the one thing that might save her. This ambivalence is extended by the creature's ability to appear as man, woman, and child. Instead of only rendering the female fetishistic object, the creature also penetrates the masculine realm. The film begins with Annie's physical destruction, but otherwise the only character who is actually killed in the course of the narrative is Greg, showing that It is an equal-opportunity supernatural creature. This implies a postmodern deconstruction of static gender categorizations, showing that these are instead fluid.

It Follows further depicts postmodern sexuality by disrupting binary gender norms. Binary gender norms create a metanarrative of universal truth about gendered behavior. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, they "are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (54). However, *It Follows* disrupts this metanarrative by subverting gendered stereotypes. For example, it breaks down "stereotypes of woman as passive object of the gaze and man as desiring subject" (Davis 63). Although Hugh/Jeff clearly plans to sleep with Jay to pass on the curse, their sex scene is controlled by her alone, as she climbs on top of him until completion. Later, when Jay has sex with Paul, it is clear that Paul's desire, not Jay's, is founded in love; she never would have considered him as a sexual partner without the trauma from being followed by It. This interrogates normative gender stereotypes that equates "male desire with sex and female desire with love" (63). While Jay's sexual encounter with Hugh/Jeff is consensual and enjoyable, the terror that follows makes her question the experience as well as the very notion of sexuality. In *Postmodern Sexualities* (1996), William Simons argues that postmodern sexuality has become "destabilized, decentred and de-essentialized" (20). When Jay realizes that the act of sex has inflicted her with a horrifying curse, it upsets her previous seemingly innocuous understanding of normative sexuality. After sex with Hugh/Jeff, Jay gives a speech that romanticizes growing up. Hugh crawls on her from behind and the scene moves from intimate to ominous. Jay asks rhetorically, "Now that we're old enough, where the hell do we go?" as Hugh covers her mouth with a rag as she struggles violently until passing out (*It Follows*). This shows that, in many ways, *It Follows* is about the impossibility of understanding the process of growing up. The teenage characters defy parental boundaries to engage in activities that result in backfiring, leaving them in a state of ignorance.

Yet, they continue to apply rules to the world to attempt and make some sense of it. Since part of postmodernism is a lack of fixed rules and referents, their attempt to apply logic to hyperreality is ineffective at best.

Jay's understanding of sex is tarnished by her experience with Hugh/Jeff. This first sexual encounter takes place in a run-down parking structure that is decrepit and decayed, indicating industrial waste and also the destruction of once-pristine space, like Jay's psychic realm. Baudrillard says that postmodernism causes "mental destructuration through a mental strategy of catastrophe" (39). What was once thought of as logical and pure becomes tainted by the introduction of an evil whose main ability is the erosion of certainty. This imagery is also reflected in visual returns to the recursive image of the pool where Jay happily swam before her first date: the pool becomes progressively filled with flotsam until finally it is destroyed. Similarly, Jay's sexual psyche undergoes an erosive process as she realizes that "sex is no longer the source of a truth" (Plummer 1). Postmodern horror slowly strips away every attempt to find a greater truth until there is nothing left. After Hugh incapacitates Jay, he ties her to a wheelchair and tells her his understanding of the rules that It follows. As he shares the rules that are not followed by It, Hugh literally controls Jay's gaze by wheeling her around and forcing her to look at It as it approaches. Jay's vulnerability is emphasized through her near nudity and (ironically) virginal white underwear. She is tied down and in a state of immense fear and confusion. The rules Hugh tells Jay about It seem contradictory and are later shown to be incorrect or at least incomplete. It seems consigned to no strict set of rules and is capable of change, which makes it all the more terrifying. Since "logic and reason fail" in postmodern horror (Keisner 412), it encourages us to question what we think is real.

The film further portrays a postmodern view of sexuality by depicting Jay as paradoxically in control of her sexuality even as she is attacked by It. After several close encounters with It, Jay lays in a hospital bed with a broken arm and head wound, showing her body as both disrupted and corrupted. She is once again in a very vulnerable state as she gazes upon her two options for seduction and thus presumably passing on the curse. She chooses Greg, a promiscuous drug dealer. As they have sex, Jay is not engaged in the act at all but instead looks up and over, searching for It: her previous relationship with sexuality has been broken down by the presence of this supernatural creature. Their sexual encounter eventually causes Greg's death. Back home from the hospital, Jay watches out of her window and sees what looks like a pajama-clad Greg headed towards his house. The doppelganger breaks in the house's window as realization dawns on Jay that she is not watching Greg at all but rather It. Jay is forced to watch as It (appearing as Greg's mother) has violent sex with Greg until he dies, culminating in It urinating on him. This scene depicts breaks down normative rules of sexual behavior. Greg subverts the traditional trope of the nice guy (represented by Paul) getting the

girl. His sex scene with It contains, by far, the most alarming sexual encounter in the film. While in other scenes It does not need to be invited inside in order to get close to its victim, in this one Greg responds to the knocking on his door before he is attacked. This seems to indicate that Greg is in some way asking for it – or rather, asking for It. Also, significant here is that It takes the form of Greg's mother in order to kill him. This version of It represents Greg's disastrous Oedipal desire for his mother. It kills Greg with its vagina, a simulacrum of the vagina that brought him into the world. Its urination represents the linkage between sex and destruction: the genitals allow for sexual pleasure, but they also create waste. Postmodern depictions of the body "disrupt society's self-image" of "self-contained, healthy body" (Lindenmeyer 60). By showing the body as leaking and ruptured, *It Follows* troubles bodily boundaries. The third act of *It Follows* includes an attempt to destroy the creature that is often seen in modern horror movies. In these films this attempt is usually spurred by some kind of clue to understanding the creature's agenda, intentions, or history. However, because there is none of that in this film and because this is a movie about a group of teenagers attempting to function in a world and with rules they do not understand, their attempt to destroy the creature is futile and even foolish. In this act, the group of friends go to their local pool in an attempt to trap the creature in water and then electrocute it. The director describes this as scooby-dooish in its poor planning and execution; the electric current doesn't even reach the water, and Paul's attempts to shoot the creature only disarm it briefly. In a very tense and chaotic scene, the creature holds Jay underwater and nearly drowns her, and Paul shoots Yara in the ankle when trying to kill It. Only Jay can see that It has taken the form of her father, sent to punish her for having sex. The group is depicted as impotent in action, and their inability to understand any rules that may exist is a postmodern disruption of logical progression.

Finally, the postmodern take on horror in *It Follows* metatextually functions as hyperrealistic itself. The film most explicitly demonstrates this through its soundtrack, self-reflexivity, and open-endedness. The film's soundtrack provides a "deliberate disjunction with the instinct for commodification and commercialization found among other genres, particularly those in the mainstream milieu" (Walsh 40). Beyond providing discordancy that engenders a sense of dread whenever It is near, the film also incorporates "heartbeat inclusions" that "form heavily processed low frequencies that are exaggerated and distorted, almost as though the corporeal has been magnified and made unnatural – denatured by the meting out of this unstoppable curse" (44). The soundtrack acts as a signifier of hyperreality, both indicating the supernatural creature's presence and providing a distorted electronic simulacrum of a heartbeat in place of Jay's real one. Later, the film denies the possibility of any logical conclusion. It seems that because Jay receives the creature from an unloving sexual interaction and passes it on initially through an unloving sexual interaction, perhaps she will be saved when she finally sleeps

with Paul, her awkward neighbor who has clearly been in love with her for years. Perhaps, the film almost implies, true love will deny Its power and Jay and Paul will live on happily ever after. The last scene shows Jay and Paul walking through their neighborhood seemingly at peace. Yet, while at first they are walking alone, the final shot depicts someone or something following them with an all-too-familiar death shuffle. We cannot know for sure whether or not it is It. The glimpse at it (or It) is too brief to confirm this. Perhaps it is just a neighbor going for a walk? Several signs seem to indicate that there will be no happy ending for the protagonist, though. One is that a jarring, synth-heavy score plays intensely in this scene, which conveys a sense of dread and impending attack. Another, more subtle hint is that throughout this film, any time that Jay is in danger it is indicated through the recursive image of the color red. In this final shot, the man raking leaves behind Paul is wearing a red sweater. Red blood has been transformed into the symbolism of the color red, thus replacing the referent with the simulacra. So perhaps true love does not save the day after all. However, and to make things even more complex, maybe this is a double denial of rules; maybe this is the one time that red does not indicate danger. Possibly the person walking behind Paul and Jay is truly innocuous. We will never know, and that is precisely the point.

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Feed the World, Eat the World: Cyborg Feminism and the Disappearing Shōjo in *Lagoon* and *Paprika*

Camille Houle-Eichel

Abstract

This essay investigates the impact of cyborg feminism and shōjo culture within a literary and cinematic context, through the theories of Dona J. Haraway and Susan J. Napier. It is by analysing concepts of the unknowability of woman as well as the disappearing shōjo that women are revealed, not as passive sacrificing bodies, but rather, subjects of power. In her work, Haraway deconstructs feminist discourse and turns to the female body to articulate the place of women in a technologically-advanced era. Susan J. Napier develops a concise analysis of Japanese anime films and series and it is through this essay that the concept of the disappearing shōjo is articulated as a figure of empowerment. This article combines both theories in an effort to demonstrate that characters in works such as Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Kon Satoshi's *Paprika* are representative of how women can enact positive social change.

Emancipation is a word uttered by feminists as it demands freedom from social strictures imposed by the dominant force of white men. It discourages, dismantles and deconstructs stereotypes about female/feminine identity. Authors such as Donna J. Haraway and Anne Balsamo created a discourse on the gendered body, specifically women, and the image of the cyborg. Cyborg feminism, a term born of Haraway's work "A Cyborg Manifesto," has been circulating within feminist discourse as a means to navigate the otherwise unknowable female body. This theory springs from the anxieties of a postmodern world, where the question of posthuman and non-human identities, has begun to sprout as discursive material to theorize feminism in a technologically advanced era. Cyborg feminist discourse is used to empower women and imbue science fiction works of Afrofuturistic literature such as Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Japanese anime such as Kon Satoshi's *Paprika*. By imagining technologically advanced cybernetics, these works reshape the female body into a subject of power. This concept is especially important when we consider that, in *Lagoon* and in *Paprika*, Black feminism and Japanese feminism respectively are central theories. Ayodele, in *Lagoon* and Paprika, in *Paprika*, also become what is known in anime as a disappearing shōjo: a vessel to enact positive change. A shōjo is typically associated to manga or anime directed towards young women and girls, with the main subject being romance and relationships. A shōjo

character is often a young woman who triumphs over adversity through transformative means. Moreover, when faced with adversity, characters mirror each other. One feeds the world while the other devours it. Characters like Ayodele and Paprika are similar as they each portray the cyborg figure in feminism and become the disappearing shōjo as a symbol of female agency.

The image of the cyborg is a hybrid construct. A cyborg is composed of bionic wear (or biowear) as well as an organic body, and is therefore considered a composite of both machine and human. Currently, one of the most common aspects of hybridity theory, is that its identity is constructed through the mixing of cultural heritage. However, cyborg feminism turns hybridity into a discursive method of the body. In order to properly link both concepts of hybridity and the image of the cyborg, we must first obtain a clear understanding of what both terms mean in this context. Anjali Probhu writes in his book *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* that "(…) hybridity is a positive, resistive force to a cultural hegemony" (7). From this statement alone, we can already assert that the cyborg feminist attempts to resist in this positive way, by articulating gender through technology, the dominating force of culture. Moreover, Probhu explains that hybrid identities create solidarity between the embodied cultures through shared experiences and commonality. The cyborg is a hybrid because it responds to this "differencing of identity" (7). In other words, the image of the cyborg is a differentiation between woman and machine. If we concede that biowear or other forms of technologies (artificial intelligence (AI) or virtual reality) have become othered as women have been identified as threatening entities, then the effect of solidarity Probhu points to is an effect of being marginalized. Haraway states in "A Cyborg Manifesto" that "[a] cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid, of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." (50) The fictional aspect of the cyborg (its technology) is representative of women's unknowability, and works with feminist theory to create this fictional body to navigate the current social predicament of women. Haraway furthers her explanation by stating that:

> Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (50)

Here we fall into the realm of possibility where the construction of social reality becomes entirely malleable. By combining reality and fiction, cyborg feminism is entitled to express new ways of constructing female identity.

As the theory stipulates, cyborg feminism concerns the constructing and deconstructing of the female gender in a patriarchal society. As Haraway explains, the cyborg "changes what counts as women's experience" by making the

body, not the mind, the primary source of discourse. It does so by building a body with cybernetic parts and therefore creates a new version of the woman's structure. By that logic, the cyborg constructs a narrative of empowerment for women because the body is made stronger through its recreation. Anne Balsamo [4] concurs with Haraway that the female cyborg is hybrid. She states that "[i]t shows how the female body historically was constructed as a hybrid case, thus making it compatible with notions of cyborg identity," (19) and further explains that "if female bodies are fundamentally different from male bodies, not just an inferior version, the issue of control becomes more critical: how does one control a body that isn't entirely knowable?" (26) Here the question of knowability (or unknowability) is crucial to understand systemic and epistemic violence inflicted on women. 'Woman' is predicated on the understanding of what or who a woman should be, and is done so by a systemic identificatory process dictated by a male-centric society. Thus, the image of the cyborg makes the ideal of woman unknowable, intangible and undefined by any gender other than woman. In the face of man's dominance, the female cyborg identity is threatening in its unknowability.

Another final concept of the cyborg that must be brought to light is its capacity for mimicry. In his work titled *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, Homi Bhabha explains that mimicry "is the desire for reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*." (126) The cyborg is not entirely human, and we cannot state that it is ever going to be entirely, biologically female either. However, the cyborg's uncanny resemblance to a human being is always coupled with its impressive capacity to imitate the human psyche, insofar as Balsamo would add to Bhabha's point by stating that cyborgs "fascinate us because they are not like us and yet just like us." (26) Bhabha speaks of mimicry in the context of colonialism, whereas Balsamo alludes to mimicry concerning the image of the cyborg, and its allure within art culture and feminist theory. Nevertheless, this allusion pieces together both notions of hybridity and cyborg feminism since each concept delves into the notion of the Other, and is effectively merged in an act of mimicry. In other words, if the cyborg is a hybrid—that is, in Bhabha's words, not quite like us—then mimicry serves as an agent of identification, as a way for the cyborg to mold itself in the ideal form to instigate change. In this case, that ideal form is a woman.

Works of science fiction such as *Lagoon* and *Paprika* offer literal examples of what the cyborg body can enact as change. On one hand, *Lagoon*'s cyborg is Ayodele, the extraterrestrial ambassador to Earth. When she is examined by Adaora, the latter informs the group that Ayodele is "made of tiny, tiny, tiny, metal-like balls. It's *got* to be metal." (25) Given the fact that Ayodele is made of metal particles and can change into whatever shape she wishes, her identity as a

[4] Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Duke University Press,1996. "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture." pp. 17-40.

cyborg is unmistakable. Furthermore, Ayodele's most used disguise is that of a female colonized body, further confirming her identity as the image of the cyborg described by Haraway. This choice of disguise is a reflection of women's oppression, as the form she takes the longest is that of a black African woman. Hence, her alien composition constructed as female makes her hybrid identity embrace the unknowable, making her all the more threatening for those who seek to keep control in Nigeria. Ayodele's identity as a threatening entity is palpable not only by her enigmatic responses such as "You people are very interesting," (32) but also in her ability to mimic men just as well as women. Her capacity for shapeshifting makes her all the more threatening because her true identity is in itself unknowable since she can shapeshift into anything, even a man. Mimicry in *Lagoon* is ever present in the form of Ayodele and her ability to transform.

She also represents the oppressed figure of a colonized woman, embracing Bhabha's definition of the term. Jennifer Gonzáles explains in her article, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research" that "[t]he image of the cyborg body functions as a site of condensation and displacement. … It represents that which cannot otherwise be represented." (58-59) Ayodele's body is a condensation of the colonized and the alienated. As such, her presence in Lagos is all the more troubling for people such as Benson who seeks to take control of the situation. Therefore, Ayodele's role is to disrupt this need for control, which she claims herself that her and her people "are change." (39) The change that she enacts, by pacifying Lagos, is in direct response to her body as a cyborg: "In other words, when the current ontological model of human being does not fit a new paradigm, a hybrid model of existence is required to encompass a new complex and contradictory lived experience. … [T]he cyborg thus becomes the historical record of changes in human perception." (Gonzáles 61) In Ayodele's case, her contradictory lived experience is the conflicting situations of hospitality and violence. Regardless that she claimed humans were interesting—and that Adaora, Agu and Anthony were welcoming to a certain extent—her subsequent treatment by the soldiers, left her traumatized: "[t]hey shot her in the thighs, chest, face, everywhere." (Okorafor137) Her experience of violence and kindness can very well be interpreted as women's transgenerational trauma, where most have lived through extreme versions of kindness and violence, especially subaltern women. What is important to understand from Gonzáles' statement is that the contradiction is always between the pre-established social contract (in its current as well as historicized context), predisposed to subdue women, and the necessity for freedom through the unknowability of the female gender.

On the other hand, Jennifer Gonzáles' passage is also relevant for Paprika. She inhabits a contradictory aspect of Japanese culture by embodying an open, sexualized personality. This is not to say that Paprika is hypersexualized, but understanding that in Japanese culture, women initially present themselves as meek individuals whose

decency in body as well as in character is of paramount importance. Paprika is traditionally known as a shōjo. In an anime, a shōjo is, as Susan J. Napier explains in her book *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, "typically linked with consumption, either as a body consumed by males whose dreams seem to revolve around nonthreatening schoolgirls or as consuming subjects themselves." (169-170) This is to say that Paprika offers a dual state personality by her appearance and her psyche. Her character is dressed in chino jeans and a tight-fitting red t-shirt. She sports short red hair and peers at the people she comes in contact with—not unlike Ayodele, whose principle, alienating characteristic is her gaze. These traits are closely linked to the shōjo as Paprika is infantilized in many ways. However, because the shōjo's infantilization is a fantasy of Japanese men, she is also sexualized. As the doppelgänger of Atsuko—a psychiatrist who, in short, represents the traditional depiction of Japanese women with her neutral clothes and professional demeanor—Paprika is curvier and viewed by all men in this film as being "the woman of [their] dreams." She fulfills their fantasy, but as a woman, not as a "nonthreatening schoolgirl." Therefore, Paprika is a hybrid model that changes the perception of society by being both a shōjo and an adult. Her cyborg identity exists because of a technological instrument that must bind with an organism to be able to work. She was created in Atsuko's mind as a way to, not only keep her patients at ease, but also to protect her identity. Paprika, instead of remaining an AI avatar, took on a life of her own and became a connected, but separate identity of Atsuko. We can surmise that Atsuko could be the cyborg since her mind was enhanced by technology; however, since both Paprika and Atsuko are intermixed with one another and that Paprika is the one who spearheads the charge to save the real world, then for this analysis, Paprika is the main focus.[5]

Paprika is considered a cyborg through the technology of virtual reality. Specifically, Paprika was created through a device called a DC Mini, that allows both users— psychologist and patient— to view the patient's dream as if it were a movie. The matrix of this device allows the users to create many worlds, which can combine with one another and create a multitude of dreams and worlds at an exponential rate. Since Paprika is originally considered as a semi-virtual entity, her conceptualization as a cyborg is difficult to discern. However, Nina Lykke describes in her article "Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science" that:

> Virtual reality is a modern communications technology which makes it possible to obtain a very "intimate 'interface' between humans and computer imagery" (Woolley 1993:5). It is so intimate that the sense data that make up the 'real' experience are supposed to be present in the virtual,

[5] This is not to erase Atsuko's contribution in this film, since Paprika is Atsuko, but for the sake of clarity and conciseness, I will focus of Paprika. An in-depth analysis of Satoshi's last film would merit from a closer look at Atsuko as the female character with the most agency.

> electronic space (in future technologies, at least). (82)

Being a virtual body, her ability to interact with reality and make contact with people makes her a hybrid of the real and the virtual, the cultural and the free. Her capacity to move from one dream to another confirms her cyborg identity and her gender, breaking the conventions of traditional Japanese culture. This makes her, like Ayodele, an image of the cyborg as Haraway envisioned it. In Lykke's analysis, the cyborg is described as the "perfect non-human human." (82) The essence of her character is that she is a dream, who becomes a doppelgänger who then becomes real and disappears into the dream world. Her existence is predicated on the dream of freedom of the self. As aforementioned, Atsuko is a conventional representation of womanhood in Japan. Her doppelgänger Paprika is closer to what one would think of a typical American woman. In either case, these representations embody two states of womanhood in Japan, the restricted and the unrestrained. Atsuko and Paprika are an expression of the mind doubled, split into the woman of reality and the woman of dreams. Atsuko's role is to blend and to keep the façade of her singular personality unfragmented so that Paprika can carry on with their work.

Throughout the film, keeping Paprika secret is important as she is the most valuable asset of the DC Mini project. Her ability to manipulate the worlds (both dream and real) around her, and to maintain herself as a mysterious woman makes her an ideal image of cyborg feminism, as she is unknowable. In the final scenes, Dr. Shima worries that Paprika might not be safe from the dangers of the dream, to which she replies: "Don't you know who I am?". Dr. Shima simply smiles and apologizes and continues to monitor her progress. In fact, the question of who Paprika is, is never answered—since her birth as a doppelgänger is never explained, and the men simply guess that she is a version of Atsuko. Napier explains that "Japanese women are still relatively disempowered, the overturning of the stereotype of feminine submissiveness may create a particularly festive resonance." (31) Here, the concept of festival is similar to what the West understands as carnival. The idea of festival, according to Napier is a "liminal space [that] allows for a kind of controlled chaos, in which 'people behave in extraordinary ways, once freed from ordinary time and everyday order'" (30). *Paprika* is a film where we can observe such behaviour from Paprika and Atsuko in their respective ways.

The Chairman appointed himself protector of dreams when the DC Mini was invented because he believed that dreams were a precious commodity that needed protection from such technology. His main objective was to supress Paprika, an entity he felt was an invader. His attempt at conquering the world through dreams, through the mind, to stop a potential female threat, is reminiscent of colonial discourse and why *Lagoon* and *Paprika* work so well together. In the former, we have a case form of colonialism while in the latter we have a colonisation of the mind. Both

circle around the notion that technology is the marker of a progressive society. Characters such as Paprika and Ayodele embody the image of the cyborg to create a form of resistance to the violence that ensues from a desire to control such assets to capitalism by enacting positive change. Ayodele pacifies Lagos whereas Paprika (with Atsuko) devours the parasitic dream of the Chairman (a parade of capitalist consumerism) and saves the world and, in the end, Atsuko is able to embrace both sides of her identity. Furthermore, Atsuko is the only one who managed to create this cyborg double while the men who have used this device have never birthed any such double. This speaks volumes for cyborg feminist theory since only a woman 'birthed' the existence of a second self and through this self enacted positive change. While both Paprika and Ayodele are cyborgs in the sense that Haraway envisioned, they also correspond to the anime concept which is that of the disappearing shōjo.

It was previously stated that the shōjo can either be a consumed or consuming subject. This concept can be viewed both literally and metaphorically. In this analysis it is both. Paprika is the consuming subject whereas Ayodele is the consumed subject and both are a metaphor for something else. At the end of the film, Paprika binds with Atsuko and becomes an infant which emerges from the insides of a toy robot. The infant proceeds to breathe in components of the dream world which have spilled into the real world. As she consumes, her body grows while she feeds on the dream and, consequently, on the Chairman also. When she reaches maturity, the world is back to normal and her translucid, titanesque figure disappears. The Chairman is gone from both the virtual and the real worlds and his desire to conquer vanishes with him. The whereabouts of Paprika at this point are unknown but both the detective and Dr. Shima are convinced they will "see her again in [their] dreams." The shōjo cannot be a part of the changed world, but rather its instigator. It is done through sacrifice and while this idea may be frustrating it does have merit. To be clear, Kon's disappearing shōjo is in connection with his fascination with "intriguing female characters and their complex and often problematic relation to illusion, memory, and performance …" (Napier 26) Therefore, the disappearance of Paprika is related to memory and its power when we consider collective memory. Paprika serves as a way to remember what was done to enable the freedoms allotted.

If we consider this in the context of cyborg feminism, we can judge that Paprika's actions were all to enact positive change. One final aspect of the disappearing shōjo is described in the following quote:

> All of these aspects of the shōjo culture—the vulnerability, the elasticity, and its quality of seduction—appear to be at work in some degrees in Kon's works, although, unlike many anime directors, he does not focus exclusively on the young girl but also treats more mature (albeit still vulnerable) women as well (26).

These three aspects of shōjo culture: vulnerability, elasticity and quality of seduction are present for both characters. First, Ayodele embodies these three aspects. Her vulnerability is her status as an alien. She is isolated from her people and this makes her a target. A second incident toward the end of the novel reaffirms this vulnerability when she is attacked a second time by soldiers: "Adaora could hear the meaty sound of the boot smashing into Ayodele's flesh even from where she was. … the men rained blows on every part of Ayodele's body with their boots, the butts of their guns, their fists" (Okorafor 266). Because Ayodele is separated from her people, she is vulnerable to attacks. Her elasticity is directly connected to shapeshifting. Similarly, to Paprika, Ayodele can change the morphology of her body, making her a versatile cyborg entity. Lastly, her quality of seduction also stems from her gaze. Both characters are distinguished by their eyes. Paprika is observed peering at the people she meets while Ayodele's eyes are her marker of her alien identity. It is through their gaze that both are deemed unknowable as both women redirect the gaze back to the observer rather than onto themselves. Second, Paprika's vulnerability lies in the fact that she is a woman whose very existence is anchored in the virtual. Her elasticity lies within her versatility. Paprika is able to converge from one dream to another, from dream to reality. Finally, her quality of seduction stems from her gaze and her difference. Her direct, but cheerful nature, as well as her body, make her into the ideal woman and this is mentioned several times in the film.

These two characters act in opposite ways when the time comes for their sacrifice. As aforementioned, the disappearing shōjo must be allowed to vanish in order to make room for the mature woman. Ayodele's sacrifice can be viewed as a sacrifice for planet Earth/Mother Earth as the newly arrived claim they want to clean the world; and so, to leave space for the mature woman (Earth itself to be given the freedom to heal). Ayodele's sacrifice is to *feed* herself to Lagos, a city marked by colonialism and capitalist ventures such as oil extraction. Paprika, however, *eats* the dream of Man to leave space for the mature woman who is represented by Atsuko. If we think about this in terms of freedoms, both characters inevitably take control of their own bodies and their own choices. In their unknowability within the realm of the 'not quite human, female cyborg,' they gain power over themselves and can navigate the space they inhabit as women and as citizens. It is precisely for this reason that the unknowable cyborg figure is threatening. Whatever change it enacts will be to enable women to stand firm in their demands for equality. Theories implemented within works of literature such as *Lagoon* and films like *Paprika*, surrounding the aspect of cyborg feminism and the disappearing shōjo create a space for women to act on their freedom as agents of positive change. As Undide says in Okorafor's novel "change begets change" (193) and these works can be the stepping-stones to rearticulating the female body.

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The "Longue Durée" of Refusal in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Aishwarya Singh

Abstract

This paper works against the literary criticism of Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* which understands the infanticide at the center of the narrative through the prism of trauma. For instance, Andrew Levy's (1991, 114) claim that Morrison uses the death of children in many of her works as a "culminating point for the multitude of painful and unexplainable inversions that inflect her character's lives" or Andrew Hock Soon Ng's (2011, 239) argument that the haunting presence of the dead baby throughout the story compels Sethe to "face her trauma." Instead, this essay argues that Morrison's Beloved represents the infanticide as a refusal of the violent forms of "care" that are built into the mechanisms of chattel slavery. Sethe's decision to cease the reproduction of life creates ruptures to the material and ideological structure of chattel slavery. Sethe's murder of Beloved constitutes "planning," in the sense that Moten and Harney employ the term. Moreover, the nature of Sethe's relationship to Beloved's ghost suggests that living in the aftermath of such painful refusals entails repeatedly attending to one's original plan and the losses that follow in its wake.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* represents the trajectory of a deeply painful refusal. At the center of the narrative is Sethe, a runaway slave woman who murdered her infant daughter Beloved when she was tracked down by her slave owner. While she is only able to kill her one child, Sethe's original plan was to kill herself and all her four children in order to prevent them from being taken back into slavery. The ghost of Beloved returns to the home of Sethe and her other daughter Denver, first as an invisible presence and then in the corporeal form of a mysterious young girl with limited speech. In this paper, I work against the popular literary interpretations of Morrison's *Beloved* which understand the infanticide through the prism of trauma. For instance, Andrew Levy's claim that Morrison uses the death of children in many of her novels as a "culminating point for the multitude of painful and unexplainable inversions that inflect her character's lives" (114) or Andrew Hock Soon Ng's argument that the haunting presence of the dead baby throughout the story compels Sethe to "face her trauma" (239). I argue that Morrison's *Beloved* represents the infanticide as a refusal of the violent forms of "care" that are built into the mechanism of chattel slavery. Moreover, I suggest that a study of the nature of Sethe's relationship to Beloved's ghost speaks to how the aftermath of these painful

refusals involve repeatedly attending to the losses that follow in their wake.

I am concerned with the *longue durée* of the refusal that is enacted when Sethe kills her child. Understanding the *longue durée* of refusal means interrogating its origins and legacies rather than viewing it as a discrete event. This durational frame evokes the following considerations: what structures does Sethe refuse when she murders Beloved? what kinds of destabilizations are produced by her refusal at the moment in which she acts? what must be endured in the aftermath of her refusal? I begin by examining how the novel portrays the custodianship of the white ruling class. Morrison's text foregrounds the forms of care that are inflicted on slaves in order to constitute them as governable subjects. In this context, Sethe's murder of Beloved is not an inversion of maternal responsibility or an act of desperation. Her plan and its partial success constitute a negation of the reproduction of life and, by extension, a refusal of violent care. Moreover, I examine how Sethe's interactions with the ghost of Beloved are marked by repetition and unconditional attachment. Departing from interpretations of the ghost of Beloved as a materialization of repressed trauma, I suggest that these kinds of interactions gesture towards the notion that living in the aftermath of refusal involves constantly revisiting its fall-out.

Understanding the *longue durée* of refusal requires an examination of the context in which such actions are taken. In other words, it is important to delineate the precise social-political relations that are being refused by dispossessed subjects. Given that Sethe decides to discontinue the lives of herself and her children, it is essential to consider the ways in which life *is* reproduced within the system of chattel slavery. Morrison's *Beloved* represents the various modes of care that are built into chattel slavery. In this context, I use the term care to refer to the ways in which slaves were "looked after" in the custody of the white ruling class. I suggest that this mode of custodianship aims to constitute Black people as governable subjects.

Morrison's novel suggests that the kinds of care provided and, in some instances, denied to slaves are determined by what Sharpe refers to as an "awful arithmetics" — a set of calculations in which Black life is fungible in the final instance. In other words, this form of care is calibrated to keep slaves moving along the chain of production with as little resistance as possible. For example, the novel recounts the experiences of Paul D when he is sold into a prison chain gang after he is captured during his escape from Sweet Home, the plantation which he and Sethe had originally worked on. The men in the prison chain gang are fed "lumps of lima beans" and they are forced to sleep in containers that are locked up by the guards (126). Morrison's reference to unpalatable food and to containers as sites of rest inaugurates how the guard's provision of care is inseparable from their administration of violence. Care is only provided to maintain the slaves as viable commodities. Moreover, the form of that care itself constitutes an assault on the body. The narrator goes on to describe the content of the men's hidden transcript as they

continue along their route: "Singing songs to Mr. Death, they smashed his head. More than the rest, they killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. Making them think the next sunrise would be worth it; that another stroke of time would do it at last" (128). The expression that "life was leading them on" can be readily interpreted to mean that the men in the chain gang maintained a tragic optimism for a better life beyond slavery. However, I propose an alternative, complementary reading of this expression: Life was "leading them on" in the sense of leading them *onwards*. On one level, this passage gestures to how slaves are reproduced not just as workers but as property that circulates. They are reproduced in ways that allow for their efficient flow in the chain of production. It is also important to note that here the slave's physiological imperative to reproduce his life — and the attendant affective desire that life can be something other than what is right now — is represented as a force that keeps his body moving. The calculated deprivation of care creates a yearning for a better life which, to an extent, functions to keep the men in the chain gang compliant. This functions as a metonymy for the systemic ways in which the denial of care, and in some instances, direct assaults on life, function to extract profit from slave populations at all nodes of production. Consider the common phenomenon of throwing slaves overboard slave ships to "save the rest of the cargo"

(Sharpe 49) or the routine practice of branding slaves so that they can be found if they escape. Essentially, through this scene, Morrison's *Beloved* shows how, in the custody of the white ruling class, slaves are purposefully provided or denied care according to these considerations of profit and effective governance.

After witnessing Sethe murder her daughter when he returns to recapture them, Schoolteacher, the name of the slave master who comes to retrieve them, notes that "[these are] the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every *care* and *guidance* in the world to keep them from the cannibal life that they preferred" (177; emphasis added). This insight into his thought process reveals how slave owners tend to be *invested* in the conception of themselves as caretakers. The formulation of slave owners as such — supported by racist biomedical discourses about the physiological needs of Black people — allows the system to "[deny] that anything was ever broken" (Halberstam 6). In other words, it allows the white ruling class to present their relationship to slaves as one of guardianship rather than exploitation.

Morrison's novel foregrounds how a key condition of slavery is the placement of slaves in the custody of white merchants, guards, and slave owners. These actors assume the responsibility of determining and attending to the slaves' needs. Their provision of care is calibrated to keep the production process moving along. Moreover, this care is ideologically constituted as a benevolence of the system. Consent to the *form* of care is moot insofar as it is conceived of as a necessity for the enslaved population. Therefore, the enactment of care within chattel slavery not only

reproduces the slave population, but it also aims to reproduce them as governable subjects.

If chattel slavery is driven and rationalized by idealized notions of white custodianship, then Sethe's murder of her child refuses the provision of these violent forms of care and the ways in which they govern the lives of Black people. Instead of carving out spaces of autonomy within the structure of chattel slavery, Sethe opts for a "mode of politics that does not reproduce the present, ad infinitum" (Berlant 393). In this section, I examine Sethe's own accounts of her actions as well as the unease of the white witnesses to the murder to attain an understanding of how her actions destabilize the logics of the present. I insist that Sethe's actions constitute "planning," in the sense that Fred Moten and Stefano Harney use the term.

Lauren Berlant formulates a politics that is "non-reproductive, generating a form from within brokenness and beyond the exigencies of the current crisis and alternatively to it too" (393). The killing of a child, in order to protect her from a life of enslavement, constitutes non-reproductive politics in the most literal and devastating sense. Sethe herself rationalizes her decision as such: "Nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no [...] Sethe had *refused* — and refuses still" (296; emphasis added). Sethe states firmly that she does not conceive of her actions as driven by desperation or insanity; she understands her actions as a refusal to be complicit in giving her children over to a violent custodianship. Throughout the narrative, Sethe also references the time that schoolteacher's pupils "took [her] milk" (20). At the most literal level, this is a description to the type of sexual abuse that Sethe was subjected to during her time at Sweet Home. However, Sethe's references to her milk being stolen are more pronounced when she is remembering the death of her daughter: "Nobody will get my milk no more except my own children [...] I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you" (236). In this context, the mother's milk signifies the ability to care for your children on your own terms. Therefore, Sethe's references to how "they took her milk" frames the infanticide as a refusal of the way that chattel slavery imposes violent forms of care upon slaves as well as how this form of care disrupts kinship ties.

After he witnesses Sethe kill Beloved, it is clear to schoolteacher "that there was nothing there to claim. The three [...] [children] they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not" (175). Despite only killing one of her children, Sethe sabotages the slave catchers' project by rendering all her children unable to receive the kind of care that would constitute them as governable subjects. Schoolteacher's nephew, who had assaulted Sethe back at Sweet Home, starts shaking after seeing the murder: "What she go and do that for?" he thinks, "On account of a beating? [...] What she go and do that for?" (176). His repetition of the phrase "What she go and do that for?" betrays an inability to come to terms with Sethe's decision to cease the reproduction of life.

At this moment, Sethe inaugurates what Agamben calls a "form-of-life"; this term refers to "a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something like a bare life" (73). Sethe destabilizes the notion that all life is worth continuing and, more importantly, that all forms of care have the consent of the recipient. Therefore, she undermines how white people are able to rationalize chattel slavery by conceiving of themselves as caretakers.

Sethe engages in what Moten and Harney have described as planning: "This ongoing experiment with the informal, carried out by and on the means of social reproduction, as the *to come* of the forms of life" (74). According to Moten and Harney, planning is not necessarily organized political action aimed at redistributing resources; instead, it consists of experimenting with *alternative* modes of care. Planning involves working through other ways of reproducing physical and social life, without always knowing the results of this experimentation. Sethe's purported goal is not to end her daughter's life but rather to "put her where she would be safe" (236). Her account of her own actions suggests that she was *reaching towards* an alternative mode of care. In other words, Sethe's objective is not simply to negate the current circumstances of life but also to carve out a new space wherein her children would receive the kind of safety that cannot be ensured through the violent forms of care that are imposed on them under chattel slavery. She *launches* a course of action based on the demands of the moment; she sche-mes under conditions of duress. Not knowing the outcomes of her actions — not knowing what lies after death — Sethe simply acts with the knowledge that there is a potential for being otherwise.

It is important to remember that refusals are not necessarily triumphant acts that undermine structural dispossession. The gravity of the loss that ensues cannot always be grasped at the moment in which one does what needs to be done. The return of Beloved as a ghost has often been read as a manifestation of the trauma that Sethe is unable to acknowledge. However, in this final section, I argue that Sethe's interactions with Beloved when she returns in a corporeal form represent how living in the aftermath of refusal entails continuously revisiting one's plans and the losses that follow in their wake. Christina Sharpe asks us to consider three meanings of wake: the disruption caused by a body that is moved; the mourning of the dead through ritual practice; and the state of being awake (21). It is across these three registers that I qualify the aftermath of Sethe's refusal.

The novel represents Sethe's attempts to make sense of the disruptions that follow her act of refusal. When Sethe comes to understand that the mysterious young woman who starts living with them is actually the daughter she killed all those years ago, she begins to talk compulsively about her plan. She seeks to make Beloved understand the conditions of duress under which she had to act. For example, Denver notes that even in the moments when "Beloved was quiet, dreamy, minding her own business, Sethe got her going again. Whispering,

muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come" (297). Denver goes on to observe that "Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it *refused*" (297; emphasis added). Sethe appears to desire impasses in communication as these impasses create an opening for her to repeat herself over and over again. This repetition is generative; as she repeats the story of her plan, Sethe comes across "clarifying information" to present to Beloved. In other words, Sethe's desire to have forgiveness *refused* speaks to her unwillingness to attain any kind of resolution or transcendence of the tragic events that have transpired. She does not seek to undermine or mitigate the disruptions caused by her act of refusal. Instead, she attempts to recuperate these disruptions by returning to her plan — the details of it, the context for it — time and again.

Moreover, the novel suggests that living in the aftermath of painful refusals involves *caring* for the loses that follow. Paul D says to Sethe in the early days of Beloved's arrival: "I just don't understand what the hold is" (80). This speaks to how, in the aftermath of refusal, one is compelled to revisit that which has been lost. This revisiting constitutes an intimate relationship between the agent and that which has been lost to them. In a lyrical exchange between herself and Beloved, Sethe declares: "I have your milk/ I have your smile/ I will take care of you" (257). The kind of relationship to death that is symbolized in these moments differs from conventional mourning. This relationship is one of attempting to recuperate the dead, to breathe life into them once more. However, towards the end of the narrative, Beloved starts to demand more food and grow larger, while Sethe starves and shrinks. Attending to that which has been lost — recalling it, building intimacy with it — is in the final instance represented as a deeply arduous task.

Morrison's *Beloved* shows that living in the aftermath of refusal means living a condition of repetition. While Sethe's plan was part of an ongoing experiment to shift the mode of social reproduction, its tragic outcomes must be lived with and, at times, against. In the novel, the aftermath of refusal consists of revisiting one's plan; almost compulsively going through it with a fine-tooth comb. It means accounting for the justifications of the plan repeatedly — within yourself or to the right audience. Moreover, it also consists of building an ongoing relationship with all that has been lost in the enactment of refusal. This brings us to the third sense in which Sharpe uses the term wake: as a state of awareness. The repetitive condition of the aftermath of refusal necessarily demands a certain vigilance from the agent. Whether she is attending to the plan or the losses which follow it, attention to the present state of affairs and what brought them about is continuously demanded of Sethe. Essentially, *Beloved* suggests that, in the aftermath of refusal, the agent must live in a heightened state of awareness.

Acts of refusal are not discrete instances that can be isolated from the flow of time — they are a response to certain social-political structures and have an

afterlife that must be lived through. In this paper, I have sought to elaborate upon the *longue durée* of the refusal that is enacted when Sethe commits infanticide. I suggest that Sethe's refusal, which constitutes a negation of the reproduction of life, is a response to the violent mode of care built into chattel slavery. Sethe's refusal destabilizes the schoolteacher's attempt to take herself and her children back into his care as well as ideological assumptions about the value of the kind of life that chattel slavery reproduces for slaves. Moreover, I insist Sethe engages in "planning," in the sense that Moten and Harney employ that term, in that she responds to the imminent crisis by reaching for an alternative form of life. Finally, I have suggested that refusal may have a tragic aftermath within which the agent is compelled to confront her original plan and, in particular, maintain an intimate relationship with that which has been lost in its execution. It is important to trace the trajectory of refusal in order to understand it not as a complete moment but rather as a condition of being.

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Special Interview

Interview with Acquiring Editor Ashley Hearn

Hoda Agharazi

Bio

Ashley Hearn is an acquisitions editor at Peachtree Publishing. Previously, they spent three years at Page Street Publishing working with authors such as Isabel Ibañez, Lori M. Lee, Candice Montgomery, Sonia Hartl, and Addie Thorley. When Ashley steps away from their desk, they can be found sampling craft beer, armchair-quarterbacking for the Green Bay Packers, or haunting a local coffee shop.

Hi, Ashley! Thanks so much for chatting with us today about the publishing industry. To start, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your path to publishing?

Everybody – especially if you're an English major – reads books. You know that books are out there. You know that books exist. But everybody has that different lightbulb moment where all of a sudden they realize, "Oh. The books don't just appear magically on my shelves. They have to get there somehow. Who are the people behind getting this book onto the shelf that isn't just the bookseller and the author?" There's a whole ecosystem of people that are taking it from one to the other. And when you kind of have that moment of realization – that's when all of a sudden publishing opens up to you as this whole landscape of employment, haha.

The way that I had that lightbulb moment – it started for me writing my own things. I didn't go to college for English or anything to do with publishing. I went to college for Communications and Journalism, specifically TV/radio/film production. It was the end of my senior year of college, I started writing my own story. I found a free online webinar that was happening over the summer in 2013 that was a basic 'Sci-fi/Fantasy Publishing 101' kind of thing. It was basically: what are critique partners? What is plot? What is character? For me, I was 101 at the time; I needed to know those base terms. That opened up the floodgate of information for me and from that point on I could not stop researching publishing. I fell headfirst into the entire world of it.

I graduated and started working for a regional sports TV show. As much as I loved that job, I would be working while also thinking about what I was going to be doing when I got home that had to do with books. A year after I graduated, I had a job opportunity at ESPN. I flew out there to see what the job would be like. I left that experience knowing that, if I accepted that job, I wasn't setting myself up to succeed – because I wasn't excited about it. With that realization, I turned that job down; and it was with the understanding that I was going to pursue something else that I *was* more passionate about. I knew it was publishing; so I immediately started looking for internships.

How did you enter the industry and build your way to becoming an acquisitions editor?

I got my first internship at Entangled Publishing. I was doing a lot of romance at the time. As much as I loved doing romance, Young Adult (YA) was what I felt most drawn to. I wanted to end up in Children's Publishing, specifically working on YA. I didn't want to pick up and move to hyper-expensive New York and just be one of thousands of other people scrapping for an editorial assistant job with no guarantee of ever getting one. So, I looked for as many remote opportunities as I could find. Unfortunately, most of them were unpaid. Fortunately, I had my job to survive off of while doing all these unpaid things. But it was hard. For 3 years I was essentially working 4 jobs. After interning for about a year and a half, I started taking on my own freelance clients. Freelance editing was an important step for me. I really do feel like you improve the more manuscripts you edit.

I also started mentoring in Pitch Wars: that's an online mentorship program [for writers]. I went into it with the approach that it was as much an opportunity for me as it was an opportunity for the author. It was the chance for me flex my editorial muscles but also get to help an aspiring author achieve their fullest vision. I got insanely spoiled with two incredible manuscripts: Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* and Alexis Henderson's *Year of the Witching*. With both of those – because they did very well – that was just another feather in my cap, so to speak. I didn't get paid to do them, but eventually – through interning, Pitch Wars, and freelance editing – there were enough successes there that I started to build a resume. I went into 2017 with it in mind that I wanted to try and get a full-time job in publishing. I felt I had built my resume out enough to be an attractive candidate to publishing houses. I got hired at Page Street Publishing and I was there for three years!

Can you tell us more about what you do? What does a typical workday look like for you?

I organize my to-do list into editorial deadlines and deadlines that aren't related to edits. Editorial deadlines are always happening in the background. At Page Street, once my list was really built up, there was not a single week in the calendar year where I wasn't editing something. There was always something happening edit-wise in the background. I expect I'll get to that point again in Peachstreet. And then there's the daily deadlines: which are things like reviewing back cover copy, reviewing jackets for proofreading, sending books to copy editors, checking changes from design, meeting with publicity for various things, etc.

Then there's the acquisition side of things, which is reviewing materials that agents are sending me, taking calls with agents, reviewing pitches and manuscripts that they're sending to me, and deciding which of those I want to move forward with for publication. It gets really complicated when you have books in all different seasons. Once you have a list that's built and established as an editor, you'll be editing a book that might be coming out a year and a half from now – *while* you're working in marketing and publicity for a

book that's coming out in a few months – *while* you're doing production stuff for books that'll be coming out maybe a year from now – *while* you're also looking to build your list. So, you have your fingers in like three different years. That gets wild: I literally will forget what year I'm in. I'm working so heavily in 2021 that I forget that we're 2020, haha.

Why did you want to become an editor?

It kind of blossomed from being a critique partner for people's writing. A few of my critique partners' works did really well based on feedback that I gave them. That was a really great feeling and it felt like I had an eye for what I was doing. And the author nurturing aspect was something that really appealed to me. I'm a fairly enthusiastic person and so much of an editor's job is cheerleading a book. I think it's an underrated aspect. So much of how much excitement builds for a book in-house directly stems for an editor's enthusiasm for a project. It's contagious. When a sales team sees how excited an editor is for a title that they acquired, it makes them excited to get their hands on it and read it – which makes them excited to go out and parrot what the editor said to the booksellers. This, a lot of the time, can affect how many copies of a book gets sold. So being a cheerleader for books, that was another thing that really appealed to me because I love books and I love getting excited about them.

Is there a specific goal you'd like to achieve as an editor?

I definitely have a very specific goal and it's been my very specific goal since I first started acquiring and building my list. My goal as an editor has always been to build a broad list that appeals to readers of varying backgrounds: be it socio-economic, religious, racial, gender identity and expression…I want readers of all intersections to be able to look at my list and find a book they relate to or see themselves reflected in. It's a reader-driven response to wanting readers to identify with something that I am providing.

What are the pros and cons of the job?

One of the most fun parts is offering on a book. Offering is such a high! I actually today got to tell two people that I'm taking their books to acquisitions – it's not a firm offer because I still have to present them for acquisitions. But even that is really exciting! I'm such a cheerleader and optimistic person. I love delivering good news: I feed off of that.

Contract negotiations aren't the most fun because as editors we're in the position of wanting to give prospective authors the entire world but having to advocate for the publishing house. An agent is in an enviable position of that their only job is to get authors the best deal. But different publishing houses have different resources available to them and are structured in different ways. You're just kind of in an unenviable tug-of-war. At the point that you're offering a contract, you're emotionally invested as an editor because you've fallen in love with this book. You've seen something that's so promising in it that you want to spend the next two years working on it. Being able to advocate business-like for something your heart is invested in is really hard.

You must receive many submissions. What makes one manuscript stand out over another? What draws the line between a submission you like and one you love?

Sometimes the books that I acquire aren't in structurally as good of shape as some of the ones I pass on. But the ones that I acquire sparked something in me that made me want to be that fierce champion for it. It's a perfect fit thing. That's why people say that "yes" or "no" is subjective. There are certain character archetypes, certain settings, certain tropes, certain relationship dynamics that I – as a reader – love. When I get those in submissions, I get really, really excited to run to the submission as fast as possible. I'm going to have to give extra special attention to it because that passion is already there.

The other thing for me is a clear image of who the reader for this book is going to be. When I'm reading something and I'm excited to bring it to the audience and I know exactly who the audience is and everything kind of falls into place is something – that pushes me toward a yes. The things that call to me the most are that subjective love of the concept from the beginning combined with my seeing to where this is going to go on the shelves and how to bring it to the audience that's going to love this book the most.

Once you find a manuscript you'd like to acquire, what's the next step? Can you tell us how you prepare for an acquisitions meeting and what goes on during those meetings?

So, it's actually different in every publishing house. At Page Street, we didn't have acquisitions meetings. I would identify a story that I liked and I would share it with my other colleague who acquired YA. If we both agreed it was worth pursuing, I would take it to my acquisitions manager; and she would decide whether it was worth pursuing. Then I would take it to our publisher. It was a process of getting certain stamps of approval.

At Peachstreet, we have a monthly acquisitions meeting. I've prepared acquisitions memo for [the books]: which are just sheets with key selling points, comp titles, and any other information that I can provide (i.e. author bios) and sample pages. My team will read the memo and sample pages – and then I will put my cheerleader pompoms on and tell them why they should like it! These three books have burrowed into my heart in different capacities; and it's my job to show other people why they've infected me, haha. It's my job to make them catch the disease, too.

What does the process of getting an author's book published look like from an editor's perspective?

After I get the stamp of approval from acquisitions, the next step would be to make a formal offer to an author. We put together an offer and that's where the contract negotiation happens. In that time, the agent is going to be reaching out to the other editors who have the material – letting them know there's a firm offer to see if anybody wants to compete with it. Once the offer is accepted, I start putting together a publication schedule. Usually with the offer being accepted, there's two stages to that. I make my initial offer, the agent counters with what they want – we go back and forth until the deal points are accepted. The deal points are the big pieces that make the contract: so advance, territories, payout, deadlines, option clause, and any other major language that needs to be included. Once they accept the deal points, then it goes to contract and the contract's team puts all of that in the form of a contract template. We send the contract back to the agent

and at that point it's negotiating language. Once the language is all agreed to, then the author signs the contract.

It all depends on scheduling, my comfort level with the agent, and the agent and author's desire – we may or may not actually start to produce the book before the contract is formally signed. After the deal memo is agreed to, that's usually when I start putting a schedule together. My schedule has everything from development editing, copy editing, rough timeline for when publicity begins, when to expect ARCs, and actual publication date. We start to plug all those things into the schedule.

What advice do you have for someone interested in becoming an editor? How does one break into the industry? Do they need a specific kind of educational background?

It's such an apprenticeship-driven industry. It is something that you only really get good at by doing; the only way to hone your editorial eye is through practice. When you start doing internships, write down the books you've worked on and how those books performed. If it got a starred review, if the book had a high print run, if the book made any library lists or won any awards – those are all things you can put on your resume. It's concrete information: It's not just saying I interned here – it's saying I interned here *and* made this impact. Those things matter to publishing houses. They care so much more about what you've done than any kind of degree you might present with. If you're looking for publishing jobs, I highly recommend subscribing to Publishers Weekly and Publishers Lunch – which is through Publishers Marketplace – cause those two have job boards.

It's said a lot that New York City (or Toronto, for Canadians) is the place to be if one wants to work in publishing. Do you think that's the case? With Covid-19, many people have started working remotely and some publishing companies are offering remote internships when they didn't before. Do you think this might affect how we work long term – that it will lead to more remote opportunities in the future?

I hope so! It's something that I've been hoping for a long time. Especially editorial, there's no need to be boots on the ground in New York all the time. There are certain jobs harder to do outside an office: I think, particularly, design likes to be there. Publicity – you're always going to need people somewhere. Publicists do a lot of mailing – so you're going to have to have some people somewhere in a general headquarters for doing that physical stuff. I definitely think we will see more remote positions. I think it's silly that we haven't already. For me, I've never lived or worked in New York; and I don't feel like I've missed out on anything. I think we're probably going to move toward more of a hybrid: where there will be some people in and some people out.

The theme of our issue is the supernatural. What do you think it is about the supernatural that draws in readers and writers to the genre?

Supernatural fiction is probably one of my favourite genres. It's an interesting blend of a lot of different sensibilities that make up something supernatural. It's a little bit monster story. A little bit horror. A little bit mystery. A little bit fantasy. Typically, supernatural stories are oozing with atmosphere and I love stories with strong atmosphere. Genre-blending stories really appeal to me right now because YA is such a saturated market –

so something that is a little bit of a lot of different genres mashed together tends to stand out in a way that genres themselves have kind of gotten overcrowded. There's a lot of space to be filled in the cracks between certain genres; and I feel supernatural kind of takes up that space. Like I said, it appeals to fantasy fans! It appeals to horror fans! It appeals to gothic romance fans! Mystery! There's a lot of mystery in supernatural stories. It's just a lot of different things.

Speaking specifically to horror – which would be a subcategory of supernatural – I just really love horror's ability to shine a light on real world issues. I think horror can take the most personal things that you're dealing with – they can take the internal and make it external in a way that makes it really compelling to read about. My favourite horror does take something that is internally happening and make it manifest into something that is external. In particular, with so much going on in the world, horror's ability to peel that apart and provide readers with some kind of agency over that can make for very satisfying reads.

Is there a recent or upcoming project you've worked on – or are excited about – that touches on this theme that you'd like to share with us?

I do have a book that I signed at Page Street: It's Alison Ames' *To Break a Covenant*. It's a queer horror in which the people of an old mining town start experiencing strange dreams and phenomena and four teen girls investigate the mine that's kind of drawing people into it. It's basically about this mine that starts eating people. It's great! It's a terrifying book – in the best way possible! The writing is really visceral and gritty and pulls you in real slowly.

Thank you so much for speaking with us, Ashley.

To view an extended version of this interview – as well as interviews with other industry professionals – click here to access the EGSS website.

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We at *The Harbour* would like to thank all of our contributors, editors, and participants who worked arduously for several months to put this issue out. It is thanks to your hard work and dedication that *The Harbour* embarks on its first journey towards becoming a publication dedicated to the advancement of research and the spreading of knowledge in amongst graduate students, professors, and other scholarly peers. We hope that you will continue to place your trust in us and allow us to become your voice in the academic world.

With all of our sincerest thanks,

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