
DIGITAL LITERATURE REVIEW
SPACE
EXPLORATION

The Digital Literature Review is an undergraduate journal featuring peer-reviewed research by multiple contributors from various universities and academic disciplines. This annual, student-run journal is a product of Ball State University's immersive learning initiative and is supported by the Ball State University English Department

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“Space Exploration: Examining How Physical and Theoretical Spaces Shape Us”

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The spatial turn in literary studies draws attention to space as more than a backdrop to our lives and stories. It treats space as an active force that shapes individual identity[1] and plays a key role in the construction of social orders.[2] Spatial literary analysis, or what we are calling “Space Exploration,” considers how these impacts are represented in literature and other creative texts. A spatial reading focused on how space influences characters’ identities and behaviors might consider, for example, how the maze-like “severed floor” in Apple TV’s 2022 series *Severance* actively manufactures identity for characters through isolation, routine, and surveillance. An analysis focused, instead, on the production of social space through political and economic relations, might read the fence in August Wilson’s 1983 play *Fences* as a boundary by which the protagonist aims to protect what he believes is his and exert control in a segregated world that oppresses and limits him. Spatial analysis also often attends

1 See Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space.* Translated from the French by Maria Jolas. Beacon Press, 1994 and Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics.” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. U Texas P, 1990,. 84-258.

2 See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*. U Minneapolis P, 1994; and bell hooks. “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness.” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36, 1989, pp. 15–23. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660.

to the relationship between a literary work's form and its meaning. As Bill Richardson argues, "the formal features we identify as qualities of works of literary art are spatial realities" (69). The structure of Elizabeth Bishop's 1946 poem "The Map," for instance, consists of rhymed first and third stanzas and a longer free-verse second stanza. Just as the poem's language invokes geographical elements, its structure creates a topography in which formal borders frame a fluid center. In each of these trajectories within spatial studies, space is a fundamental part of narrative, and studying it allows us to deepen our understanding of both the text itself and the world it depicts.

As with any "turn" in a scholarly field, multiple forces have converged to set the spatial turn in motion. Postmodern thought is one such force, with its emphasis on multiplicity and "new spatiality": Frederic Jameson observed the fragmentation of space, and Jean Baudrillard coined the term "simulacra" to describe spaces that bear no relation to reality. In examining the lasting impacts of colonialism, postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak also shape discourse surrounding spatiality. Their writings on injustices connected to place and displacement draw attention to links between space and power. Structuralist and poststructuralist theorists, in shifting intellectual focus away from time (e.g., a linear development across time), further solidified the influence of spatial relations in contemporary thought, prompting Michel Foucault to describe ours as an "epoch of space" (22).

Spatial studies are inherently interdisciplinary, as spatial analysis draws on insights from fields such as geography, ecology, and history. Spatiality is also applied as an interpretive lens in many fields beyond literary studies. Spatial analysis in the study of linguistics examines how speakers' embeddedness in physical and social environments shapes their language patterns. In geography and urban planning, spatial mapping through GIS and other data-driven practices can help researchers understand land use and make recommendations for resource allocation. In both museum studies and education, spatial awareness involves careful design of physical environments to support visitors' or learners' attention and cognitive engagement. In these and other fields, scholars must engage

with both physical factors and theoretical frameworks.

As the Internet and other structures of globalization change how we experience place, spatial studies matters more than ever. Places in a digital age are at once real and unstable. We can see the impact of digital spaces when social media discourse contributes to the gentrification of a historic neighborhood, wielding real impacts on the physical place and the people who live there. Similarly, digital spaces overlay physical spaces, making social interactions and community networks reliant on shifting and even fragile technologies. As technology evolves, so does our sense of identity. We work to curate our digital personas and, at times, we find the self located in and shaped by the digital world as much as it is by the physical spaces we inhabit.

This year's *Digital Literature Review* explores how real and imagined spaces structure identity, society, and narrative. The essays collected here model spatial awareness across a variety of topics, offering interpretations of creative works—including literature, film and television, and theatre—as well as explorations of the spatial dimensions of language and commercial media. We hope that these attempts to map cultural texts will illuminate the intersections of place, power, and imagination.

The first articles in this issue consider individual identity in connection with spatiality, focusing on how personal identity shapes and is shaped by space. In "Under the Mask: Homi Bhabha and Identity in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse,*" Riley Schwarzkopf examines the fictional character Miles Morales and his navigation of his multi-faceted identity. Schwarzkopf reads the character's development through Homi K. Bhaba's ideas about what lies inside and beyond our identity. In the next article, "Commodifying the Subaltern: Literary Space of the Orient in Noor Naga's *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English,*" Leah Turner examines identity across cultures. Applying insights from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Turner reflects on the violence of translation as a spatial issue in Naga's novel. The third article in this group, "Sounds of Identity: How Does English Pronunciation Reflect Identity, Space and Linguistic Background?," shows how language is spatially constructed. In a comparison of native speakers and second-language speakers, authors Lida Zarearsanjani, Emad Elbana, and Ivan Aparicio Sausedo present English

as a diverse language that is dependent on context.

In the next group of essays, the focus shifts to how spaces are socially produced. The articles in this section draw attention to the power dynamics inherent in social structures, and they leverage spatial analysis of powerful stories as a "call to action" to readers. In a new reading of Daniel Defoe's *The General History of Pyrates,* Volume II, Alex Costello analyzes the space of the pirate ship as a heterotopia where social ethics can be interrogated. His article, "The Pirate Ship in Context: A Vessel for Enlightenment Thought," shows how Defoe distorts aspects of the pirate ship for the purpose of social critique. In "*WALL-E*: Consumerism and the Destruction of Physical Space," Melody Miller examines how spatial awareness deepens viewers' experience of environmental critique. Through her examination of the Disney-PIXAR film's fictional landscapes, Miller shows how the film depicts the environmental threats of over-consumption and lack of empathy. In "Gender Roles and Domesticity through Advertisements in the 1950s," Gia Valenzano shows how media contributes to the production of social inequality. By examining space in vintage ads promoting domestic items (kitchen and cleaning supplies), Valenzano shows how mid-century advertising not only perpetuated gender norms but also established them. Social injustice is also at the heart of "Unmasking the Uncanny: Making Colonial Injustices of Slow Violence Visible in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*" by Roman Hughes. Hughes illuminates issues of spatial injustice by connecting harmful neocolonial practices to the displacement of impoverished populations. "Humanity vs. Animality: Spatial Oppression in *Tender is the Flesh*" by Sage Waters examines Augustina Bazterrica's gruesome dystopian world to show how society denies humanity for some in service of others. Waters looks at how spaces in the novel are used to produce and perpetuate oppressive structures, exposing through amplification the injustices in our own society.

The last group of articles model spatial reading of literary and other creative works, demonstrating the insights available when both writers and readers understand space as an active force. Through literary analysis, these articles consider the role of spaces in shaping plot, developing character arcs, and making abstract concepts vivid. In "Domestic vs. Wild Spaces: Determining Characterization in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering*

Heights and Andrea Arnold's Film Adaptation," Chloe Miller analyzes how natural and domestic spaces actively shape social and emotional expectations for main characters, Cathy and Heathcliff. In "Not An Angel, Just a Woman: Domestic Abuse and the Significance of Space in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Netflix's *Maid*," Alyson Baugh compares Bronte's classic novel with a contemporary TV series to show how domestic spaces can reflect the balance of power of their inhabitants. Aleaha Patton turns our attention to live theater, positing the stage as a Thirdspace in her article, "Purgatory as Explored in Live Theatre Spaces." Patton examines three plays representing the liminality of purgatory to show how space impacts an audience's engagement with difficult, abstract ideas. In "Spatiality in McCormick's *Sold*," Josie Pressnall uses Yi-Fu Tuan's writings on topophilia and topophrenia, paired with close reading analysis, to show how the author of this YA novel creates empathy for victims of sex trafficking. Finally, "The Properties of Water in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*" by Margaret True highlights how Robinson uses water in her novel to create flexible and often unpredictable spaces, including domestic spaces, that challenge social norms for female characters.

This collection of articles aims to provide an introduction to spatiality in literary studies, and we hope it will inspire readers to launch their own explorations of this burgeoning field. Each of the spatial theorists mentioned in this issue provides a unique lens for understanding the discipline. When you immerse yourself with spatiality theory, you begin to see its influence on the identities and societies we construct. We hope that keen spatial awareness may inspire you to find ways to build new, more inclusive and connected communities, as well as a new understandings of those around you.

This is the 13th issue of the *Digital Literature Review,* a student-run online journal produced in Ball State University's English Department. DLR students participate in a two-semester course sequence, providing them with firsthand experience in writing, editing, and designing a scholarly issue. There are three teams that comprise the DLR: Editorial, Design, and Publicity. Each team has an appointed lead and 2-4 additional members. Editorial oversees the editing of submissions and corresponds with authors. Design is responsible for the layout and illustration of blogs and the journal. Publicity connects the work of the DLR with university

and public audiences. Each member of the DLR team plays an important role in the creation of a product that we can be proud of.

Thank you for joining us on a journey of discovery about space by reading this year's issue of the *Digital Literature Review*. Each article shows how, as we move through physical and metaphorical spaces, we embark on journeys of discovery. We hope that after reading this issue you begin to perceive the role of spatiality in the media that you consume and consider how the spaces we inhabit shape us.

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Under the Mask: Homi Bhabha and Identity in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*

Riley Schwarzkopf

This article reads the character Miles Morales, from the movie *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse,* through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's writings on intersectionality and identity in *The Location of Culture*. As an individual, Miles struggles to bridge the gaps between multiple facets of himself and only finds a way forward when he embraces all of his identities at once, becoming Spider-Man. The heroic alter ego allows Miles to grow physically confident with his new powers and functions as a tool for personal growth in his civilian life. Miles's journey to become a hero requires him to grapple with the complexities of being a masked superhero, as well as to weave together the masks he wears in his personal life as son, nephew, and student. The balance he finds between them is the sort of existence that Bhabha argues our society needs to adopt in order to progress towards a better future. Miles Morales embodies Bhabha's ideal in the discovery of an existence fused from aspects of himself, in a space both in between and beyond his identities.

Under the Mask: Homi Bhabha and Identity in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*

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Introduction

At a base level, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* follows all the tropes of a traditional superhero origin story. An extraordinary circumstance gives a seemingly average person superpowers, and the sudden appearance of a villain with nefarious intentions causes that newly powered individual to rise up to combat that evil and save the day. However, the additional layers this movie adds on top of its surface premise set it entirely apart from other media in the genre. The protagonist, Miles Morales, has to learn to control his new superpowers while grappling with constantly being compared to several other, significantly more competent, Spider-Man variants from different universes. He also must balance the high expectations that his parents have about his academic performance at his new, prestigious preparatory school despite the reality that he is struggling to keep up in the fast paced, competitive environment, and is unhappy to have moved away from the friends he had made in his local community. *Into the Spider-Verse* is about more than Miles becoming a superhero; it is also about Miles finding a balance between multiple identities at the same time. This theme can be understood through the ideas of spatial theorist Homi Bhabha, who argues that identity should be thought of not as a set of labels that can be interchanged in different settings, but rather as the creation of a single, simultaneous, cumulative entity. Aligning with conventions of the genre, Miles has his heroic moment and saves the day, but that only happens after he has found a way to merge the many parts of himself into one single being—his very own version of Spider-Man.

Within the realm of spatial theory, Homi Bhabha primarily focuses on the space of identity. A person can fit under many different labels, often having a specific answer to what race,

culture, gender, sexuality, or religious sect they identify with. But often, the complexity of the human experience is not so easily classified under a single label. Most individuals inhabit several identities simultaneously and are therefore never quite able to fit comfortably into any of them. On a larger scale, no culture exists in a vacuum, and a completely homogeneous population is impossible. In his book *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha discusses identity as multifaceted: no individual can be fully defined by a single label or idea. He argues that, especially regarding race, the degree to which a mixed person identifies with each aspect of their identity shifts depending on the circumstance. Conflict, Bhabha argues, arises not from the articulation of differences, but rather from trying to fit something as complex as a person into the confines of one identity.

Bhabha goes beyond pointing out that the current system of switching between labels is not effective. He explains that, in the future, all facets of an individual should be thought of as existing at the same time. This would eliminate the dissonance that occurs when a single identity is not reflective of a person's lived experience and background.

Bhabha's proposed blending of multiple identities aligns incredibly well with Miles's journey towards self-actualization in *Into the Spider-Verse*, and viewers can use Bhabha's theories to better understand the changes Miles undergoes throughout the movie. In particular, the resolution of the central conflict reflects Bhabha's claim that a person's identities must be thought of as simultaneous, overlapping entities in order to progess to a better future. Miles's struggle to balance his personal identities with the baggage that comes with taking on the identity of Spider-Man is what leads him to becoming a hero. Miles finds a solution in the space between his identities: the boundry becoming the starting line for moving into the future beyond. This is exactly where Miles finds himself at the beginning of *Into the Spider-Verse.*

The Starting Line

Miles is introduced as just another 13-year-old from Brooklyn. He has just transferred out of his old school, Brooklyn Middle, to attend the prestigious Visions Preparatory Academy, to the joy of

his mother, a Puerto Rican nurse, and his father, a Black cop.[1] Miles is less excited, as he believes the new school to be "elitist," and struggles with the fast-paced, stressful curriculum. To escape this preassure, Miles eventually sneaks out of his dorm to visit his Uncle Aaron, with whom he shares a special connection through their shared appreciation for graffiti art. Uncle Aaron takes him somewhere where Miles can put up some of the work in his sketchbook. It is in this place that Miles is bitten by a radioactive spider, which those familiar with Spider-Man will know is what gives Miles his superpowers.

What immediately sets this movie apart from other Spider-Man media is that Miles is not the first boy to receive the radioactive spider bite in this version of the story. Miles's New York City already has a Spider-Man, Peter Parker, who has been serving as the city's web-slinging hero for almost a decade. Shortly after Miles gains his powers, this Peter Parker dies, leaving New York City without its hero. Yet, even after Peter's death, Miles is not the only Spider-Man around. *Into the Spider-Verse*, as the name might suggest, introduces a "multi-verse" of Spider-People. A group of these extra-dimensional Spider-Men from various universes are accidentally dragged into Miles's city. This is not a sustainable existence for these Spider-People, as their transplanted bodies cannot stay in a foreign dimension for long without experiencing painful "glitching" and eventually death. Miles must return these Spider-People to their home universes, master his new superpowers, and defeat the bad guy as his city's new Spider-Man, all while keeping these new parts of himself hidden to avoid worrying or disappointing his parents. But by the end of the movie, Miles has managed to achieve all of these goals, while also gaining a deeper understanding of himself, both in his role as Spider-Man, as well as all of the other, less fantastical, identities that he holds as the civilian Miles Morales.

The movie's first shot of Miles shows him doodling in his bedroom. If his off-key singing to Post Malone's "Sunflower" is any indication, this is clearly a space where he feels the most himself and not under any pressure to perform a particular role for other people. Bedrooms and other such

1 See Bendis, Brian Michael. *Ultimate Comics Spider-Man*. Art by Sara Pichelli. Marvel World Wide Inc, 2011. Vol. #1-5.

personal spaces communicate aspects of identity just as much as body language and physical actions do,[2] especially in an animated medium like this film, where each aspect of the room has been chosen purposefully by a team of artists to communicate something about Miles's character. He has a pretty typical teenage boy's room, with messy clothes and clutter strewn all around, but the room also gives hints to more unique aspects of his character. There are posters, some books, and a few action figures; the shelves he uses for storage space are made of the milk crates that record stores use to hold albums. A large architect's desk table takes up most of one side of the room, where evidence of past art projects and stickers are clear on its surface. Light streams in from large bay windows that face a residential city street. This space represents Miles as much as his actions or words do. He is an artist, a music lover, a bit nerdy, but most of all a normal kid with a bright future just outside. This room, where he's at his most relaxed and most himself, is the best reflection of Miles's starting point.

We are introduced to him in this space, so that the audience can see what kind of person Miles Morales is—his personality, interests, a bit of his character—all in the span of about a minute. The end of the movie circles back to this location for a similar reason, again showing Miles alone and unobserved in his room. But the contrast in confidence between the boy in the introduction and the one in the finale makes the personal growth and changes he undergoes due to the events of the movie all that more obvious.

Miles is soon removed from the contentment of his private space by his parents calling him down to head to his new school and get settled in the dorms. He has to remove his preferred clothes and literally "change out" of his comfort zone, in order to put on a prep school uniform. It is clear that Miles has not packed yet to move into his school, as he is not ready or willing to make the change. The rush around to do so further highlights his change from a space where he is comfortable with himself into the unfamiliar and fast-paced enviornment of his new school, Visions Preparatory Academy.

On the walk to the Academy, Miles passes his former school

2 See Lefèvre, Pascal. "The construction of space in comics." *A Comics Studies Reader*, 6 Nov. 2008, pp. 157–162, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2tvd9s.21.

where we see Miles switch between different identities, different masks, in response to interacting with different groups. In his stiff prep-school uniform, Miles walks through crowds of his plain-clothed former classmates. He is clearly familiar and confident around them. He speaks to several different "types" of students: he has a conversation with one in Spanish, he exchanges a secret handshake and passes around a basketball with others, and finally he talks to a girl with pink hair who says that everyone at Brooklyn Middle School will miss him. Miles replies, "You miss me? I still live here!" (00:03:59). It is clear that, despite these students being a part of his local peer group and Miles being comfortable and confident among them, he is now considered to be something of an outsider in this community. This transfer into a new identity is visually cued to the audience via the fancy Visions Preparatory Academy uniform. Miles walks through the space that represents his old identity in order to travel to a space that represents his new one. But just as he no longer fits amongst his old schoolmates, Miles doesn't quite fit in with the new ones either.

Eventually, Miles is picked up by his father in his police cruiser, an effort made to ensure Miles makes it to his new school despite his reluctance. In a line that culminates his feelings on the move, Miles says to his father, "I would prefer to be at a normal school among the people." His father responds, "The people?' These *are* your people." (00:05:36). Despite his father's hopes and assurances, as Miles walks into his new school he is visibly excluded from the many groups of students who are to be his new peers. They all look out at him from closed circles. Miles doesn't seem to fit in socially, not to mention how overwhelming Miles finds the content and speed of the school's curriculum. He is completely off balance, displaced both physically and socially from spaces where he was comfortable and confident. Despite ostensibly being in a place where he should be among "his people," Miles is the odd one out. This is a theme we see repeated again when Miles is among the other Spider-People later in the movie.

In order to escape the pressures placed on him at Visions Preparatory Academy, Miles sneaks out of his dorm to go visit his uncle's apartment. It is implied that Miles is not supposed to be in

contact with this family member, as Miles's father disapproves of him and because Aaron is involved with some criminal or "shady" business. His uncle's apartment is another space where Miles is comfortable. Differing from his bedroom where the comfort comes from being unobserved in his own personal space, this comfort stems from how clearly Miles feels that his Uncle Aaron understands him as a person and how much he looks up to the man as a role model. It is clear that Miles, being 13 years old, thinks that his suave Uncle Aaron is extremely cool and tries to imitate his relaxed confidence. We see one of the first major clashes of Miles's personal identities and a somewhat secret one in this scene, as well. Miles gets a text from his dad reminding him that he should be working on his homework, which is the embodiment of the version of himself that his parents want him to be. If that identity had to be put into words: Miles the diligent student and successful son. Uncle Aaron, seeing that Miles is distressed by this reminder of his responsibilities, asks to see Miles's art and then takes him to throw it up in an abandoned maintenance tunnel after a bit of breaking and entering. This version of Miles is his identity as an artist and rebellious teenager. It is quite literally because of this clash of identities—because Miles is trying to escape the stress of embodying an ill-fitting role—that he gains his Spider-Man powers in the first place. The inciting incident of being bitten by the radioactive spider that is central to all Spider-Man narratives happens because he can no longer sustain the pressure of being someone he is not, hence his choice to go with his uncle into that maintenance tunnel. It is also relevant that this momentous change happens in the company of someone who constantly encourages Miles to be himself, who "see[s] exactly what.. [he] is doing here" (00:12:42) and sees the "real Miles…coming out of hiding" (00:12:10). Miles's placement at this intersection of two identities is what gives him the opportunity to gain his superpowers. He is a person at a transitional point, which uniquely gives him opportunities to branch off onto new paths outside of the narrative that has been set for him by the world.

Mutation as a Manifestation of Change

Gaining superpowers causes immediate physical changes in Miles. He seemingly grows several

inches overnight, and his perception of the world is literally altered by his heightened senses. Sounds, such as the volume of his internal thoughts and the gossip of his classmates, grow overwhelmingly loud. He is hyperaware of every minute change in facial expression of anyone he passes, and starts to sweat profusely, seemingly without reason. He also gains his "sticky-ness" (a classic Spider-Man ability) finding himself able to crawl on walls and stick to things even when he does not necessarily want to. Like his move to the new school, Miles has been forced to grapple with being thrust into a new space and new identity without his consent and must now find a way to exist while still holding onto aspects of his former life. Bhabha argues that the future of identity will not be organized around individual labels, but instead understood as a single entity that encompasses all parts of an individual's identity simultaneously; the transformation from kid to superhero forces Miles to undergo this kind of change in identity perception for himself. He can no longer move between different identities with different people or in different spaces, but must find a way to exist while grappling with all facets of himslef at once.

After receiving his powers, Miles then meets what will be the first of many Spider-Men, his universe's Peter Parker. This Spider-Man is your traditional confident, quippy superhero, and has been serving as the city's web-slinging hero for almost a decade at that point. It is important to look at how Spider-Man's physicality, his movements on screen, are depicted, as the hero's movements are directly connected to his comfort and confidence in himself. As Scott Richmond put it in his article, "How to Look at Superheroes: Ilinx, Identification and Spider-Man," the fluidity and dynamism of Spider-Man's movements are indicative of the level of self-actualization, confidence, and comfort in their own skin that that specific Spider-Man has reached in his personal life. We see several other instances of Spider-Men who consistently move fluidly and with confidence, especially visible when they swing through the city via their webs and during fight sequences. With the exception of Miles, all other versions of Spider-Man we meet in this movie are shown to be extremely competent in their abilities. However, until the

moment Miles is able to become his own unique Spider-Man by infusing the persona with elements of his own personality and preferences, Miles remains somewhat of a bumbling hero physically. He does not have any immediate instincts for how to fight crime, and his attempts to try to emulate his idea of what a hero should be results in him falling off a building and breaking an important device that is needed to defeat the movie's villain. He doesn't know how to web-swing, which is showcased when he meets his first Spider-Man from an alternate dimension and he attempts to swing away to escape the police; he runs into buildings, cars, people, trains, and a snowman, respectively. He is uncertain, both with who he is as an individual and who he is as a hero, and that shows in his movements on screen. This lack of coordination and control over his enhanced body connects directly to Miles being the only Spider-Person in the film who has yet to find a balance between his identities as a civilian and as a hero.

Miles also has an entirely different powerset from other Spider-People, being able to turn invisible and electrocute people alongside the traditionally enhanced strength and senses. He doesn't even have his own costume, having to get by with an ill-fitting, cheap imitation of the classic red and white Spider-Man costume that he bought from a department store. To be fair to Miles, he has only had his powers for two days at this point, but it is still a noticeable difference when compared to the other Spider-People he meets, each of whom has a professional and unique costume of their own. Miles tries desperately to reach the competence levels of these other Spider-People, trying to fit himself into his idea of what Spider-Man needs to be. There is a comedic beat in the movie where Miles copies the contemplative pose of one of the other Spider-Men, as if doing so will help him be a better hero (00:45:44). Only after Miles works to play to his own strengths, using his invisibility and trusting in himself, is he able to assist in saving the day. Rather than trying to copy what he thinks Spider-Man should be, Miles succeeds because he finds a way to combine aspects of his personal identity with the hero identity.

Following the paths other Spider-Men have taken will not work for Miles, as he is a unique person separate from them. The role of the original Peter Parker's Spider-Man will always be an

ill-fitting costume on Miles, both literally and as an identity Miles unsuccessfully tries to live up to. This mirrors Bhabha's argument that sticking to a single identity is not only impossible, but also actively harmful to the individual who tries it. The conflict that results from the clash of Miles's multiple identities and his inability to fit the mold of Spider-Man prevents him from defeating the antagonist of the movie. It is a matter of literal life and death, where Miles's success as Spider-Man will decide whether or not one of the Spider-people will have to sacrifice themselves.

The "glitching out" that the non-native Spider-People suffer from functions as another example of Bhaba's warning about the negative effects of trying to force yourself into an identity that does not fit. The explanation given for the glitching is that the foreign Spider-People's "atoms are [not] real jazzed about being in the wrong dimension" (00:42:05). They literally cannot exist in an ill-fitting universe and are being physically rejected from it. This conflict also serves as a central motivation for Miles to gain control over being Spider-Man quickly, since, along with defeating the villain of the movie, if Miles cannot master his role one of the foreign Spider-People will have to stay behind in Miles's dimension and see their own life come to a painful end.

A Leap Into The Beyond

A repeating motif in this movie is having to take "a leap of faith" in order to progress as Spider-Man. This applies to the hero's ability to web swing through the city, his primary mode of transportation and fighting technique. It also applies both to Miles's skill with his powers and Miles's personal growth in his civilian life. For Miles, his success as Spider-Man, and as a person, depends on his tolerance for the unknown and his willingness to jump into that unknown toward an uncertain future. It is interesting that the movie phrases it as a "leap," as it mirrors Homi Bhabha's thoughts about how the future of identity should be approached in the modern era. Though he puts it through the lens of dealing with cultural differences, some of the wording of his explanation feels uncannily close to the motifs of the movie, especially his use of "beyond" and "movement":

> Social differences are not simply given to experience through already authenticated cultural tradition; they are

> the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project—at once a vision and a construction—that takes you "beyond" yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction to the political condition of the present. (Bhabha)

Bhabha is saying that existing in the boundary between identities and leaping to a point beyond them is key to progress. Miles leaps beyond the uncertainties of his abilities as a hero and the uncertainties of his worthiness to take up the mantle of Spider-Man for himself. Miles' leap takes him into the future where he is able to beat the bad guy, use his powers with confidence, and save the day, all in one fell swoop.

The Costume

Visually, Miles's Spider-Suit becomes strikingly different from the other Spider-People he meets, in order to better reflect elements of his personal identity onto his superhero identity. As mentioned previously, there is already the original, traditional Spider-Man existing in Miles's universe. He wears the classic red and blue spandex suit with black webbing details and white, expressive eyes that audiences are familiar with. This is what the costume of Spider-Man that Miles wears at the beginning of the movie is based on, which was sold in a costume shop along with other merchandise for his universe's first Spider-Man, Peter Parker. Miles dons the costume of another Spider-Man, only to find the outfit ill-fitting. Despite being assured "it always fits, eventually," copying the identity of someone else does not help him to become a better hero. (00:32:16). The next Spider-Man costume we see is the costume of Peter B. Parker, a version of the previously mentioned Peter Parker, from an alternate universe. This costume is very similar to the traditional Spider-Man costume; however this Spider-Man is going through what basically amounts to a midlife crisis, so not only is this Spider-Man noticeably chubbier and less muscular, but he is also often wearing sweatpants over his costume. This trend of the Spider-Man costume reflecting the wearer continues with every subsequent Spider-Person Miles's meets: Gwen's Spider-Woman costume includes ballet shoes, Spider-Noir's costume is in monochrome black and includes a fedora and trenchcoat, and even Spider-Pig's costume has white nose holes

resembling the traditional white eye holes to better express the fact that he is literally a pig under the mask. It is clear that the details of what each hero wears nods to aspects of their identities outside of Spider-Man. The costume is not just the person under the mask, nor is it just the mantle of the hero it represents: it is a combination of both. It is something that surpasses the strength of either identity on its own. That is why it is only when Miles spray paints the classic red and white Spider-Man suit over, creating a version that is almost entirely black except for some red spraypainted accents, that he gains a hold on his abilities and can save the day. This suit is Miles and Spider-Man as one. When he accepts all parts of his identity and merges them into this new version of Spider-Man unique to himself, Miles is finally able to competently use his powers, save the other Spider-People, and defeat the villain to save the city as its new hero.

Conclusion

Miles holds several identities, even before he gains his powers as Spider-Man. He wears the mask of a dutiful son, a student at a prestigious preparatory academy, a precocious artist fond of graffiti, and a likeable peer to his old friends at Brooklyn Middle. But none of them seem to exist at the same time and Miles cannot seem to fit comfortably into one. Even in the extraordinary circumstance of gaining superpowers, Miles remains out of place as he doesn't quite fit among the rest of the Spider-People due to his lack of experience as a hero. It is only when Miles blends facets of all his identities together, becoming a Spider-Man that is unique to himself, that he can find success, not only as a hero, but in balancing aspects of his personal life. He is shown to perform better at school, both socially and academically, and he has a better relationship with his family.

The conclusion of the movie places us back where we began, in Miles's bedroom where he is free to be himself, but even at this moment he seems more relaxed and at ease than at the beginning of the movie. He lies in his bed, smiling with his arms crossed behind his head. When Spider-Gwen calls out to him through a portal. Instead of being daunted by his call to action as Spider-Man, Miles looks ready to meet his destiny head on. Unlike at the beginning of the movie, he is not forced out of this comfortable

space; he exits it willingly.

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse is a movie all about striking a balance between different spaces, both the multi-verse, where several instances of Spider-Man seem to exist alongside each other, and also in the civilian realm, as Miles juggles several different identities he holds through different spaces. Through the lens of Bhabha's ideas about spatial identity, Miles appears the perfect example of a person who has taken the leap into the unknown, beyond the need for labels and single identities. It seems especially fitting that the final installment in the franchise, set to release in 2027, will be titled *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse*. The intersectionality of Miles's multiple identities, the masks he wears both as Spider-Man and as a civilian, allows him to be happier and more fufilled. As Bhabha predicted, Miles's journey to self-actualization suceeds because he takes that leap of faith into the unknown, into the "beyond."

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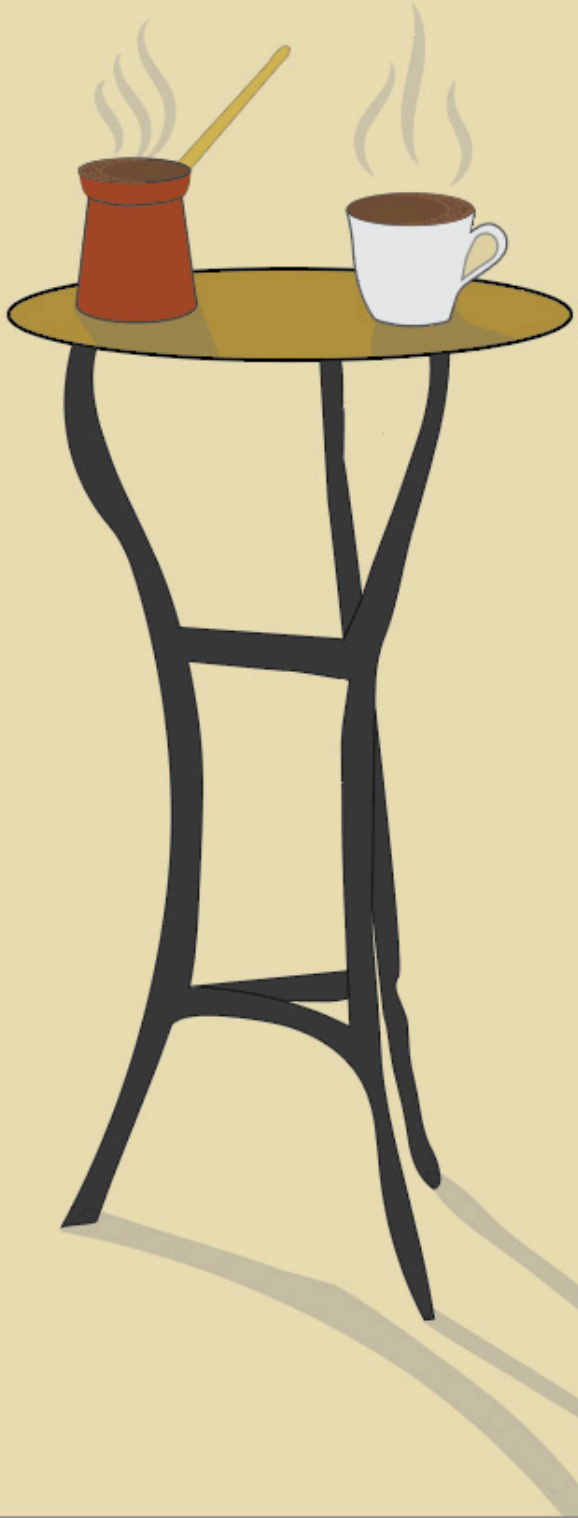

Commodifying the Subaltern: Literary Space of the Orient in Noor Naga's *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English*

Leah Turner

This paper analyzes *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* by Noor Naga through the lenses of *Orientalism* by Edward Said and *On Decoloniality* by Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. By applying Robert T. Tally, Jr.'s spacio-cultural theory and Henri Lefebvre's notion of the production of space, the author shows how Naga constructs Cairo as a literary space where power, identity, and cultural misunderstanding intersect through the characters of the "American girl," the first-generation Egyptian American finding her roots, and the "boy from Shobrakheit," a former Arab-Spring photographer from rural Egypt. The novel's experimental structure culminates in a meta-fictional map of how Western epistemologies colonize and commodify the Egyptian subaltern. The structure of the text preys upon the reader's own privilege and lack of knowledge of Egypt, breaking the fourth wall of the novel. The question implied by the novel's title, *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English,* reveals the violence in translation. By inserting herself in the narrative as the "American girl," Naga confronts both author and reader as consumers of authenticity.

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The subaltern, as defined by Gayatri Spivak, is the group that is marginalized by colonial occupation and rendered voiceless by systemic power imbalances (26). The subaltern is subproletariat, meaning that the subaltern is not just oppressed but also denied access through the colonization of their space. In Noor Naga's *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English*, the relationship between the subaltern and the diasporic Egyptian pushes forth the crucial questions: who can tell the Egyptian's story and who counts as Egyptian? In this novel, both characters have Egyptian heritage. The subaltern is a boy from rural Egypt, rendered homeless and jobless due to his background and class. The diasporic Egyptian, Noor, is a first generation Egyptian-American. However, in Egypt, the diasporic Egyptian is not considered fully Egyptian. The 20ll Egyptian Revolution resulted in political turnover and created a rupture in national identity. In the decade that followed, layers of revolutionary optimism, militant rule, and neoliberal expansion fractured the identities of the city of Cairo and its inhabitants. In her novel, Naga analyzes the tensions among the Western gaze, diaspora, and the local subaltern. Using a theoretical framework based on Said's theory of "Orientalism" and decolonial approaches as outlined by Mignolo and Walsh, the novel's experimental narrative critiques Western privilege and commodification of authenticity. Naga's novel in structure and plot shows how Western thought and assumptions shape the perspectives of characters and readers alike, ultimately revealing how narrative space can critique privilege and fetishization, and show the limits of cross-cultural understanding.

The 2022 winner of the Center for Fiction's First Novel Prize, *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* follows two characters, Noor, the American girl, and the boy from Shobrakheit, who remains unnamed. Noor is a first-generation Egyptian American who decides to "return" to Egypt despite never having lived there. The boy from Shobrakheit, who was a photographer during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution from rural Egypt, has since fallen into poverty in Cairo and become addicted to cocaine. When the two characters meet, they begin a relationship despite not speaking the same language. The boy from Shobrakheit teaches Noor how to navigate Cairo and Noor gives the boy a place to live, sharing her own apartment with him. The relationship quickly becomes obsessive and abusive. When Noor bars the boy from her apartment and ends her financial support, he becomes obsessed. He breaks into her apartment, attempts to attack her new British boyfriend, before ultimately jumping to his death. The novel concludes in Part Three with the revelation that the first two sections were Noor's memoir, with the boy from Shobrakheit's perspective and voice entirely her creation. In the final section, the reader observes a writing workshop for Noor's novel in which her classmates try to understand her and the boy from Shobrakheit's story. Noor's identity, shaped by movement between cultures, inhabits a liminal space where her power and privilege shift according to the context around her.

The novel's three-part structure functions as a map of the increasing epistemic violence—the harm that is inflicted by devaluing and silencing the knowledge and experiences of the marginalized subaltern (Spivak 25). Part One of the novel establishes the Orientalist gaze; Part Two showcases colonial mapping through footnotes; Part Three reveals the Western denial of voice for the subaltern in the memoir workshop. As Robert T. Tally, Jr. notes, the space of the novel is never neutral; it is a cartographic project that attempts to organize the chaos of the real world into a readable form that "enables readers to orientate themselves and the characters, events, settings, and ideas of the novel in the world" (Tally 153). In *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English,* the diasporic Egyptian's experience in Egypt is mapped through her perspective of Egypt. Noor attempts to colonize

the boy from Shobrakheit's revolutionary trauma and impoverished, rural background for her own identity-building project. In seeking an "authentic" Egyptian experience, she creates a dilemma where the diaspora writer risks re-centering the Western experience in narratives that should belong to the postcolonial subject.

The author Noor Naga (who will henceforth be referred to as Naga to differentiate from her character Noor) was born in Philadelphia, raised in Dubai, studied in Toronto, and lived and taught in Cairo while writing this novel (Naga, *If An Egyptian* 203). Naga's position amongst cities and cultures employs what Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh refer to as a "border thinking"—knowledge produced from the perspective of the diasporic subject who exists between worlds (134-136). Naga's own scholarly work on the twentieth-century Cairo novel provides insight into the understanding of the city as a liminal space where personal and political boundaries are inherently blurred ("Romance and Liminal Space" 131). By naming her protagonist after herself, Naga performs a decolonial unveiling, acknowledging that the "American girl" is an extension of her own Western-educated privilege, thereby complicating the text's narrative authority.

Reception of *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* has focused on its refusal to satisfy the Western reader's desire for a legible Orient, leaving the story uncomfortably ambiguous (Krstovic 11-16). Scholarship surrounding the novel situates it within postcolonial, socio-political, and experimental frameworks that interrogate identity, power, and representation in contemporary Cairo. Maha Elsaid argues that the novel's portrayal of the relationship between Noor and the boy from Shobrakheit serves to "reconstruct power in the chaos of Cairo," exposing class disparities that survived the 2011 revolution (65). Elsaid argues that the shifting power dynamics between the American woman and the boy from Shobrakheit reveal the novel's interrogation of both Western and Egyptian ideological assumptions. Through disparities in class, education, and cultural capital, the characters' interactions expose the underlying inequalities shaping their relationship. These interpersonal tensions mirror broader societal disillusionment

after the revolution, especially in the characters' conflicting interpretations of history and authority. Elsaid's reading emphasizes the novel's ability to reveal the complex intersections of identity and political upheaval.

Arkan Naser Hussain examines the novel's form through Lyotard's concept of the *petit récit*, the "little narrative" that privileges the local narrative over universalizing colonial structures. Hussain argues that the novel's alternating perspectives reflect the protagonists' fragmented identities and enact a critique of Western epistemologies that seek coherence and dominance (1). The shifting narrative voices foreground the importance of local experience and resist colonial hegemony by refusing to present a single authoritative version of events. According to Hussain, the structure itself becomes a postcolonial intervention that mirrors the instability and multiplicity of post-revolution Cairo (2). The structure as intentional distraction forces the reader to confront their epistemic dependency on Western academic frameworks to understand Egyptian reality (Mignolo and Walsh 210).

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said states that the Orient is a European invention, "since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes" (1). According to Said, the Orient is an othered imagination based on the Western experience and relationship to the East through colonial rule and representation. Noor's "return" to Egypt is a return to a false reality. She seeks a Cairo that only exists in her imagination where she can validate her own authenticity as the child of Egyptian immigrants in America. Said's concept of imaginative geography—the way a space is perceived through art or texts—is shown as the protagonist projects her psychological needs onto the boy from Shobrakheit, treating him as cultural currency. Mignolo and Walsh argue that even after physical colonization ends, *coloniality*, or the mindset and power structure of colonialism, remains (4). Coloniality in novels is visible in the centering of English as the medium through which the experience of subaltern is told. The question intrinsic to the title, *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English,* addresses Mignolo and Walsh's theory head-on. Likewise, the structure of the novel and the revelation that the first two parts of the novel are Noor's memoir enact coloniality. If an Egyptian

lacks access to a voice on a global scale, i.e. cannot speak English, his existence is effectively erased from the global archive. At the end of the novel, the boy from Shobrakheit remains an unnamed person defined by his location. His perspective is only known to the reader through Noor's reflection, offering a blurred vision of Egypt and the subaltern's experience.

bell hooks describes the epistemic violence of the center in "Choosing the Margin as the Space of Radical Openness":

> [n]o need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk. (22)

The subaltern is silenced by exclusion from the center—the space of the colonizer's power. They do not have the access to speak on their own (Spivak 26). When being forced into the margins, the oppressed is only allowed into the center when it is useful for the oppressor. Although she has Egyptian parents, Noor occupies the center when she is in Egypt. Her wealth and privilege allow her to dictate the relationship between her and the boy from Shobrakheit and to control his narrative.

At the beginning of the novel when she is first entering Egypt, she notes her appearance and her bald head at odds with Egyptian culture: "If I was a white girl with a shaved head, they probably wouldn't have cared. But because I was an Egyptian girl with a shaved head, they wouldn't let me forget it" (Naga, *If An Egyptian* 4). In the United States as she and the other Egyptians board the plane, no one minds her appearance. But when the plane lands in Egypt, "[t]hey glared openly at me and muscled past in the aisle, suspicious all of a sudden" (4). As she gets her passport stamped, she stumbles over words in her poor Arabic and the officer calls her an American. As much as she wants to, she cannot refute due to her inability to speak Arabic, marking her as an outsider in Egypt. In the United States, she exists under white

supremacy, forced into the margin, but in Egypt, her appearance marks her as an American, changing her position in the social hierarchy. She does not have an Egyptian passport nor ID card; what makes her Egyptian in America does not make her Egyptian in Egypt. She uses the boy from Shobrakheit to gain social markers and "prove" that she is Egyptian not only in Egypt, but in the United States.

The language barrier between the boy from the Shobrakheit and Noor appears in the formatting of the first part of the novel, which features alternating chapters titled by questions between the two characters, written in distinct styles but without speaker markers. The boy from Shobrakheit's sections employ short sentences, mimicking the style of Arabic (Hussain 5). Noor's chapters are longer than the boy's in the beginning, narrating her journey to Cairo and struggles with adjusting to Egyptian life. The boy from Shobrakheit does not speak English and Noor only speaks very poor Arabic, and so the reader must learn the "language" of the novel to understand the story, just as the two characters learn each other's languages and the Cairo they each inhabit.

Layers of Cairo are built upon one another, formed by each person's experience in the city. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, proposes three elements to space: perceived space ("things in space"), conceived space ("abstraction and signs as such are…. truth"), and lived space ("space and things are reunited" in social reality) (218). Cairo's perceived space is the physical city, while Noor's conceived space is the city that she thinks she knows. The two clash in the lived space, the reality the boy from Shobrakheit inhabits, as seen through Noor's narrative. In the beginning of the novel, Noor inhabits the conceived space of the expat; she lives in neighborhoods like Zamalek, which historically are colonial sections that function as neighborhoods for Western NGOs and researchers (El Sawy). This is a sanitized space of Cairo, untouched by poverty.

However, as per Tally's theory of literary space, Naga creates a fourth Cairo. In part two, the format of the novel shifts and includes footnotes on Egyptian culture. Both the narrator and the author are communicating to the reader. Noor is communicating to her classmates, and Naga is creating spaces for the reader, depending on their background. Hussain notes

that the footnotes in the novel "are recounted to the girl by the boy and, thus, most of them, as Egyptian readers can easily spot, are blatantly inaccurate" (6). The footnotes create two layers of meaning. The Egyptian understands the joke and the unfamiliar reader falls into the trap laid by Naga. The first footnote included reads: "Despite their efforts to blend in, government informers in Egypt are always recognizable by their state-mandated painter's mustaches" (Naga 89). Footnotes mimicking academic annotation give context to unfamiliar culture; however, the inconsistency and errors in the footnotes show that the way Egypt is perceived is not always the truth. The literary space is broken by Naga as she reaches out of the novel to relay that the narrative of Egypt is determined by the writer and is prone to bias and inaccuracies. This move refutes the Orientalist fantasies of Egypt.

In her essay "Romance and Liminal Space in the Twentieth-Century Cairo Novel," Naga refers to the global image of Egypt as "often relegated to the category of the postcolonial, the Oriental, the marginal" and that it is positioned against Western narrative, instead of centered in its own right (131). In the novel, the boy from Shobrakheit's story is placed against that of Noor's and her story is formed through the inclusion of her perspective and understanding of his world.

In a section from Noor's point of view that begins, "Question: If you are competing to lose, what do you win if you win?," Noor describes the boy from Shobrakheit. (Naga, *If An Egyptian* 37). He tells her of the village of Shobrakheit and she describes his appearance:

> the hems of his pants were frayed, strings dangled from his vest like lines of saliva, yet he wore a perky bow tie [...] [he] wore black leather sandals with socks, but one of the soles was loose, flapping like a bottom lip when he walked.

Noor realizes Egypt through him, thinking,

> [m]ore than anything, what binds people here to one another here is the pointless struggle for quality of life. I'm learning slowly that having money and the option to leave frays any claim I have to this place.

This reflection illustrates that her relationship with the boy from Shobrakheit is a learning ground for her privilege that she never had to confront before this relationship.

But both characters use each other as tools for their desire. Noor notes, "The boy from Shobrakheit will die never having crossed a border." Noor is his connection to the world outside of Egypt and his only way to travel. She is America and an experience that he will never be afforded.

Shobrakheit is not merely the boy's hometown, but it is a lived space that stands in opposition to the conceived space of Cairo. The novel opens with a question from the boy from Shobrakheit: "Question: If you don't have anything nice to say, should your mother be punished?" (Naga, *If An Egyptian* 3), narrating the family's struggle with the description of his mother slicing a peach in four sections for dinner. To create a compelling backstory and propel the boy from the countryside and into Cairo, it is revealed in short sentences that the boy's grandmother shoves the peaches into her ears and then climbs into the stove to commit suicide. When Noor co-opts the boy from Shobrakheit's history for her memoir, she ignores the material reality of Shobrakheit, including its lack of infrastructure, the agrarian struggle, and the specific local histories of resistance. Instead, she "Orientalizes" the village, turning it into a myth of authentic Egypt as a form of geographic erasure. By the time the boy from Shobrakheit is in the neoliberal city of Cairo, he is a displaced person whose rural knowledge is useless, yet that same knowledge is what Noor seeks to extract and translate into her English-language memoir. In a way, he reaches America, but it is a version of himself that did not exist in his reality, as his story is only derived for consumption.

In rewriting the boy, Noor rewrites herself. The boy is relegated to the side of her Cairo self-discovery story. In the United States, Noor is in the margin, but the boy from Shobrakheit is placed below her in the cultural hierarchy as a commodity. Just as he is silent for the duration of the novel, only voiced through Noor, Noor is silenced in the memoir workshop. Her classmates use her story for their own gain—the pain of the Egyptians, mimicking the experience of the boy from Shobrakheit. This shows the power of colonization and coloniality in different contexts. In the workshop, Noor's classmate, Minnie, questions the accuracy of Noor's story, "Minnie: [...] Obviously, I'm not trying to tell you about

your own culture, but I googled a few of them and—" (Naga, *If An Egyptian* 164). The memoir scene is not a conversation between writers. It relegates Noor's story to the margins of her classmates' understanding of Egyptians.

Placing the story outside of the novel as an object shows how the postcolonial narrative is a publishing commodity. Authors and stories are seen. Readers come to the pages with their own ideas. Why does someone pick up a novel? The answer rests in the space that the book occupies. The novel's epigraph, a quote from an Instagram caption by Hana Gamal, an Egyptian photographer, begins this conversation of seeing and being seen: "I am not what you think I am. You are what you think I am" (Naga, *If An Egyptian* 1). The novel's cover features yellow capitalized letters of the title, the author's name in the same typeface in white beside the word "speak," over an orientalist painting of a young man. In the painting, the man's gaze is positioned towards the title, his eyes looking towards "speak." The cover engages the unwitting reader in complicity with the colonial narrative that bars the Egyptian from agency, denying them the right to consent even before the first page. Why do they pick up this novel? Is it the author's name? Is it the hope of an authentic story?

The background of the cover is an 1872 painting titled *Bishari, Bust of a Warrior* by Jean-Léon Gérôme, a French painter, sculptor, academic, and Orientalist (Jean-Léon Gérôme). The Bishari tribe is one of the groups indigenous to Northern Sudan and Southern Egypt. Gérôme's paintings captured his view of the East during his travels, but although he employed a realistic style, his paintings "were instead carefully crafted fantasies, where the boundary between reality and fiction was meticulously blurred" (Olsen and White). They contributed to a false, exoticized narrative of the East. With this painting placed as the cover, the Egyptian narrative is framed as a consumable product whose story is determined by the observers with power. It distorts the subaltern, and mimics Gérôme's gaze on one who cannot "speak English."

Naga uses English to enact the coloniality she critiques, showing how language is a border the boy from Shobrakheit cannot cross. As the boy cannot speak English, he is denied the right to narrate, and his story is domesticated to satisfy

Western tastes, as is Noor's in the workshop. The novel operates as a panopticon for the characters, as the watchful eye of the reader polices their stories. The counter-hegemonic struggle of the subaltern is shown through the colonizer's viewpoint in that the center dictates how the Egyptian will be presented, even if the Egyptian does speak English. Power and privilege shift depending upon space, but the subaltern remains lowest. This epistemic violence defines the postcolonial experience: stories are defined and made palatable by others. As this novel is a purchasable good, Naga is selling a "translated" version of the subaltern for a global market. Her ability to publish this novel and tell her perspective as an Egyptian relies upon the privilege that the subaltern cannot access. If an Egyptian cannot speak English, then only those who can speak English are able to tell their story. Power belongs to the speaker rather than the subject. This spacio-cultural distance cannot be closed by a book and can only be acknowledged as a site of ongoing struggle.

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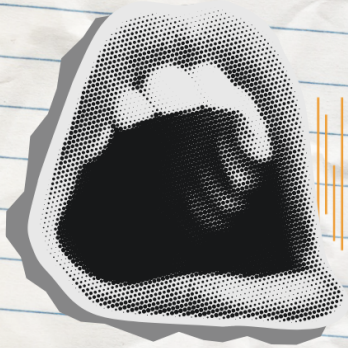

Sounds of Identity: How Does English Pronunciation Reflect Identity, Space, and Linguistic Background?

Lida Zarearsanjani, Emad Elbana, and Ivan Aparicio Sausedo

This essay examines how linguistic identity is constructed and negotiated across spaces and how phonological variation is shaped by place, movement, and linguistic experience. It calls for deeper consideration of the less visible dimensions of language, particularly the sound system. Drawing on three research projects conducted in the fields of phonetics and phonology, this essay compares the English pronunciation of nonnative speakers from Kenya, Iran, and Argentina with that of three native English speakers from the Midwest United States. In doing so, it explores how speech production is inherently variable and influenced by a range of physical, social, and experiential factors, reflecting the uniqueness of each speaker's linguistic trajectory and identity. By reframing phonological variation as spatially produced rather than individually deficient, the essay demonstrates that English does not exist as a single, homogeneous system but rather as a constellation of situated practices shaped by where and how it is used. Through the interaction of first-language (L1) phonology, second-language (L2) acquisition and learning, and specific situational contexts, phonological variation emerges as a meaningful and systematic phenomenon. Both where one has lived and the social or situational context of speech (i.e. as formal versus informal settings) manifest spatial differences that shape pronunciation. Geographic space, linguistic exposure, and mobility all influence English pronunciation, thereby contributing to the ongoing construction of linguistic identity.

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Introduction

How can a single wave of sound both unite speakers across continents and mark profound differences between them? Spoken language is never merely a neutral vehicle for meaning. It carries histories of movement, structures of power, and traces of the lived spaces in which it is learned and practiced. As David Crystal argues, linguistic diversity preserves distinct ways of interpreting human experience, reminding us that variation is not deficiency, but cultural knowledge encoded in sound (6). In a globalized world in which English functions as a lingua franca—a prominent means of communication among speakers of other languages—pronunciation becomes one of the most visible sites where identity, geography, and social space intersect. Pronunciation is shaped not only by where a speaker has lived but also by the social and situational context in which they speak. These two manifestations of spatial difference—geographic/mobility factors and variation in register, or "variation in speech" based on social setting—interact to influence how speech is produced and perceived. What, then, can be learned from the production of English across multiple spaces by diverse speakers?

Recent scholarship in the humanities has increasingly turned to space as a critical lens of interpretation, largely through examinations of how identity is produced not only through time and narrative but also through the physical, social, and imagined spaces people inhabit.[1] Language,

1 See Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas, Beacon Press, 1994; Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." 1967. *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22-27;

too, is spatial. It travels across borders and it is reshaped by the conditions of its use. Phonology offers a particularly revealing point of entry into these processes because it reflects deeply embodied habits formed through repeated interaction with specific linguistic environments. Because each individual's linguistic history is unique, speech production is never uniform. Variation is an inherent part of language use and arises from multiple factors, including physical differences and social and linguistic backgrounds (Zsiga 438 [2nd ed.]).

Variation according to place underpins the concept of dialect. As Zsiga explains, a regional dialect is a variety spoken by a group of people who live in a particular area. Since every individual is born and raised in a specific region, each person naturally speaks a dialect, reflected in accent and pronunciation (438). In this sense, differences between native and nonnative pronunciation are rarely random. Rather, they reflect systematic interactions among perception, production, articulatory habits, and cross-linguistic transfer. Research in second-language phonology further demonstrates that first-language sound systems strongly influence how new sounds and syllable structures are perceived and produced, particularly when the target language contains marked or unfamiliar structures (458).

Integrating this linguistic perspective with spatial theory allows pronunciation to be understood not merely as a technical outcome of language learning, but as an embodied record of where and how language has been lived. No dialect is inherently superior to another, nor is any variety intrinsically correct or incorrect. Dialects carry rich cultural and historical significance, reflecting the identities and lived experiences of their speakers.

Methodology

Linguists often rely on careful listening and acoustic analysis to investigate how language reflects identity and space. By attending closely to pronunciation patterns, researchers can uncover how speakers' linguistic choices index their geographic backgrounds, social experiences, and interactional contexts. Listening is therefore not a passive activity, but an analytical method that allows linguists to interpret how sound encodes lived experience and spatial history.

The research projects analyzed

and Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

here recorded speech from three L1 English speakers, and three L2 English speakers. The data was collected using open-ended questionnaires to elicit speech production in a casual manner, and text scripts that addressed possible differences in segments. Using both auditory analysis and instrumental tools such as Praat, a software for phonetic analysis (Boersma & Weenink 2025), we examined segmental and suprasegmental features in selected words and speech samples. Segmental features refer to the individual sounds of speech, such as consonants and vowels (phonemes), that occur in sequence and serve to distinguish meaning. Suprasegmental features, by contrast, extend over more than one sound and include elements such as syllable structure, stress, intonation, rhythm, and pitch, all of which shape meaning and contribute to the overall flow and pattern of spoken language. This approach allowed us to compare how speakers from different geographic and social spaces produce English sounds, and to identify distinctive features of vowel sounds and consonants using the International Phonetic Alphabet for transcription. The purpose of this alphabet is to provide a unique symbol for each distinct sound in a language, meaning every phoneme that distinguishes one word from another ("International Phonetic Alphabet").

English as a Lingua Franca

"Lingua Franca" refers to the global status that English has acquired over time, in which it is a means of communication among speakers of other languages. The language backgrounds of the participants in the three research projects revealed how and why they learned English, as well as how these experiences shaped their views on the global purpose of the language. For the Kenyan speaker, English represented more than a language—it was a pathway to new opportunities and social mobility. She viewed English as a "ship to the world," a tool to pursue her professional ambitions and connect with broader communities beyond Kenya. She was motivated to learn English by her desire to work in English-speaking spaces, where she could teach and share knowledge as an instructor. This aspiration reflects the broader role of English as a lingua franca, functioning not just as a means of communication but as a marker of status and mobility. Her phonological choices, including careful articulation influenced

by classroom-based learning and literacy practices, demonstrate how the spaces in which she learned English—classrooms, media, and formal educational environments—shaped her speech. English in multilingual societies often develops as a language of education and economic opportunity, which is evident in how her pronunciation reflects both L1 influence and the social function of English in Kenya (Kachru 125).

The Persian speaker's experience with English similarly highlights its role as a lingua franca, though shaped by a different spatial trajectory. After moving from Iran to the United States, English became central to her ability to navigate academic and professional spaces. Rather than aiming to sound like a native speaker, her use of English is oriented toward effective communication and participation in these settings. This functional orientation is reflected in her pronunciation, which maintains features of Persian phonology—such as vowel insertion in consonant clusters, as in "Skype" pronounced [ɛskaɪp], and the clear articulation of final consonants at the ends of words—while remaining highly intelligible. These patterns suggest that, for this speaker, English operates as a practical and social resource rather than a marker of native-speaker identity. Her pronunciation illustrates how speakers using English as a lingua franca adapt the language to meet communicative needs within specific spaces, without fully suppressing the phonological patterns shaped by earlier linguistic experience.

At a very young age, the L2 English speaker from Argentina began learning English at a language school. Initially motivated by his family's encouragement and the practical benefits of learning the language, he gradually grew to enjoy learning English and developed positive attitudes toward the imagined English-speaking culture. He later pursued higher education in the field of English teaching, further consolidating his academic and professional development not only in his home country, but also in the U.K. and in the U.S. This immersive experience strengthened his language proficiency and fostered integrative motivation, a concept developed by Gardner (qtd. in Paltridge and Phakiti 404) as he developed meaningful connections with the local culture and community. Throughout his language

experience, his understanding of English expanded beyond seeing it solely as the language of native speakers. He came to view it as a global lingua franca, a tool for communication among speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This perspective has shaped his professional identity and approach to language, emphasizing the role of English in intercultural communication and global engagement.

Language Identity Is Shaped by Geography and Cultures

English does more than facilitate communication; it also acts as a lens through which speakers express their identities. The way individuals pronounce English carries traces of their cultural background, educational experiences, and the regions in which they have lived. The speech patterns of the Kenyan, Persian, and Argentine participants illustrate how accent and pronunciation reflect not only language learning but also the social and geographic journeys that shape each speaker's language identity. The Kenyan speaker's identity is rooted in her African, Kenyan upbringing and cultural beliefs, which continue to influence her speech even after moving to the United States. Despite her ability to approximate native English sounds, she maintains distinct pronunciation patterns as an assertion of self and cultural belonging. For example, she pronounces words like "education" and "schedule" differently from an American speaker. The American speaker shows the expected palatalization of the /dʒ/ sequence, resulting in affrication (e.g., [ˌɛdʒuˈkeɪʃən], [ˈskɛdʒul]),[2] whereas the Kenyan speaker produces them as [ˈskɛdul] and [ˌɛduˈkeɪʃən].[3] Importantly, this does not mean that Kenyan English lacks the [dʒ] affricate because Kenyan English does include [dʒ] in many other lexical positions. The difference observed here is more plausibly explained by orthographic influence, especially in contexts where English is learned primarily as a classroom subject rather than through everyday exposure to native speakers. Moreover, this difference is not a deficit but a reflection of her identity and the linguistic space she inhabits. Her pronunciation demonstrates that language is both a personal and cultural map: it preserves her connection to Kenya while allowing her to navigate new social and professional spaces in the U.S.

2 The dʒ sounds like the letter "j".

3 The "d" in this case is pronounced like "d" in "dog".

The Persian speaker's identity similarly interacts with her spatial and social experiences. Despite achieving high intelligibility in English, she preserves certain phonological features of Farsi as a marker of cultural identity, such as full articulation of coda consonants and epenthetic vowels in onset clusters ([ɛskaɪp]).[4] Her pronunciation reflects experiences across multiple spaces—home in Tehran, classrooms in Iran, and professional spaces in the U.S. Acoustic evidence shows that even when adapting to American English norms, Persian speakers retain subtle prosodic and segmental features of their L1, highlighting the spatial and cultural dimensions of identity in pronunciation. By contrast, the Midland American English speaker's pronunciation reflects immersion in domestic, educational, and community spaces, producing context-dependent variations such as flapping[5] and vowel reduction. This comparison illustrates how both native and non-native speakers' phonological patterns are shaped by the interaction of social, cultural, and spatial environments, showing that identity is embedded in speech across contexts.

The language background of the Argentine speaker and his experience living in the U.K. supports the way he produces sounds with a clear preference for what is considered Received Pronunciation British English accent, building up a linguistic identity that reflects the process and influence of learning a target language in an EFL Classroom, since Argentina is a Spanish-speaking country. The sounds analyzed from the American English speaker align with the Midland accent of the region of his birth, serving as an example of "standard" General American English. For example, a clear distinction between R-dropping vs. R-full is noticed when pronouncing the word "car" in casual speech, the spectrogram of this speaker showed the absence of a rhotic transition, indicating deletion of the final [ɹ].[6] On the contrary, the spectrogram of the L1 English speaker produced a voiced alveolar approximant [ɹ], showing the r-full of General American English, which is pronounced at

4 A vowel sound is added before the word's initial consonant, turning it into something like "es-kaipe".

5 Flapping: the consonants /t/ and /d/ are pronounced as a quick, voiced flap sound (i.e., "butter" sounds like "budder").

6 In this case, "car" ends abruptly as "cah" without an r-colored vowel transition.

the end of a word (Zsiga 66 [2nd ed.]). This reinforces the idea that variation in sounds reveals aspects about the speaker's language identity constructed through spaces where regional accents, and language learning experience are intertwined.

Language Pronunciation Is Shaped by Contextual Factors

Pronunciation is not static; it is shaped by the contexts in which speakers learn and use language. The Midland American English speaker acquired English natively through immersion in home, community, and educational spaces, which facilitated natural rhythm, stress, and segmental patterns such as flapping and vowel reduction. In contrast, the Kenyan speaker learned English primarily in institutional and formal educational contexts, supplemented by media exposure, which resulted in careful articulation, preserved vowel clarity, and orthography-driven pronunciation. These contextual differences explain why the Midland speaker produces "better" with [ɾ] (like a soft "d"), while the Kenyan speaker retains [t] (a crisp "t" sound), or why "sure" is pronounced [ʃɝ], as one syllable by the American speaker, but [ʃu.wa] as two, by the Kenyan speaker.

Each speaker's phonology is shaped by the spaces they inhabit: the Midland speaker's informal domestic and community spaces encourage casual, compressed forms, while the Kenyan speaker's formal educational spaces encourage careful, expanded forms. These examples illustrate that pronunciation is a spatial practice, reflecting both the physical and social environments of the speaker[7] (De Certeau 91). Instrumental phonetic research supports this view, showing that apparent consonant deletion or reduction in casual American English speech often reflects gradient phonetic processes shaped by register and reduced articulatory effort rather than categorical phonological absence. (Zsiga 243 [2nd ed.]). Considering context and register is therefore essential for interpreting pronunciation differences, particularly in L2 speech.

For the Persian speaker, contextual factors also play a significant role in shaping pronunciation, though their effects interact closely with first-language phonological constraints. While her English consistently reflects Persian phonotactic patterns, the

7 See de Certeau

degree of articulatory care varies across contexts. In more formal or academic situations, her speech is characterized by slower tempo, clear syllable boundaries, and deliberate consonant articulation, reflecting heightened attention to intelligibility and professional expectations.
In less formal contexts, speech becomes more fluid, yet reductions common in American English—such as extensive vowel reduction or consonant deletion—remain limited due to L1 constraints. Acoustic analysis of words such as "through," "interview," "button," and "Skype" demonstrates that even when speaking casually, the Persian speaker maintains systematic pronunciation strategies shaped by Persian phonology. These patterns suggest that contextual space influences how speech is produced—tempo, clarity, and effort—while first-language phonology constrains which phonological alternations are available to the speaker. From a spatial perspective, this illustrates how speakers navigate social expectations of formality while carrying embodied linguistic habits across settings.

In the case of the Argentine speaker, his language learning background informed that all English classes were taught by EFL teachers from Argentina (British and American accents target preferences). Most of the EFL course books were designed by British Publishers like Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press and integrated the four macro skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). His language instruction aimed to develop communicative competence as well as specific aspects of language as he advanced his language education. In the segmental and suprasegmental differences, he clearly shows features of Received Pronunciation British English resulting from (1) his learning experience in academic settings where English is taught as a Foreign Language, (2) his preference towards British accent target, and also (3) his exposure to real-world sounds, people and places during his time in the U.K. When reading the word "mountain," the spectrogram of this speaker showed that the Argentine participant pronounced the consonant sound [t], in [maʊntɪn] with no reduction intended (using a sharp "t" sound). On the contrary, the spectrogram of the American speaker showed that he used the glottal stop [ʔ], where the consonant

sound /t/ was reduced to the glottal stop (replacing "t" with a quick throat catch) before the nasal [n], a characteristic of many American English speakers (Zsiga 23 [2nd ed.]).

Variation: Phonological Alternations and Register

Phonological alternations refer to systematic variations in the way sounds are pronounced when influenced by their surrounding linguistic environment, revealing the underlying rules that shape a language's sound system (Zsiga 244 [2nd ed.]). One type of alternation is lenition, where sounds become weaker or more open, and in American English, this usually happens with intervocalic /t/ or /d/ ("t" or "d" sound between two vowels), which becomes a tap [ɾ] (making words like "butter" and "ladder" sound the same). This process makes speech faster and more fluid without changing the meaning of the word. For example, when pronouncing the word "city" in casual speech the American speaker produced the voiced, alveolar, tap [ɾ], [sɪɾi] (sounds like "siddy"), whereas the Argentine speaker produced [t], following British English patterns of consonant sounds, [sɪti] (sounds like "sit-ee").

Another important type of alternation introduced by Zsiga is deletion, which occurs when a segment that is present in the environment of a word is not pronounced in actual speech. Deletion can also result from the lenition of vowels: in unstressed syllables they are not pronounced with full distinctive quality resulting in a reduction to schwa, and eventually in a deletion of the vowel sound. This alternation usually leads to a reduction in the number of syllables that a word contains. When participants pronounced the word "vegetable" in casual speech, the L2 English speaker from Argentina produced a four-syllable word, syllabified as [vɛ.ʤɪ.tə.bəl] while the L1 English speaker from the U.S. produced a three-syllable word by deleting the vowel sound after the consonant sound [ʤ], therefore syllabified as [vɛʤ.tə.bəl] (or "vej-tuh-buhl"). This suprasegmental difference portrayed that the Argentine speaker pronounced each segment following general patterns of the learned target language of Received Pronunciation British English, while the American speaker applied lenition of the vowel sound, which resulted in the deletion of a segment, following

general patterns of his regional accent.

Register—variation in speech based on social context—further demonstrates how spatial and relational factors shape pronunciation. During the recordings, the Midland American English speaker, recorded in a familiar domestic space and speaking with someone she knew intimately, produced speech that was relaxed, fluid, and informal. In contrast, the Kenyan English speaker, recorded in a more formal academic setting with a socially distant researcher, spoke carefully and deliberately. These differences in register led to observable phonological variation: the American speaker reduced vowels and produced flaps and compressed syllables, while the Kenyan speaker maintained full consonants, inserted glides, and emphasized syllables. This pattern highlights how emotional and social distance between speakers creates distinct linguistic spaces, influencing how identity is expressed through sound. As Bhabha and De Certeau argue, identity is performed in "in-between" spaces and emerges through practice; here, pronunciation reflects not only geography and background but also the social and interpersonal environment of the interaction. By shaping speech based on closeness or formality, speakers adapt to the immediate spatial context, showing that language is an embodied reflection of both physical and social space. Findings from sociophonetic research similarly show that speakers adjust pronunciation to manage formality, align with interlocutors, and project competence or authority (Zsiga). In L2 speech, these social adjustments interact with L1 transfer producing systematic and predictable variation rather than random deviation.

For the Persian speaker, words such as "through," "interview," "button," and "Skype" revealed systematic L1-influenced phonological patterns across formal and casual speech. Intervocalic /t/ often appeared as a flap ([bʌɾɛn] for button),[8] while vowel insertion in clusters, as in [ɛskaɪp] for "Skype," reflected Persian phonotactic constraints. In more formal contexts, articulation was deliberate, whereas casual speech allowed slightly faster, more fluid production, though still constrained by L1 habits. These patterns show that the Persian speaker negotiates identity and intelligibility

8 Like saying "budden" instead of a sharp "t."

simultaneously, balancing Persian phonological influence with English norms. Compared with the American speaker, whose reductions were highly context-dependent, the Persian speaker's pronunciation illustrates how L1 background and spatial experience shape consistent yet adaptable speech patterns.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that English pronunciation is far more than a technical skill; it is a spatially and socially situated practice shaped by geography, mobility, and lived experience. Comparing the Kenyan, Persian, Argentine, and American speakers shows that phonological variation arises from the interaction of first-language systems, second-language acquisition, learning environments, and social contexts, rather than from individual deficits. The Persian speaker's pronunciation illustrates how L1 phonology shapes English production, with systematic adaptations such as vowel insertion and flapping reflecting both intelligibility and cultural identity across formal and informal settings. The Kenyan speaker's dialectal variation reflects phonological and spatial awareness, suggesting that linguistic identity is shaped through contextual demands and individual agency. The Argentine speaker's language identity is shaped by the target language preference, and both imagined and lived places of the target culture. We also gained insight on how American speakers showed distinctive characteristics of the American English accent depending upon how they acquired and learned their first language, and the region they were born and lived in the U.S.

By analyzing pronunciation as a form of linguistic space-making, this research reveals that English is not a single, uniform system but a constellation of practices influenced by where, how, and with whom it is spoken. Spoken language encodes speakers' histories, identities, and experiences, highlighting the meaningful role of sound in social and cultural negotiation. Recognizing these spatial and social dimensions provides deeper insight into language learning, teaching, and intercultural communication, emphasizing that linguistic identity is continuously constructed and expressed through the sounds we produce.

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The Pirate Ship in Context: A Vessel for Enlightenment Thought

Alexander Costello

In 1728, the waning years of the Golden Age of Piracy, Daniel Defoe released *The General History of The Pyrates*, Vol II under the pseudonym "Captain Johnson." This work follows the adventures of some of the most notorious pirates of the era and blends historical fact with romanticized fiction. One of the most striking stories focuses on the adventures of a pirate named Captain Misson, who is the only completely fabricated pirate in the account. By analyzing his story through a spatial lens, it becomes clear that Defoe took aspects of the historical pirate ship and distorted them in ways to suit his purposes. Recognizing that the pirate ship was historically a liberatory and marginalized heterotopian space that allowed the pirates to create their own micro-societies, Defoe then placed this space within a fictionalized narrative, allowing him to center his social critiques.

The Pirate Ship in Context: A Vessel for Enlightenment Thought

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The modern interpretation of swashbuckling Atlantic pirates, both as pop culture and historically accurate figures, stem largely from Daniel Defoe's *A General History of The Pyrates* separated into two volumes and written in the final years of the Golden Age of Piracy (1650-1730AD). Defoe's work is a compendium of the most notorious pirates' adventures, which take place in a pivotal historical period that saw the rise of globalization, the creation of the maritime state, and the advancement of Enlightenment thinking. While this source is a valuable historical document, as Defoe utilizes verifiable sources such as court records and trial manuscripts, it is also evident that he romanticizes the pirates and their adventures in order to present social critiques of abusive government structures and the Atlantic Slave Trade. Historians have analyzed Defoe's use of the historical and social aspects of the pirate archetype to formulate these social critiques, but little attention has been given to how Defoe's representation of space contributed to his critique. Defoe distorted and embellished the central spaces that pirates occupy, particularly the ship and terrestrial pirate communities. Given his fastidious use of historical records, we can be sure Defoe was aware that the pirate ship was in reality a marginalized space that acted as a zone of resistance to the effects of the growing maritime state and globalization as a whole. However, in identifying the ship as a liberatory and heterotopian space, Defoe pushes beyond the historical reality and utilizes the ship as a vessel within a confined chronotope to present John Locke's Enlightenment arguments on government and his own social critiques of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Historical Context

Before analyzing Defoe's

fictional representations, let's consider what historical accounts tell us about the space of actual pirate ships. In their book, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and The Hidden History of Revolutionary Atlantic,* Peter Linbaugh and Marcus Rediker identify the ship as both an "engine of capitalism" and a "zone of freedom" for the self-organized sailors below decks (144). With the creation of the maritime state, employment for seamen dramatically increased. However, the work was harsh, lacking financial compensation and characterized by abusive hierarchical discipline practices. Sailors were pressed into service, mostly from poor and ethnically diverse populations. This forced conscription created a micro-society made of international, lower-class individuals. Additionally, sailors often worked for a number of different countries throughout their career, making the ship a space where sailors both lost their national identity and gained an identity in the much larger world beyond their homelands. Despite the diversity within crews, racial and ethnic differences were still sources of conflict aboard the 17th century ship. However, Linbaugh and Rediker point out that sailors eventually began to develop distinct phonetics and dialectics unique to the society onboard ships. Thus, sailors began creating their own identities distinct from their home nations. Furthermore, pirate ships also developed common symbols and social norms that crossed between ships as crews split and multiplied into more pirate crews (214, 226).

Marginalized groups ultimately responded to the poor conditions and abuses of this micro-society by reclaiming the space of the pirate ship and restructuring it into a space of freedom. Because of the poor conditions on the ship, the different cultures of the crew members, and the abusive power structure, ships saw a dramatic increase in mutinies and quick surrenders to pirate crews (Linebaugh and Rediker 144-60). Instead of a tyrannical and abusive power structure, pirate ships cultivated egalitarian societies that gave authority to the crew with limited leadership assigned to the captain in times of emergency. Justice was dispensed occasionally by the will of the majority against treasonous crew members or tyrannical captains, and quartermasters were elected to see to the needs of the crew. Finally,

because of the liberatory nature of the ship, it was not uncommon to see multiethnic crews or even crews that welcomed women into their ranks. This further distinguished the space from the societal norms of mainland Europe.

While the creation of the maritime state was leading to the rise of piracy, mainland Europe was also experiencing a paradigm shift in the form of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is a historical period best explained by Dorinda Outram as a "capsule" of debates and ideas that reached into every part of society and politics (7). Defoe's social critiques seem to be inspired by arguments from contemporary Enlightenment thinkers, particularly John Locke. Locke was one of the first Enlightenment philosophers who set the groundwork for arguments based on reason. Locke's arguments focuses on the role and structure of government as well as the natural rights of individuals. These critiques are also prominent themes in Defoe's pirate accounts. Most of these accounts blend the historical truth with Defoe's creative fabrications, with the notable exception of the entirely fictitious pirate Captain Misson. Yet it is this fictional captain that provides the most insight into how the spatiality of the pirate ship was interpreted by contemporary audiences and by Defoe himself.

Captain Misson

Misson's story begins with his life before he becomes a pirate, showing his background and the key moments that led him to become a captain. Interestingly, Defoe depicts Misson's pirate ship without the tyranny associated with historical pirate ships. Misson is identified as the son of an unknown noble by birth who received an early education (13). This sets him apart from the traditional pirate who comes from the lower-class. Additionally, he does not become captain of the pirate ship through mutiny or violence. He takes on the role because his superiors are killed in battle. Left as the most senior and capable mariner on board, Misson accepts the title of captain at the encouragement of the whole crew. After his promotion to captain, the crew votes to live a "life of liberty" rather than return home (18). To some degree, this interpretation does incorporate aspects of egalitarianism and the liberatory nature of the historic pirate ship. However, it removes the pirate ship's identity as a

marginalized space and the violence associated with the pirate ship's conception.

This reinterpretation of the pirate ship serves two purposes. First, the author gives Misson an educated background to lend credibility to his enlightened ideas. If Misson's background was similar to the marginalized identity of the historic pirate, audiences would be less receptive to his arguments. Without the respectability afforded to Misson by his noble birth, the micro-society he creates may seem desperate or unintelligent. Secondly, the author avoids the historical pattern of violence in the creation of the pirate ship that would tarnish his ideas; since the ship is a representative space for his ideas, the creation of the space has to remain positive. This is further reinforced when Misson has a meeting with the other elected officers and his right-hand man, Caraccioli. When it is suggested that they fly the traditional black flag of the pirates, Caraccioli objects adamantly stating that "they were no Pyrates, but Men who were resolved to assert that Liberty which God and Nature gave them" (Defoe 20). Clearly, Defoe is attempting to distance Misson from negative pirate stereotypes such as violence, lack of education, and greed.

Once the legitimacy of Misson and his micro-society is established, Defoe creates a distinct chronotope within the narrative to compel readers to contemplate their discussions. Chronotope is a term defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84-5). In a chronotope, the author shapes time and space within their creative work in order to organize the narrative and create specific meaning for the audience (Tally 161). In his account of Misson, Defoe uses the ship itself as a confined chronotope since it is both metaphorically and physically separated from the outside world. Socially, the pirate ship is a space disconnected from any nation or terrestrial land. It is also physically disconnected from the world as the ship operates in the ocean, which often functions as a liminal, or in-between, space. This removes the pirates themselves from external affairs beyond the ship, creating a narrative space primarily focused on the contemplation of Enlightenment ideas. For example, three consecutive pages of the account focus on Caraccioli's

thoughts about religion and government (17-20). While there is a minor battle and Misson is given the title of captain within these pages, the central focus is the ideas presented by Caraccioli. The intervening events simply further Caraccioli's arguments of governance and religion.

This does not mean that Misson and his crew are entirely removed from the world around them. There are multiple reports of them attacking other ships, meddling in the affairs of African villages, and eventually creating a pirate colony on land. However, these moments of action typically occur after periods of inaction that allow the pirates to contemplate topics of religion, governance, and slavery. The actions themselves also invite new moments of inaction and reflection. For example, the account includes a story where Misson and his crew find slaves aboard a captured vessel, which prompts Misson to begin a long reflection on the inherent wickedness of slavery. Thus, the focus is not directed toward the capturing of the ship but Misson's arguments against slavery.

Within this confined chronotope, Defoe retains the pirate ship's heterotopian nature. Michel Foucault proposes one definition of heterotopias as spaces of deviation, where abnormal actions can be exercised. This means that heterotopias often act as a counter site to contest the social status quo. Specifically, Foucault argues that the ship is "the heterotopia par excellence," because of its economic significance and the imaginative power that the space can represent (9). This means that the pirate ship already existed as a heterotopia, and Defoe simply utilizes this aspect of the space for his narrative. Specifically, Defoe places the pirate ship in opposition to the wider world and the rising issues of globalization. Caraccioli expresses this dialectic when he encourages Misson to "bid defiance to the power of Europe…and lawfully make war on all the world" (19). This places Misson and his crew in tension with the European world beyond the borders of their ship. Defoe then uses this opposition created by the heterotopian space to critique the hypocrisy of the wider world, beginning with government.

Discussion on government and the political corruption of the time begins with a simple speech from Caraccioli, who states that every man is born free and has a right to support himself. He

argues that governments were once paternalistic; functioned like families in which the father naturally cared for his children, who responded with obedience. However, Caraccioli claims that stronger families began to enslave weaker ones due to greed and ambition, thus creating the corrupt monarchies of Europe that took this paternal government's place. He concludes his discussion on government by stating that man "usurped the prerogative of God" and that "no crime ought to be thus punished [with death], nor indeed any war undertaken, but in defense of our natural right, which is such a share of Earth as is necessary for our support" (18). The author here is projecting a distaste for divine monarchy, severe criminal punishment, and government that is founded on ambition for power rather than the protection of its citizens. Defoe juxtaposes this corruption in the wider world within this micro-society as Misson, upon being sworn in as captain, states that he would use his power for the public good only. This moment, while a bit dramatized, is historically accurate to the actual social order of pirates within this period. Thus, it appears that Defoe has taken aspects of the pirate social spaces such as liberty and egalitarianism, and crafted a microcosm of Enlightenment ideas on governance within Misson's account.

Defoe seems to be specifically using the literary space to juxtapose current European governance with John Locke's concept of natural law and the social contract. In his *Two Treatises of Government,* written roughly 35 years prior to Defoe's work, Locke discusses the purpose of government and its relation to natural law. Natural law, according to Locke, dictates that human beings have an intrinsic right to life, liberty, and property (141). This is remarkably similar to Caraccioli's views, such as when he argues that Misson should wage war on the world because men have a right to liberty that stems from "the Laws of Nature" (Defoe 18-9).

Locke famously observed that people will enter into a social contract, creating a government with the intent of preserving natural rights and enforcing the will of the majority. In the narrative, Misson does not force anyone to remain in his crew but is unanimously elected. He then swears to act in the public good and asks that the crew stand by his decisions, which would be made "for the good of all"

(Defoe 19). The overlap between terminology such as "liberty" and "natural law," as well as the formation of a social contract between Misson (the government) and his crew (the people), establishes a clear connection between this account and John Locke's Enlightenment philosophy.

Locke argued that when governments abuse their authority, the social contract that existed is void and citizens can revolt. This is reflected in Misson's story when Caraccioli states that they should not consider themselves pirates because they would be willing to obey governors who acted justly in their position. To Caraccioli, just governors should protect the people's rights, deliver justice equally, and prevent the rich from oppressing the poor. However, if a governor ignores his duties, then citizens have a right to refuse his authority and "withdraw from sharing the miseries" that come from unjust rule (Defoe 20). This reflects Locke's arguments because, in rejecting their obligations to a government that has abandoned its responsibility, the pirates are acting within their rights as abused citizens. This reinforces the idea of Misson's pirate ship as a liberatory space, juxtaposed against mainstream European society through its incorporation of Locke's ideas in the narrative structure.

This juxtaposition is not only used to criticize the government but also to argue against the injustices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. During the Golden Age of Piracy, pirates in the Caribbean and along the African coast had a detrimental impact on the lucrativeness of the Slave Trade. After pirates had been largely suppressed in the 1730s, there was an increase of almost 27% in slave exports, showing that pirates had been effectively preventing slave ships from reaching their destination or forcing merchants to abandon the enterprise altogether for fear of lost investment. In fact, full-scale campaigns against piracy were organized as a direct result of their impact on the slave trade (Linebaugh and Rediker 168-72). While these figures coupled with the pirates' known distaste for the abusive authoritarianism may deduce that pirates were intentionally confronting the injustice of slavery, the reality is a bit more disappointing. According to Arne Bialuschewski, while pirates would, on rare occasions, accept slaves into their crews, the majority of pirates had little regard

for the lives of slaves and did not concern themselves with the injustice of slavery as an institution. Multiple accounts show that pirates often abandoned slaves within ships they had captured or acted abusively towards native African populations (462-67).

However, the account of Captain Misson diverges significantly from this historical narrative. Within the narrative, Misson and his crew come across multiple ships carrying slaves as cargo. In one such instance, Captain Misson captures a vessel with 17 slaves and declares that slavery could not be justified under the belief of a divine creator. He takes it a step further by declaring that they were created by the same God and given the same reason as white men. He then goes on to state that

> [n]o man had power of liberty over another; and while those who profess'd a more enlightened knowledge of the deity, sold men like beasts; they prov'd that their religion was no more than a grimace. (Defoe 27)

Defoe takes the opportunity within the heteroptopian and liberatory space of the pirate ship to argue that slavery cannot be condoned under natural law or a just government. By specifically calling out the hypocrisy of Christian Europe, Defoe challenges his European audience to question why criminals would have a higher value for human life than their own society. Misson's opinion toward slavery extends beyond the historical reality of pirates. However, it reinforces the notion that the pirate ship is a space for the application of Enlightenment ideas and a site of resistance, if only fictional, against the injustice of slavery in the Atlantic world.

While the ship acts as a site of resistance and Enlightenment thought, the reality is that the ocean is still a liminal zone to Defoe's audience. Despite the great achievements both in the societal structure of Misson's ship and their moral inclinations, the ship exists apart from the terrestrial world. Applying Misson's social critiques to established societies may seem impossible, as the pirates exist outside of the world that the audience occupies. To solve this issue, Defoe ends his account with the creation of a settlement called Libertalia. In this settlement, the people are called "Liberi" erasing previous nationality distinctions among its citizens, which include French, English, Dutch, and Africans (36). This means that

Misson creates a multiethnic and multinational land that provides equality to all people regardless of nationality or race. Furthermore, it is recorded that the form of government for the settlement is democratically established, and Misson becomes the limited term elected monarch (65-6). This again shows Defoe incorporating common Enlightenment arguments for government into the account. By moving the society beyond the liminal zone of the ocean and the confined chronotope of the ship, Defoe displays that his ideas can be applied to a stable and manifest space.

In the end, Libertalia is destroyed by a native tribe in Madagascar and Misson loses his life at sea after fleeing (Defoe 69). It could be argued that by destroying these spaces, Defoe weakens his claim that these utopian and liberatory spaces might exist beyond the liminal zone. However, within the context of this compendium their destruction means quite the opposite. The destruction of Libertalia and Misson's death are more than likely an attempt by Defoe to maintain the facade of the compendium as a purely historical text. This is further supported by the fact that a majority of the fabricated story of Libertalia exists within the narrative of another pirate named Captain Tew. Tew is a real historical figure who supposedly meets Captain Misson and joins him in Libertalia. The effect of this interaction with historical facts is an increased sense that Misson's story is historically possible.

By creating a quasi-historically accurate space, Defoe utilizes the unique spatiality of the pirate ship to present Enlightenment critiques of globalization, particularly government corruption and the injustice of slavery. By identifying the historic pirate ship as a liberatory and heterotopian space, Defoe crafts a fictional narrative juxtaposing the pirates and European society. Mission's pirate ship is placed within a confined chronotope to emphasize critical conversations about contemporary Europe. These conversations express the Enlightenment arguments of John Locke as well as the author's own rejection of slavery. The interweaving of history and fiction in the text allow Defoe to root his narrative in the actual organization of the pirate ship while simultaneously extending the space beyond the historical reality in order to present his critiques.

Defoe's reinterpretation of spaces shows the effects of globalization and the frustrations it produced during the age of Enlightenment. Furthermore, it allows us to better understand how spatiality can be used within a narrative to advance ideas and critiques of the real world.

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WALL-E: Consumerism and the Destruction of Physical Spaces

Melody Miller

In the Disney-Pixar film *Wall-E*, the abandoned Earth and detached humans serve as a reflection of our own society's overconsumption and disregard for environmental responsibility, revealing the unrealistic and dangerous belief that our physical spaces can endlessly absorb our waste. Spatiality is the tool used by the film to show the destruction we produce on Earth through unsustainable patterns of consumption. This research essay analyzes how *Wall-E* exposes the spatial foundations and consequences of consumerism in the modern world. It considers the role of eco-films like *Wall-E* in advocating for personal responsibility and prompting viewers to reduce consumption.

WALL-E: Consumerism and the Destruction of Physical Spaces

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The opening scene of *Wall-E* immediately establishes a profound sense of loneliness through its sweeping images of an abandoned Earth. In *Wall-E*, the camera drifts slowly over endless towers of compacted trash and crumbling skyscrapers swallowed by dust, with no signs of human life. The landscape is painted in muted, neutral tones. The scene foregrounds silence, with only the faint crackle of an old musical playing from Wall-E's speakers.

These details emphasize the planet's desolation. The once-bustling world has become a graveyard of consumer waste, and the vast emptiness makes the small robot microscopic as he methodically compacts garbage. Inside his truck-home, the small string of Christmas lights and carefully arranged trinkets glow warmly against the cold, gray world outside, highlighting how desperately Wall-E clings to fragments of human connection. A discarded film creates a sense of companionship for Wall-E. By using the abandoned Earth as both setting and symbol, the film makes loneliness not just an emotion but the defining atmosphere of the entire world.

This film follows its protagonist, Wall-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-class), the last robot left on Earth as he spends his days tidying up the planet, one piece of garbage at a time. Over 700 years, Wall-E has developed a personality, and he is, predictably, lonely. Then he spots EVE, a sleek and shapely probe sent back to Earth on a scanning mission. Smitten, Wall-E embarks on an adventure where he follows EVE across the galaxy. When she finds a tiny plant and powers down after sending a signal to her ship, he follows her back to the giant starship Axiom, where humanity lives in lazy, obese luxury, controlled by a directive

to return to Earth once vegetation is confirmed. The film becomes a space adventure as Wall-E, with EVE and a few awakened humans, battle against the ship's automated captain, AUTO. In doing this, they deliver the plant and fulfill the directive, saving humanity from itself and paving the way for Earth's restoration.

The Pixar film *Wall-E* was written primarily by Andrew Stanton with the help of Pete Docter. Stanton was inspired to create this film by the rise of Amazon and Apple, and the question of where does all the "stuff" go when we go away? He began playing with an editor friend's binoculars at a baseball game, making different emotional faces with them. This messing around gave him the idea of placing these binoculars on top of a trash compactor, creating our beloved Wall-E. He saw our connection and addiction to devices, comparing them to a nicotine hit or drug, and concieved the device-dependent Axiom society for the film. Andrew Stanton created an intentional connection to our behavior, with a bittersweet ending, to allow for a realization of our future if changes are not made. Disney-Pixar's *Wall-E* has been widely discussed as a critique of hyper-consumerism in contemporary culture. The fast-paced cycle of buying and discarding promoted by the Buy-N-Large company leads to the absolute destruction of Earth, forcing humans to live on the spaceship, Axiom. They become increasingly passive in their consumption, creating destruction aboard the ship, as well, and leaving themselves completely dependent on the machinery around them. They lose their autonomy, as well as their humanity. The film serves as a warning against consumption and passive destruction trends, and urges a change in behavior.

In *Wall-E*, spatiality is a central tool in warning viewers about overconsumption. The film creates a contrast between Earth's vast, trash-covered emptiness and the Axiom's confined, artificial comfort. *Wall-E* shows how the spaces we inhabit shape our connection to the world and to each other: the vast, empty, polluted Earth highlights loneliness, while the compact, screen-filled Axiom emphasizes how technology and consumption can shrink both physical and social space. Through this spatial lens, the film promotes reclaiming real, tangible spaces to restore connection and humanity. This contrast reveals how physical

distance and digital immersion can disconnect people not only from their environment but also from each other.

Wall-E's curiosity and persistence shows that meaningful connections can still be rebuilt. The film suggests that reclaiming physical space through exploring and noticing our surroundings is essential for rediscovering our humanity. *Wall-E* offers a hopeful message: even in a world shaped by isolation, people can choose to reconnect and rebuild. This optimistic element is important because it allows the reader to connect the film with their own behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors, and to draw their own solutions to better their physical spaces.

The film asks what lessons we can take from our growing separation from Earth. By showing robots with human qualities and humans behaving mechanically, *Wall-E* encourages us to reconsider what it means to be "human" or "alive." Through these spatial reversals, the film critiques environmental neglect and humanity's loss of meaningful connection. In "*Wall-E* Reflection: When Robots are Human, and Humans are Robots," Kati Henderson argues that in *Wall-E* the typical roles of "human" and "robot" are reversed. Many biological humans act like thoughtless, dependent robots, while some robots (like Wall-E and EVE) display individuality, emotion, and agency. This source shows that *Wall-E* does not just critique environmental destruction and consumerism on a surface level—it also exposes how these forces dehumanize society. The article argues that humans in the film have become passive beings because of their dependence on technology and consumer culture, while robots display the curiosity, emotion, and agency that humans have lost. *Wall-E* uses this reversal of spaces to warn audiences about the consequences of overconsumption and disconnection from physical space and human relationships.

Wall-E links humanity's potential extinction to environmental destruction caused by unchecked consumerism and corporate control. It also demonstrates that humans only begin to survive and thrive again once they reconnect with the real world, and rebuild genuine human relationships. Ashton Treadaway's "The Loss of

Humanity through Consumerism in *Wall-E*" argues that *Wall-E* critiques extreme consumerism by showing how humans lose their identities when they allow corporations and technology to control every aspect of their lives. The author explains that Buy-N-Large's dominance turns humans into passive consumers who no longer think or engage with the real world. Meanwhile, robots like Wall-E and EVE display emotion and moral responsibility more than humans do. These character reversals suggest that regaining individual agency and becoming more conscientious consumers are essential if humanity hopes to avoid the destruction shown in the film.

Eco-films like *Wall-E* warn that neglecting our natural and built spaces leads to environmental collapse and a dangerous disconnection from the world we depend on. Treadaway emphasizes the protection and personal responsibility attached to our physical spaces. Life on the Axiom disconnects humans from any natural environment, trapping them in an artificial world where they lose awareness, agency, and even their humanity.

This reinforces that the film asks us to care about our physical world (or physical spaces) before the damage becomes irreversible. *Wall-E* uses these physical spaces, ruined landscapes and artificial living environments to warn that neglecting these spaces leads to environmental destruction and a profound disconnection from the real world.

Wall-E warns against the consequences of environmental neglect, which we see in the erroding health of our physical spaces, due to today's systems of rapid production and disposal. Within spatial studies, scholars debate how humans affect physical spaces and determine their outcomes. We can understand this impact through the theories of Henri Lefebvre. In the *Production of Space*, Lefebvre explains that physical space is constantly shaped by human activity, especially through the priorities of modern capitalism. Lefebvre argues that natural space is increasingly overwritten by socially produced spaces built for economic efficiency, consumption, and control rather than human or ecological well-being. Under consumerism, space becomes a commodity, planned and engineered to encourage buying and productivity rather than authentic

lived experience. As a result, things like malls, highways, and even public areas reflect the values of a system that turns land and everyday environments into extensions of the market. In this way, our consumer habits do not just happen in space; they actively produce the physical spaces around us. This production reinforces the very systems that shape our lives.

John Cairns, Jr. argues that modern consumption patterns are damaging our physical spaces, by showing how disproportionately high resource use drives ecological overshoot and environmental degradation. Cairns highlights that the United States, despite having only 4% of the world's population, consumes nearly 25% of its resources, illustrating the severity of the imbalance. He argues that consumerism has become a defining feature of the 21st-century lifestyle, contributing significantly to the planet's declining ecological health. This evidence serves as a call to action. It urges individuals to adopt less materialistic behaviors in the short term, and calls on societies to pursue long-term structural change.

In their working paper titled "Consumerism and Environment: Does Consumption Behavior Affect Environmental Quality?," Carlo Orecchia and Pietro Zoppoli address similar concerns. Their analysis demonstrates that as consumer behavior becomes more focused on convenience and disposability, environmental degradation accelerates. Like Cairns, Orecchia and Zoppoli argue that unsustainable consumption is not just an individual problem but a systemic one, shaped by economic structures that encourage constant purchasing and resource use. Together, these points reinforce the broader warning that without significant changes in both personal habits and societal systems, our physical spaces will continue to deteriorate.

Eco-films made for children, foster early recognition of damaging patterns and the potential for future change. Given the ongoing deterioration of physical spaces, acknowledgment of behavior and call to action are more important than ever. Shifting research focuses on the question of how eco-films influence society and what kinds of change they have the potential to inspire. In a study titled "Effects of Eco-Animations on Nine and Twelve-Year-Old Children's Environmental Conceptions: How Wall-E Changed Young Spectators' Views of Earth

and Environmental Protection," researchers examined how nine and twelve-year-olds' environmental conceptions changed after watching *Wall-E*. Children completed word association tasks before and after the film. Through content and cluster analysis, researchers identified shifts in how participants understood Earth, pollution, and environmental responsibility. In scientific studies, content and clutter analysis examines the objects and arrangement within a space to infer patterns about people's behaviors, identities, and lifestyles. The study showed that *Wall-E* meaningfully reshaped children's views of Earth and environmental protection, though the nature of these changes varied by age. Overall, the film prompted stronger associations with pollution and responsibility, demonstrating how eco-animations can influence young audiences' environmental understanding.

Due to the story's emotional connection and moral tension, it naturally sparks discussions about values, ethical decision-making, and the consequences of inaction. In Staci M. Zavattaro's "We'll See Who's Powerless Now!: Using *Wall-E* to Teach Administrative Ethics," shows that fictional stories like *Wall-E* can be powerful tools for helping students grasp complex ethical concepts by presenting them in a vivid, accessible narrative. The film allows students to engage with issues such as power, accountability, and public leadership in a way that feels concrete rather than abstract. Eco-films and other narratives can, therefore, open space for deeper critical reflection than traditional lectures alone.

However, there is only so much that a film can do to make physical changes in the world. Kylie and Brett Caraway's "Representing Ecological Crises in Children's Media: An Analysis of *The Lorax* and *Wall-E*" discusses how these films portray ecological crisis, environmental destruction, and humanity's disconnection from nature. While children's media often attempts to raise awareness about sustainability and responsibility, we should be wary of eco-films' tendency to oversimplify ecological problems by framing them as individual moral failures rather than systemic issues rooted in larger economic and political structures.

The authors also point out that the solutions offered (such as planting a single seed or returning

to a nostalgic natural past) are symbolic rather than transformative. Such endings risk giving audiences a false sense of resolution, so while eco-films can spark awareness, they rarely challenge deeper systems driving environmental destruction. It is important to raise awareness in young people regarding threats to the enviroment, but it is also important to avoid simplifying the issue through false resolutions. These films are great first steps, especially for kids, but we must continue to acknowledge larger causes of physical destruction and avoid settling for shallow solutions.

By pairing critiques of overconsumption with strategies for personal and collective change, these sources show that bettering our physical spaces depends on reducing our own consumption, teaching environmental awareness, and actively choosing behaviors that support sustainability as a broader society. Reduced consumption and sustainable choices are ways individuals can take responsibility for the spaces they inhabit, connecting personal actions to broader environmental and societal benefits. This research does not just analyze problems like overconsumption and destruction of physical space; it explores practical solutions. Through these solutions, we can establish a framework that connects individual responsibility with the bettering of physical spaces and moving forward to action.

Cairns articulates several practical solutions to address overconsumption and environmental degradation. Individuals can reduce their ecological impact by consuming less, embracing less materialistic lifestyles, and making more sustainable choices. On a broader scale, societies can shift toward renewable energy, increase efficiency, stabilize population growth, and redefine progress by prioritizing well-being over material wealth. In this way, we will create a framework for long-term sustainability.

As Korfiatis suggests, eco-animations like *Wall-E* demonstrate how media can influence personal responsibility and our relationship with physical spaces. By increasing awareness of issues like pollution and waste, these films encourage everyday sustainable actions such as recycling, conserving energy, and reducing waste that show even small choices can improve the environments we inhabit. They also foster long-term environmental

values, making sustainability a tangible part of daily life, and reinforcing the idea that individuals play a role in creating healthier physical spaces. However, as Kyle Caraway and Brett Caraway remind us, awareness is only a first step. It is important that our acknowledgment of the issue moves beyond symbolic solutions.

In *Wall-E*, the abandoned Earth and the technologically detached humans reflect our own society's overconsumption and unrealistic belief that physical spaces can endlessly absorb waste. While the film is widely recognized as a critique of hyper-consumerism, this essay adds a spatial perspective: embodied engagement such as observing and interacting with one's surroundings is essential to restoring human connection. Drawing on research about environmental deterioration, the impact of eco-films on young audiences, and our responsibilities as inhabitants of shared spaces, this essay situates *Wall-E* within broader conversations about environmental accountability. Spatial theory emphasizes that humanity's survival depends on confronting ecological destruction, resisting consumerism, and rebuilding meaningful relationships with natural as well as built environments. Eco-films, particularly those aimed at children, can foster early awareness of harmful patterns and inspire long-term change, but must be accompanied with real work. Future research should focus on concrete, real-world examples of environmental action to move beyond film-based awareness toward genuine, spatially grounded change.

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Gender In ADs

Pyrex Ware, Life Magazine, Page 60

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Kitchen Ad, Life Magazine, Page 38

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"Happier Homemaking" Life Magazine, Page 144

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Gender Roles and Domesticity through Advertisements in the 1950s

Gia Valenzano

In 1950s America, advertisements and magazines didn't just show women at home. They placed women there, establishing their roles as caretakers. By examining selected advertisements from a 1952 issue of *Life Magazine*, the author explores how visual and textual rhetoric worked to constrain women, centering their lives in kitchens, living rooms, and caregiving spaces. By analyzing ads in connection with Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender*, we see how such media perpetuated the idea that femininity is rooted in the home, thus enforcing limited physical and social mobility for women.

Gender Roles and Domesticity through Advertisements in the 1950s

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Introduction

A woman's role in the household has always been considered an important one. Women are often seen as the backbone and the glue. While this ideal stretches very far back, the 1950s brought new focus to it through advertisements that placed women firmly in domestic spaces. We can interpret the visualizations of 1950s home life to understand what the feminine ideal was–not just how women should behave but where they belong. Often, these advertisements positioned women in submissive roles. They argued for the significance of a household appliance to the thriving of a family. A fridge isn't just an upgrade; it is an upgrade to better serve the family. "Successful marriages start in the kitchen!" ("Successful") was more than a slogan. While selling products, these advertisements also sold a vision of ideal womanhood mapped onto the space of the home.

Using Doreen Massey's thesis that space is socially constructed and gendered, this project argues that advertising not only reflected established gender norms, but also constructed them. This essay makes the case that 1950s' ads spatially limited women to the home by turning spaces like the kitchen and dining room into gendered spaces, creating lasting boundaries for women.

Gender, Space, and Place

Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender* offers a way to see how gender roles are connected to the ways men and women move in or are confined by space. In her discussion of globalization, for example, Massey shows how space organizes relations of power and identity. Massey argues that globalization leads to a "global hierarchy" where all significant social and economic powers are centralized and accumulate to the benefit of the wealthy and powerful few at the expense of others (160). We can see globalization

working through advertisements and the representation of women, connecting women globally through shared domestic consumerism, as well as shared identification with a widespread repressive narrative tying women to domestic places. These narratives not only showed women working at home; they confined them there and erased them from public spaces.

Uniform assumption about household duties belonging to women limit physical and social mobility. Through advertisement representations, we see the positioning of women not as part of significant social standing, but arguably as objectified and resourceful to others. This global hierarchy, seen through advertisements, reinstates inequalities. Massey emphasizes that the domesticated "mom" figure is constructed not as an independent subject but as a "stale symbolic center," which is something to anchor others within the household (180).

Inequality shapes the experience of space differently for different people. Gender, class, and ethnicity define how one moves through space because of issues of mobility, safety, and access. Massey further illustrates that gender is certainly embedded in the way individuals dwell and experience space (164). A pattern of spatial control can be seen in 1950s advertisements, where women are overwhelmingly depicted in the home, tending to related housekeeping duties. This is an attempt to spatially position women rooted in the home while also excluding them from spaces perceived as masculine. The home becomes a controlled space with links to identity and subordination. In this way, Massey reveals her central argument: gender shapes space and space shapes gender.

Cookbooks and Other Guides for Living

In "The Way to A Man's Heart," Jessamyn Neuhaus argues that 1950s cookbooks were used as tools to instruct women on how to be good wives. She argues that often they were used as a guide for living, explaining that cookbooks aimed to "reassure the young wife that skills in the kitchen would ensure a happy married life" (529). Such an assertion promotes the same belief found in advertising that a woman's value and marital stability depend on how well she can perform her domestic role. In pushing a domestic ideal where

marital happiness depended on a woman's domestic labor in the home, Neuhaus says that "cookbooks were part of a larger discourse that sought to limit women's roles to those of wife, mother, and homemaker" (529). Both cookbooks and advertising pushed a rhetoric that women are socially and physically bound to the home and the role they play there. The home becomes a mechanism for reproducing social hierarchies. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre states, "symbolic representation serves to maintain these social relations in a state of coexistence and cohesion"(32). Symbolic representation, then, teaches people where they belong.

The article emphasizes that "cookbooks are an example of how popular culture from the 1950s reflected a deep ambivalence Americans felt about gender roles in the postwar years" (Neuhaus 531). Although women proved they could work outside the home during the war, social forces pushed for them to return to the home. Politicians and media alike glorified stability and clearly defined roles for men and women. Neuhaus shows how nostalgia for this period continues to shape discourse: "conservative politicians regularly evoke the 1950s as a time of great stability, when men and women enjoyed the comfort of clearly marked gender roles" (531). This type of rhetoric defines roles spatially, with men enjoying freedom and mobility outside the home and women fixed and immobile at home. The article reminds readers that, while men were able to sustain their gender role by simply going to work, a woman's responsibility was to keep the whole household running smoothly.

Analysis

In the following analysis of advertisements in an issue of *Life Magazine*, published on May 5th, 1952, a pattern emerges: women are consistently positioned in enclosed settings, waiting in rooms that define their existence. The selected advertisements have to do with some type of homemaking, cooking, or caregiving. Using Massey's critique of gender and space, we will analyze how women are situated in the ad with a focus on the rhetorical fucntion of such placement.

According to Doreen Massey, space is socially constructed through power dynamics. Different genders, classes, and ethnicities

have different access to mobility and public presence. According to this theory, the house is a socially defined location that molds identity and belonging rather than just being a physical building. Advertisements that frequently feature women in dining rooms and kitchens normalize the connection between femininity and interior space. The home becomes a gendered barrier that restricts women's spatial mobility through repetition.

In the ad below, images of Pyrex Bakeware are accompanied by the caption "Be a better cook" with emphasis on the word "better." We see two women looking almost longingly at this kitchenware. Subheadings read "Beautify your table" and "Glorify your cooking." The sequence of three images show, consecutively, the lower half only of a woman's figure putting the food in the oven. The food is presented to a smiling man who sits with utensils in hand and a woman's arm and hand serving a spoonful of food.

In this sequence, the man is seated in a position of consumption rather than labor; the woman is so closely confined by the image frame that her body is reduced to her serving limbs. Massey argues that gender is embedded in ways individuals inhabit space (164). This is a visualization of the hierarchy in the home which is accomplished through spatial composition.

In this ad for Daystom

Life Magazine, page 60

Life Magazine, page 38

Furniture, spaces are aggressively gendered. The kitchen is visually coded as an extension of feminine identity through the extensive use of pink hues and soft lighting, which feminizes the interior space. Daystrom is actively focusing on women and association to space in the home with these depictions, choice of color, and using adjectives such as "fun" to describe them. The caption reads, "Easy good looks–with easy care!," playing on the idea that homemaking and housekeeping are fun, feminine, and womanly. It is a woman's job to create an inviting, aesthetic space for the family. The woman is shown painting the wall, thus beautifying the home for her family.

What's interesting is that while the rooms shown are predominantly pink, the ad showcases paint colors at the bottom, which don't include shades of pink. This marketing image uses color to foreground the kitchen as a feminized space.

The last ad for Costco household items (below) does more than showcase the versatility of the product–it presents a detailed portrait of homemaking centered around chores in the home. Women are shown taking care of children, ironing, hosting, and cleaning or sorting. There is an emphasis on

Life Magazine, page 144

how the furniture will upgrade women's housekeeping, making them "happier." Three of the women depicted wear an apron, an item of clothing that solidifies their professional identites as caretakers, in same way a uniform or suit would define a man's profession

The ad's layout is dense, maximizing the women's labor within a single page. It also normalizes domestic confinement as a fate reserved for women, as no men are pictured.

Conclusion

Analysis of these 1950s' advertisements shows how American marketing sold identities rather than just goods. Through carefully constructed language, images, and domestic framing, advertisements linked femininity to domesticity. The social standards of postwar America prioritized stability and traditional family structures, which were mirrored and reinforced by advertisements.

Examining advertisements from the 1950s involves more than just looking back in time; it makes clear how media molds cultural assumptions and serves as a reminder that advertising contributes to the construction of society rather than just reflecting it. Acknowledging advertisements as an influence supports media literacy, and spatial awareness invites a reconsideration of how ads continue to shape gender expectations today. We are able to interact critically with the media that still shapes gender norms today when we understand the power present in old advertisements.

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Unmasking the Uncanny: Making Colonial Injustices of Slow Violence Visible in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

Roman Hughes

This project analyzes the representation of colonial migration and imperial negligence, while shedding light on the rarely acknowledged issue of environmental migration and the long-term implications of environmentally displaced migrants. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon describes the concept of slow violence and how this violence disproportionately affects impoverished populations. This paper builds on Nixon's work by grappling with neocolonialism's impact and the resulting environmental migration of "undesirable" peoples to colonizing nations. An examination of the stories in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* shows how these topics can be brought to the present in literature. The paper aims to show how colonialism is directly tied to the presence of slow violence in underdeveloped areas and the increasing need for environmental migration. Colonial negligence in the "postcolonial" ignores the fact that conditions for environmental displacement were created by the powers that now deny environmental immigrants asylum.

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Introduction

In 2025, humanity saw a slew of unusual and catastrophic climate disasters across the globe. Wildfires in California from June to August took 173 victims, injured over 500 others, and resulted in the evacuation of over 30,000 residents, as well as air quality alerts throughout the United States. In East Africa, January through April brought abnormal rainfall that led to a devastating locust outbreak, destroying crops and causing widespread hunger and malnutrition, impacting over seven million people. The Middle East saw record temperatures exceeding 131°F in July, resulting in massive infrastructure failures, power outages, and over 3,000 heat-related deaths. Deliberate deforestation and heatwaves triggered fires in the Amazon Rainforest in July, affecting many indigenous communities and causing major losses in biodiversity. In May, a category five super cyclone made contact with the eastern coast of India and Bangladesh, carrying wind speeds of over 167 mph and storm surges that left over 1,200 dead and thousands injured (Kumar).

These events are just a fraction of the irregular patterns of environmental devastation from the past year, and the human causes of these environmental disasters call to mind Edward Soja's concept of spatial (in)justice: "In the broadest sense, spatial (in)justice refers to an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice" (2). Increasingly, our planet is being heavily impacted by climate change, largely due to human action as we continue our head-first dive into the Anthropocene Age.

While the Anthropocene Age, which refers to the era in which humanity has a planetary impact on geophysical and biochemical changes, may have begun some time ago (experts debate its exact start), the effects have never been more visible than they are today. However, even that new visibility has not yet extended to those underdeveloped and underrepresented regions wherein environmental devastation has reached the point of pushing inhabitants out of their homes. Rob Nixon explains this phenomenon in his 2011 book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.*

Colonialism is directly tied to the overwhelming presence of this slow violence in underdeveloped areas and the increasing need for environmental migration. Furthermore, colonial negligence in the "postcolonial" age exemplifies the hypocrisy of colonial patterns and ignores the conditions for environmental displacement that were created by the powers that now deny environmental immigrants asylum. Amitav Ghosh's 2019 novel *Gun Island* is a literary narrative that highlights and "make[s] visible" (Nixon) how colonial and neocolonial injustices engender(ed) vicious cycles of "slow violence" over time. Through this unmasking of injustices, the importance of fiction as a tool for awareness and multispecies activism is brought to the global stage.

In his landmark theoretical text, Nixon explains the pervasiveness of human pollution on the environment through lengthy, invisible damage, defining slow violence as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). He discusses how the relative invisibility of this violence on the environment and the beings inhabiting it is why limited action has been taken to mitigate these effects. Nixon also calls attention to the overwhelming impact slow violence has on the poor communities who face the greatest runoff of human pollution. I'd like to place even greater emphasis on this reality of environmentalism of the poor and draw attention to the continued negligence of colonial powers, which worsens the impact of slow violence on these communities. Even without the ongoing physical presence of colonial powers in these regions,

neocolonialism still holds strong and continues dripping fuel on the fire that threatens to burn these regions to extinction.

Furthermore, colonial negligence and neocolonialism have created the conditions that lead to environmental and economic devastation, thus inviting the ever-increasing need for environmental migration. Not only is this sort of migration experienced by human populations throughout the Global South and other underdeveloped nations, but we are also seeing this environmental displacement in animal species. This seems to both parallel the human migratory experience and further add to the disruption of order and deterioration of livable habitats for both humans and non-humans alike. This dynamic is depicted in Amitav Ghosh's 2019 novel *Gun Island*. Told through parallels to Bengali legend, Ghosh's novel presents a fictional account of human and animal migration in the Global South, primarily due to environmental deterioration. The novel tackles issues such as environmental migration, memory, slow violence, and immigration policies, while also considering how the past influences and perhaps holds the salvation of the present.

Environmental migration studies have picked up in prevalence in the past decade as we continue to see more visible effects of this human-centered epoch. However, the term "environmental migration" is not as mainstream, partially because of the difficulties in defining an environmental migrant (Dunn and Gemenne). Trying to define "cause" leads to placing the environment as the one determined reason for migration, but we must consider the realities of "why" the environmental state might be a reason for leaving.

Nature didn't get that way on its own, after all. The International Organization for Migration defines "environmental migrants" as "persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad" ("Environmental Migration"). For this research, the terms "environmental migration" or "environmental displacement" will be used to describe acts of relocation that occur when life becomes unsustainable

and economic growth becomes impossible. Where environmental migration is addressed in current research, emphasis is often placed on the tracking of environmental migrants (Obokata et al.; Black et al.), the use of "nature" as a tool of border enforcement (Schindel), and the connection between effects of climate change and the movements of human migration (Spellman). While it is vital to understand these aspects of the broader issue to grasp what we are dealing with, these studies fail to capture the role humans play in causing environmental displacement. Furthermore, in failing to acknowledge the direct link between human industrialization and climate destruction, these studies also fall short of recognizing how neocolonialism on a global scale causes this environmental devastation.

While studies on the influence of the environment on migration are gaining traction, many of these investigations steer away from the complex relationship between environment and neocolonialism. The direct correlation between colonial powers and environmental displacement cannot be ignored, however invisible the effects may be over time. Continuing to ignore this issue will lead to further irregular immigration and eventual global environmental devastation.

In the face of ignorance or apathy, narrative can help to address the challenge of visibility. The accessible genre of fiction can bring examples of slow violence to the present moment and depict the causes of environmental migration and the planetary destruction that will continue to occur if we do not address them. Ghosh's novel, *Gun Island*, is a powerful example of the potential of fiction to draw attention to slow violence. Scholarship on the novel notes how Ghosh shows the impacts of societal or cultural collapse on both human and non-human species,[1] depicts multispecies justice as the key to planetary survival,[2]

1 See Prateek Upreti. "The Cry of a Delta: A Postcolonial Eco-Critical Study of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*." *London Journal of Research In Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2025, pp. 65-74; Nupar Pancholi, Sanjit Kumar Mishra. "The Era of Environmental Derangement: Witnessing Climate Crisis in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 13.2 (2021): 1-10.

2 See Shaveta Gupta. "Ecocide: A Study of Climate Change in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*." *Language in India*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2020; Khan, Rakibul Hasan. "Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*: The Climate Crisis and Planetary Environmentalism." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2025, pp. 423-437.

demonstrates how environmental degradation leads to environmental refugees (Gümüş), and foregrounds the identity and challenges of undocumented migrants from underprivileged areas.[3]

Ghosh's novel has been hailed as a unique example of climate fiction being distinctly effective due to how he frames the indiscriminate nature of climate change and how he presents so-called "improbable" disasters in a way that feels sharp and consequential to readers. Particularly, the use of Los Angeles for a climate event (primarily wildfires) has been discussed across a variety of literature. In Ghosh's case, the use of LA as a key location of a major environmental event is meant to bring this phenomenon to the global sphere and demonstrate that climate change is a planetary issue by placing it in such a universally acknowledged center of modern society (Gilson). Ghosh also chooses to bring what were considered "improbable realities" and "implausible connections" (Asaad 7) at the time of writing into the discussion of realistic fiction. For Ghosh, writing these events is reality: "to treat the 'improbable' occurrences of nature as magical, surreal or allegorical would be to "rob them of precisely that quality that makes them so urgently compelling—which is that they are actually happening on this earth, at this time" (Gill and Ghosh). The expanse of research on this novel demonstrates its strength as a climate text. My research builds upon this body of work to further examine the depiction of colonial and neocolonial injustices that result in the environmental displacement that characterizes the majority of the movement in this narrative. Through parallel and intersecting human and nonhuman stories in *Gun Island*, Ghosh brings slow violence to the present moment and emphasizes the impact these irregular animal migratory patterns have on the deterioration of multispecies habitats.

Unnatural Nature and Environmental Migration in *Gun Island*

Ghosh's novel is awash in what seems like magical realism, but is, in fact, an unexpected rendering of real-world events that can be generally explained by science. This novel has come to

3 See Trina Bose and Amrita Satapathy. "The Crisis of Climate and Immigration in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*." *Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 2021, pp. 473-489.

prophesize unusual animal patterns and environmental disasters, such as the wildfires in California that occurred six months after Ghosh wrote about such a thing in *Gun Island*. Additionally, Ghosh's own experience with the first tornado to hit Delhi in recorded history influenced him to include an unnatural tornado in his work, though he delayed writing it for many years due to the probability of such an event (Gill and Ghosh). From the beginning of the novel, however, we see hints of these unnatural events being more possible than we think, and we get an insight into the possible environmental destruction that can lead to environmental displacement. One character, Moyna, says, "it seemed as though both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans. When people tried to dig wells, an arsenic-laced brew gushed out of the soil" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 53). These observations about the environmental and economic state of the Sundarbans demonstrate not only the prevalence of Nixon's slow violence when it comes to the deterioration of things like soil richness and water purity, but also the reality that these issues are largely ignored due to the relative wealth and development of the region.

While arsenic in soil can be a natural occurrence, the volume and potency of such a mineral is increased exponentially by human factors, including agricultural runoff and unregulated waste. We can assume that the arsenic-quality of the water was not always obvious: many toxic substances can have effects on those who come in contact with them, even at low doses and especially over long periods of time, and the harm can increase with prolonged exposure and as the substance gets increasingly more potent (Davies). When a community lacks access to potable water, there arises an urgent need for relocation. Here is a connection to Nixon's proposal:

> a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable. (19)

This sort of situation is what we might also refer to as spatial injustice (Soja). Additionally, the

sudden disappearance of fish due to polluted water or unnaturally warm water disproportionately affects communities such as the Sundarbans, where fish are a main source of nutrition and income.

In Ghosh's novel, an unusual species, the shipworm, is shown to be invading Venice with the warming of the lagoon in less visual but more consequential ways: "They eat up the wood from the inside, in huge quantities. It has become a big problem because Venice is built on wooden pilings. They are literally eating the foundations of the city" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 251). Here we see an example of unnatural animal migration having an unintended impact on the human environment as well. What is ironic about this situation is that it is ultimately the humans' fault that these species have been forced to make Venice their new home. The novel's narrator, Deen, attempts to find an explanation for these strange occurrences, one that is not automatically attributed to human responsibility. Cinta, a Venetian history professor and longtime friend of Deen, is quick to correct Deen's ignorance: "you cannot say that this spider's presence here is 'natural' or 'scientific.' It is here because of our history; because of things human beings have done" (234-235). Her point is this: forced animal migration is *always* unnatural.

Irregular Immigration and Denial of Asylum by Accountable Powers

Ghosh's novel spends a good amount of time detailing the obstacles and challenges migrants face when attempting to leave their homes. In this story, inhabitants of the deteriorating Sundarbans make their way from Bangladesh through Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey to Europe, specifically Venice. Through the characters of Tipu and Rafi, the migrant experience of those trying to leave environmental devastation in the Global South is painted with attention to not only the perilous journey across borders with exploitive guides, but also the struggle of having a "worthy" reason for migrating that will be accepted by arrival countries. Tipu, who works as a guide for migrants in the Sundarbans and Bangladesh, explains to Deen why he has to help travelers create stories for themselves:

> Suppose a guy's applying for asylum in Sweden – he'll need a story to back him up, and it

> can't be just any old story. It's gotta be a story like they want to hear over there. Suppose the guy was starving because his land was flooded; or suppose his whole village was sick from the arsenic in their ground water; or suppose he was being beat up by his landlord because he couldn't pay off his debts – none of that shit matters to the Swedes. Politics, religion and sex is what they're looking for – you've gotta have a story of persecution if you want them to listen to you. So that's what I help my clients with; I give them those kinds of stories. (67)

What is interesting about Tipu's observation of the requirements of successful migration is that the true reason for these movements is the environmental devastation of these communities, from the potability of drinking water, to the health of the soil, to the presence of key species that make up a large part of local nutrition and commerce. If it weren't for the actions of more developed nations using easily accessible land and allowing the waste from their operations and material use to seep into the foundations of poor communities, these migrants wouldn't be forced to seek a more viable environment to live in. Through *Gun Island*, we see that human greed has multispecies consequences, as the predatory operations of big corporations leave both human and non-human victims alike in destitution, ultimately leading to a planet with dwindling stable environments for any living being.

The Cyclical Nature of Slow Violence—And How We Can Disrupt That Cycle

Through his climate fiction, Ghosh brings slow violence to the visible present, putting a microscope to the extreme environmental disasters and unusual patterns we can expect to see if we continue on the current path as a global society. Literature has the ability to "engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence" (Nixon 2). Ghosh has spoken on the difficulties of capturing the severity of the climate crisis in politics and literature, but at the same time he asserts that fiction is likely the most effective method of examining other forms of existence outside our realm of individual understanding (*The Great Derangement*). This is an idea that Nixon calls upon, stating,

> In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. (15)

The importance of literature to accomplish this task cannot be understated, and Nixon is sure to credit those writer-activists like Ghosh who take this duty seriously and "are enraged by injustices they wish to see redressed, injustices they believe can help expose, silences they can help dismantle through testimonial protest, rhetorical inventiveness, and counterhistories in the face of formidable odds" (6). It is clear that fiction can have a profound impact on readers, as seen with another of Ghosh's novels, *The Hungry Tide*, which he says

> inaugurated something significant. People's attitudes toward the Sundarbans changed completely after that book. People began to think about the place in a different way. People need a way to enter a reality, and narrative can provide that. Stories can give you a way to think about the world around you. (Brady and Ghosh)

Though this effect has been recorded, it is also true that Ghosh and other activist-writers have had some doubts about writing about climate change due to concerns of believability; however, we are seeing that the probability of these environmental events is not as unbelievable as we might have once thought.

Conclusion

Through *Gun Island*, we see the potential of a genre that has otherwise been written off as science fiction or fantasy to counter the real-world pervasiveness of slow violence and spatial injustice. It is in this form of literature that writer-activists find the best platform for discussing climate change and the causes of environmental migration in the present moment. In this text, folkloric legend is paired with seemingly improbable, yet all too real, environmental disasters and unnatural migrations in a way that makes clear the reality of how precarious the global habitat is. Not only does this novel demonstrate how human beings, through neocolonialism and elusive imperial powers, are becoming displaced due to the deterioration of potable water, soil nutrients, and species key to local health and economic

growth, but it also showcases how these instances of deterioration reach into the realm of the non-human inhabitants of affected areas.

With examples like dolphins, spiders, and invasive wood-eating worms, Ghosh's novel makes visible the displacement of animal species and the impact of those displacements on the continuity and the tenantability of human-occupied spaces, as well. What Ghosh manages to do in the pages of this text, and in his commitment to talking about the events of this novel and beyond, is offer a path toward hope in a genre that is inundated with doom and gloom. Ghosh sees climate fiction as an opportunity to break from hegemonic perspectives of the global environmental crisis and instead lift up the unseen and unheard stories of underrepresented climate victims—human and non-human alike. He says:

> When I look at fiction about climate change, it's mostly apocalyptic, dystopian. I think that is a privileged point of view. It's almost a certain kind of American or Western–and even male–perspective, and that's just not my world or my imaginative space at all. (Brady and Ghosh)

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Humanity vs. Animality: Spatial Oppression in *Tender is the Flesh*

Sage Waters

Agustina Bazterrica's 2017 novel *Tender is the Flesh* critiques a capitalist society for its ability to dehumanize some in service for others. This is done through the portrayal of cannibalism and selective oppression based upon select spatial circumstances. This paper provides a spatial analysis of the novel by bringing the plot and the system within into context of Henri Lefebvre's book, *The Production of Space*, which shows how space can be used as a tool to bring oppression into a society. The novel shows how language and spaces with predetermined expectations represent and build oppression. This helps us to understand, through an extreme example, the overall system of oppression.

Content Warning: This article contains sensitive content, including discussion of cannibalism, which some readers may find disturbing.

Humanity vs. Animality: Spatial Oppression in *Tender is the Flesh*

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Tender is the Flesh and Spatial Theory

Agustina Bazterrica's 2017 novel *Tender is the Flesh* imagines a dystopian society in which space is organized so that some human bodies are meat for consumption while others retain their humanity in the eyes of society. Reading this novel through spatial theory clarifies how this division is produced. Henri Lefebvre argues that space in a capitalist society is a social product that functions as a tool of control. In *Tender is the Flesh,* the government uses language and spatial organization to determine who does what in what spaces, assigning people one of two roles—the products and the humans.

A portion of the human population in the novel is commodified, resulting in the kind of oppression described in Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*:

> Today the realm of commodities has extended its sway, along with that of capital, to the entire planet, and it has consequently assumed an oppressive role. (217)

Oppression and commodity are directly correlated with one another. Commodification becomes a tool of oppression, reflecting the priorities of those who control the system.

Literary Devices and Spatiality

The novel *Tender is the Flesh* develops its gruesome idea of a society using literary devices such as zoomorphism, which attributes animal characteristics or qualities to non-animal beings or things. This means that humans can be depicted through ways that we would normally depict animals. Zoomorphic language—words like crawl, growl, or attack—dehumanize people and makes it easier to see them as animals fit for consumption.

In this dystopian novel, the

government has banned the consumption of animal meat, following a virus that has contaminated all animal flesh, and forced its society to go on a cannibalistic diet. The story follows the main character, Marcos, and his experience of working in the human-meat processing plant. This novel shows how an oppressive society can emerge through spatial arrangements (cages, slaughterhouses, even zones of captivity in private homes) and development of figurative language (zoomorphism) to allow society to accept oppression and consumption of its own members.

The novel also uses space as a tool for ordering this cannibalist society. Lefebvre argues that space is inherently social. He argues that spaces are made and remade through social relations. He focuses on the grasp of power through space, as well as the relationship between the product and producers of a society. Lefebvre argues that produced space impacts thought and action, explaining:

> that the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it. (26)

The slaughterhouse in *Tender is the Flesh* is a perfect example: it is more than a building where bodies are processed, but a space that teaches people to think of some humans as "heads" rather than persons. This all comes down to control and domination of space.

Tools for Oppression in the Novel

The system that is presented in *Tender is the Flesh* is dystopian, yet familiar. It exaggerates existing logic of industry and advertising rather than inventing a world without connection to our own. The system of values and structure is particularly evident within the slaughterhouse. As Marcos walks through the slaughterhouse, the primary focus is production and maintaining a very direct expectation of the space. As Lefebvre would note, the space within the walls creates a dominating power. Because of the power that space holds, its values spread, dominating the society as a whole.

Language is crucial to this expansion of control. The government makes strict rules

on how citizens may refer to the people being eaten, both before and after production. The human meat they eat after its production is strictly called "special meat," which is clearly just an attempt to conceal violence, where language is the root of order once again. Advertising perpetuates sanitized terms for human product, creating an order in which the purported value of products distracts from the reality of cannibalism. Most of the people being raised as food are pumped with growth hormones and other chemicals to produce more quickly, as people do not grow nearly as quickly as pigs and cows and other animals that would normally produce edible meat. Although, just like normal livestock, the meat that is grown most naturally is considered higher quality. In the novel, these people are called First Generation Pure, or FGP for short. These individuals consume no growth hormones and are considered to be higher quality meat, which costs more. Using these terms for individuals being slaughtered is essentially utilizing the zoomorphic tool to bring them as far from humanity in the eyes of society as possible.

Advertising works as a tool to support desensitization in *Tender is the Flesh* as well. In the novel, there is a commercial about special meat, in which they are advertising the consumption of human flesh just as if it were regular animal meat, maybe even better. The layout of the commercial presents what feels like an early 1950s "nuclear family." The woman in the commercial is a mother to three children. She is beautiful and "dressed conservatively" (Bazterrica 7) with her whole family smiling as she serves 'special meat.' She says, "I serve my family special food, it's meat, like I've always served, but tastier" (Bazterrica 8). Society adapts to eating human meat because commercials like this speak to the part of the people that crave comfort and normality. The commercial is trying to make people strive for that ideal life of normalcy, hinting at the fact that the primary way to attain it is to follow the societal norm of cannibalism.

In his review of psychological strategies of dehumanization, Nick Haslam describes strategies by which societies dehumanize people, which primarily involves denying their human characteristics and nature. We have already discussed the "animalistic" forms, but Haslam

also notes "mechanistic" forms. The form of "depersonalization involves a view of others as fungible [goods, assets, or currency] and lacking individuality" (261). The novel presents this form of dehumanization literally, showing humans being treated as marketable goods. In the novel, Marcos states, "He doesn't call it special meat. He uses technical words to refer to what is a human but will never be a person, to what is always a product" (Bazterrica 8). Haslam explains that the process of dehumanization requires people to deny heads individuality and uniqueness. This kind of dehumanizing is key to transforming the individuals who are being eaten, so that they can be cannibalized freely. Haslam cites a study by Leyens and colleagues, in which:

> They conceptualize dehumanization as a motivated phenomenon serving individual, interpersonal, or intergroup functions (relief from moral emotions, self-exoneration, enabling or post hoc justification for violence, epistemic certainty in the face of nonnormative behavior, provision of a sense of superiority, enforcement of social dominance) (255).

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social spaces and power within spaces further clarifies the separation between types of bodies. Bourdieu notes:

> Social distances are inscribed in bodies or, more precisely, into the relation to the body, to language and to time-so many structural aspects of practice ignored by the subjectivist vision. (17)

It is important to note the mention of social distances, or in other words, social structures/roles within relationships, language, and time. All factors fall into what determines that social structure. Society creates separation between humans and "heads," through their "spaces" (cages, processing plants, etc.). Just as language creates separation between types of bodies, most "humans" in this society keep their distance from spaces assigned to "heads." This is a way that they can separate the product from the people. The society sets a very strict spatial order, which simply reinforces the power of society's oppression.

Marcos and Jasmine

The main character, Marcos, works at the slaughterhouse and, therefore, exists in a unique

space within the social order. He, himself, retains the status of human but is in close contact with "livestock." Marcos registers the limitations on language very early in the novel: "They've all normalized cannibalism, he thinks. Cannibalism, another word that could cause him major problems" (Bazterrica 4). Physical oppression happens on the farms and in the slaughterhouses to people being eaten, and Zoomorphism is used to keep that control. First, producers take away any sense of self and character and make "heads" physically unable to govern themselves. This is done through intense mutilation: cutting vocal chords to take away any ability to speak, thus taking away their chance to utilize the power of language and persuasion on their own; branding, typically in the middle of the forehead so that there can be no mistaking them for the rest of society; most disturbing of all, however, is when they get to the pregnant women:

> Some are in cages, others lie on tables. They have no arms or legs. He looks away. He knows that at many breeding centers it's common practice to maim the impregnated females, who otherwise would kill their fetuses by ramming their stomachs against the bars of their cage, or by not eating, doing whatever it takes to prevent their babies from being born and dying in a processing plant. (22)

Early in the novel, main character, Marcos, can be seen standing out from the rest of society. He is shown making comments of disapproval of the system and of cannibalism.

Later, Marcos is given a female by a business associate, perhaps as a kickback. He keeps her, though he expresses that he really does not want to. He houses her in the barn, feeding and caring for her as an animal. Gradually, he begins to form a connection, naming her Jasmine. He eventually brings her into his home, dresses her, feeds her real human food and not the feed they give to the other livestock.

Jasmine is a unique and seemingly simple character in this novel. She starts out as a prized FGP (First Generation Pure) head because she has not been fed growth hormones to accelerate her growth, so she ages just like any other human does in a normal society. Disturbingly, FGP's are most like the people in the rest of society, yet they are considered the highest quality for eating.

Despite being a free gift of the best possible quality, Marcos initially refuses to slaughter her. Marcos never explicitly says why, though as the novel continues, it is clear that he starts noticing the humanity showing through the animalistic mask she is forced to wear. When she is put into a different space, her tastes and feelings become noticeable: "She spends hours watching television, sleeping, drawing, staring at a fixed point. At times, it seems she's thinking, like she really can" (136). Marcos never fully acknowledges Jasmine as a true human being, not to the same extent as the rest of society, but he registers her difference from the dehumanized livestock she is meant to be.

Once he gets Jasmine pregnant, Marcos has a change of heart. After living with her as a culturally unorthodox family, he calls his wife (from whom he had been separated) to help Jasmine give birth, despite her having no knowledge of the child or Jasmine. Once Jasmine gives birth to a healthy child, he takes the baby, and bashes Jasmine's head with a bat, killing her. He carries her out of the domestic space of the home to his barn (an appropriate space for a "head") to be butchered. It's a shocking moment in the novel and the only explanation comes when Marcos simply states to his wife, "she had the human look of a domesticated animal" (209). In saying this, Marcos reestablishes the oppressive social order he once critiqued. While throughout the novel, it is clear that there *is* that separation between the people being eaten and the people living in society, Marcos seemed to have been going in the opposite direction with Jasmine, treating her like a person on the other end of the social structure than what she originally started out as.

This notion that she looked "domesticated" in comparison to the other heads is fascinating. It seems strange that he would be troubled by this breakdown of categories, since he has spent the novel critiquing the social order. In the beginning of the novel, once he first interacted with Jasmine, she was viewed as an inconvenience. Then, she gave him pleasure. But when she gives birth to a child, Marcos is afraid of the implications of breeding with a "head." Early in the novel, we learn that he had been burdened by the loss of a child, which may have been the actual cause of his discontent. When Jasmine gives him a child, and

he brings his estranged wife back home, Marcos has an opportunity to claim a proper domestic order. Despite the fact that we watched him providing that domestication to Jasmine, she is now in the way. When Marcos kills Jasmine, he restores the oppressive social system he had been questioning--because now it serves him well.

Conclusion

The article, "Morality in the Evolution of the Modern Social System" by Bryan R. Wilson discusses the intent of a productive society, saying that it is,

> held together' by the commitment of individuals to a shared pattern of norms and moral dispositions that determined the character of social action and social relationships. (316)

Social norms in *Tender is the Flesh* are distorted to present cannibalism not only as a possibility, but a necessity for stability. It is an extreme and disturbing example, yet it has the effect of illuminating oppression within our own society.

The novel suggests that space is not merely where oppression happens, but the means by which it is produced. This production is characterized not only by supply and demand of goods, but also the production of moral systems. Within the novel, characters choose to continue oppressing people like Jasmine to sustain their social order. Bourdieu explains in "Social Space and Symbolic Power" that people often choose rank over anything else in society, describing the importance of the "sense of one's place" (Bourdieu 17). It is this sense of one's place which leads people labeled in French as "les gens modestes" (common folks) to keep to their common place, and the others to "keep their distance," to "maintain their rank," and "not get familiar" (Bourdieu 17). Those who chose to encourage and fuel the oppression of others are essentially choosing to maintain their space, rather than disrupting the order to help those who never got the choice in the first place. They don't want to familiarize themselves with what happens to the oppressed, but rather, push that oppression more, dehumanize them, and normalize it to both prove and fuel their power. Bazterrica's novel suggests that when humanity is desensitized enough to dehumanize and oppress people to the point of cannibalism, humanity was never truly there.

There is a scene in the novel in which Marcos is sitting alone in a

secluded section of an abandoned zoo, surrounded by graffiti. On the wall, one section of the graffiti stands out amongst the rest. It shows a Venetian mask beside a message that reads:

> The mask of apparent calm, of mundane tranquility, of the joy, at once small and bright, of not knowing when this thing I call skin will be ripped off, when this thing I call mouth will lose the flesh that surrounds it, when these things I call eyes will come upon the black silence of a knife. (110)

The abandoned zoo, which is secluded and marked off from the rest of society, is the only place that remains open to individual thought. In this space, removed from dominated society, Marcos encounters the kind of open space Lefebvre describes, which allow genuine thoughts *and* action. The truth of the graffiti in such a forbidden place illustrates how, when space is captured and weaponized, the limitation of thoughts and actions becomes a secluded, dark cave.

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Domestic vs. Wild Spaces: Determining Characterization in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Andrea Arnold's Film Adaptation

Chloe Miller

This essay explores space as a narrative presence in literature, further expressed through film, and examines how settings act as living presences that shape the inner worlds and conflicts of their characters. In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Andrea Arnold's film adaptation, the domestic spaces of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange embody and construct identity, which is reinforced or challenged by the moor. Perspectives from spatiality like bell hooks's "The Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," Michel Foucalt's concept of heterotopia and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* explain how environments reflect psychological depth, social position, and emotional confinement. The contrast between the rugged Heights and the refined Grange reflect oppositions of passion and civility, which are central to characterization. Arnold's adaptation reinterprets these spatial dynamics through a realist view that utilizes physical texture, weather, and isolation.

Domestic vs. Wild Spaces: Determining Characterization in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Andrea Arnold's Film Adaptation

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Before a single word of dialogue is spoken in *Wuthering Heights*, the reader already knows the kind of world they have entered from its descriptions. There is a house battered by wind, a landscape that refuses comfort, and interiors that feel more like battlegrounds than homes. Literary and cinematic narratives often use physical spaces not only as settings, but as active forces that shape the identities, emotions, and social relations within them. In works where landscape and architecture are closely tied to character psychology, domestic and exterior spaces become sites of meaning that mediate power, belonging, and exclusion.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is especially invested in this relationship between environment and self, as characters repeatedly return to houses and landscapes to express passion and belonging. Through the lens of spatial theory, the original 1847 novel and Andrea Arnold's 2011 film adaptation of the novel reveal how the narrative spaces established through the households of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange embody and construct character identity which is reinforced or at times challenged by the outside space of the moor. Perspectives from spatial theory like bell hooks' "The Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," Michel Foucalt's concept of heterotopia, and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, "The House, From Cellar to Garret: the Significance of the Hut," support how interior and exterior environments reflect the psychological depth of social position and emotional confinement of the characters.

In Brontë's novel, the architectural contrast between the

rugged, storm-beaten Heights and the manicured, refined Grange are reflected thematic oppositions of passion and nature versus civility and culture. Arnold's adaptation reinterprets these spatial dynamics through a realist view that utilizes physical texture supported by fluctuations in weather and social isolation. The film establishes the homes as extensions of the characters' internal struggles rather than outside symbolic spaces.

This spatial framework reveals the significance of space as a narrative and psychological presence by tracing how both the novel and the film use domestic spaces to establish identity and social boundaries. The domestic space of Wuthering Heights comes to embody both Heathcliff's feral intensity and Catherine's divided self. Their turbulent bond ultimately manifests through their shared passion for one another. Thrushcross Grange, by contrast, reflects the cultivated restraint of the Linton siblings, Edgar and Isabella. Its polished domesticity also reinforces the rigid social hierarchies that limit emotional freedom in Victorian England. In both text and film, the settings act not just as backdrops but shaping presences that come to define the inner worlds and conflicts of their characters. Through the lens of spatial theory, both Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Andrea Arnold's film adaptation depict domestic spaces as active influences in shaping character identity and social hierarchy, while the moor functions as a liminal, heterotopic, and marginal space that exposes and destabilizes the emotional and social boundaries imposed by the home.

Wuthering Heights follows the intertwined lives of the Earnshaw and Linton families, centering on the intense and destructive bond between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. After Heathcliff is adopted into the Earnshaw household, his social marginalization and later mistreatment shape his obsession with revenge and possession. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton for social stability rather than following her passion divides her identity and fuels lasting conflict. The novel's nonlinear structure, framed through the perspectives of Mr. Lockwood, the tenant in the neighboring house leased out by Heathcliff, and Nelly Dean, the Earnshaw maid, reveals how class, inheritance, and environment determine the fates

of the novel's central characters. The opposing spaces of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange reflect emotional extremes and social order. Ultimately, the novel traces how unresolved passion and resentment perpetuate suffering across generations.

Arnold's adaptation reimagines *Wuthering Heights* through a raw, realist perspective. This is emphasized physically through the bodies of young Catherine and Heathcliff, particularly in the outdoor scenes. The natural landscape of the moors becomes the film's true backdrop, making a point of showing the full extent of their isolation and suggesting that outside influence is almost nonexistent. Further, the sensory experience felt in the shifts between house and wild provides the viewer with another point of distinction when moving from the closed-up house to the expansive wilderness. The film focuses primarily on the early relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, portraying their bond as primal and shaped by the harshness of their environment, the moors. Heathcliff stands out as being fully personified by the moors as he doesn't fit in with the culture defined by the Earnshaw and Linton households.

Heathcliff's otherness along with his intentional racial background in this film means that his brutal treatment is foregrounded which in turn highlights systems of exclusion and violence often subdued in other earlier film adaptations. Arnold minimizes dialogue and narrative exposition; she lets silence stand in place of words so that background pieces like weather or bodily presence are used to convey meaning. Domestic spaces appear oppressive and decaying, while the moors function as a site of fleeting freedom. The film presents the tragedy as an embodied experience rather than a purely symbolic or moral one.

The Novel

From its earliest descriptions in the novel, Wuthering Heights is introduced as a home inseparable from the characters within. Lockwood's initial encounter with the house emphasizes its exposure and defiance, "Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling; 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed" (Brontë 4). The house's harsh exterior mirrors Heathcliff's emotional intensity and resistance

to social refinement. Critics have long observed that the Heights functions as an extension of Heathcliff himself. Steven Vine argues,

> If Wuthering Heights wuthers, there can be no stable distinction between the inside and the outside of Heathcliff's dwelling. (340)

The house's enclosed brutality results in identities that are passionately fighting for space to define themselves individually. In an unruly household without proper guidance, children are raised to resist social discipline and instead follow the household's own culture.

The brutality shapes the characters' emotional vocabularies so thoroughly that escape from the house also becomes an escape from the selves it has helped create. The otherness becomes inseparable from Heathcliff's character and, reinforced by his environment, it compels him to leave the Heights and go out into the world to mature and make his own money. This movement directly shapes the rest of the novel and places Heathcliff at the forefront of the action. However, Heathcliff is not the only character whose identity is produced by the Heights. The house, a space characterized in spatial theory, also imprints itself on Catherine Earnshaw, whose inner life becomes the most visibly fractured by its competing spatial demands.

While Heathcliff most visibly embodies the Heights' spatial otherness, the house's formative power extends beyond him, shaping the psychological interiors of those who grow up within its walls. Gaston Bachelard explains that houses shape inner life, arguing that the "house is our corner of the world… our first universe" (4). Rather than functioning as a neutral shelter, the house in Bachelard's formulation becomes a site where memory, imagination, identity, self, etc. are first formed and continuously reinforced. At Wuthering Heights, this "first universe" is a dark and shadowy environment where violence forces its inhabitants to become enclosed within themselves and isolated from the outside world, producing an inner life defined by intensity rather than stability. Catherine Earnshaw's psychological fragmentation is inseparable from this space. Her famous insistence, "Nelly, I am Heathcliff" (Brontë 84), grounds her identity not only in emotional union but in their shared environment, suggesting that

selfhood at the Heights is relational and spatial rather than autonomous.

In Bachelardian terms, Catherine's sense of being is rooted in a house that allows no clear boundaries between interior and exterior, self and other. As a result, when she is removed from this formative space and exposed to the ordered domesticity of Thrushcross Grange, her identity fractures, revealing the incompatibility between the wild psychic universe shaped by the Heights and the social discipline demanded by polite Victorian interiors. Catherine's tragedy feels less like a failure of choice and more like a failure of spatial belonging. The Heights forms her inner world so completely that no alternative domestic space can fully contain her without distortion. In this sense, Brontë suggests that when a "first universe" is built on violence and excess, it produces identities that cannot survive translation into socially regulated space without breaking apart. Nicoletta Brazzelli notes that Brontë's novel is

> dealing with a closed group of characters living on their self-destructive passions, with no sense of a society beyond Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. (234)

Catherine's inability to balance her two sides, the wild freedom of the Heights with the social order of the Grange, ultimately results in her collapse, which further illustrates how incompatible spaces can fracture identity.

Contrasting with the Heights, Thrushcross Grange represents refinement, containment, and social performance. When Catherine stays with the Lintons, her physical transformation reflects the spatial ideology of the Grange: "her manners were much improved," Nelly Dean observes, as Catherine adopts civility and restraint (Brontë 53). Herbert Goldstone reads this transformation as evidence of what he calls "Catherine's deepest values...a rejection...of a reasonable, common-sense acceptance of the dictates of society," arguing that the Grange draws characters into social conformity at the cost of emotional integrity (178). The house produces a version of Catherine that appears polished but is fundamentally at odds with the intensity cultivated at the Heights. This spatial dissonance reveals that her "improvement" is less a maturation than a performance demanded by the architectural and social codes of the Grange.

The Grange becomes a space that sustains hierarchy while presenting itself as order and

comfort. Edgar Linton's identity is produced by this environment. Lorraine Sim argues, "a character's experience is largely determined by their exclusion from, inclusion or imprisonment within, different spaces" (32). Spatial critics emphasize that the Grange does not simply reflect civility but actively enforces it through boundaries that regulate who may belong. As Jan Albert Myburgh notes, the boundaries between Heights and Grange function as ideological borders, producing belonging on one side and exclusion on the other (41). Heathcliff's exclusion from the Grange reinforces his social marginalization and fuels his desire for revenge, exposing the conditional nature of its civility. In this way, Brontë reveals that the comfort promised by such domestic order depends on the continual policing of bodies through the regulation of emotions, producing competent individuals who can properly manage relationships. Together, these pressures make the Grange as psychologically restrictive as it is socially elevated.

Between these two houses lies the moor, a space untethered from social expectation where movement is free for those willing to resist containment. Being too closely associated with it means accepting the potential dangers of existing outside the protection of social influence. Foucault's concept of heterotopia translates to this environment, as heterotopic spaces exist outside normative social structures while simultaneously reflecting and destabilizing them. In "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Foucault describes heterotopias as sites that "juxtapose in a single real place several spaces that are in themselves incompatible" (25), a formulation that mirrors the moor's function between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The moor is neither fully wild nor socially ordered, but instead a shifting space where domestic boundaries temporarily dissolve.

Within this heterotopic landscape, Catherine and Heathcliff are able to exist outside the rigid identities imposed by the houses, experiencing a form of freedom unavailable indoors. Catherine's recollection of childhood freedom on the moors evokes a time before social division, revealing how space structures both memory and desire. The structure of power in the moor is flipped so that children or the socially inadept (the ones within Victorian society that hold

no power) are the ones in control in the sense that those finding power within the social order would have no place there. Yet, like Foucault's heterotopias, the moor offers no permanent refuge. Instead, it exposes the instability of domestic order without providing an alternative structure to replace it. The moor becomes a spatial threshold that intensifies emotional truth while underscoring the impossibility of sustaining such freedom within Victorian social constraints.

While the moors momentarily suspend the social logics enforced by both the Heights and the Grange, their freedom is defined as much by instability as by liberation. Alice Sukdolová identifies the Victorian landscape as heterotopic, arguing that it disrupts "the sphere of influence of the Victorian society and does not succumb to their rites" (108). This disruption is essential to the novel's emotional logic where passion flourishes on the moor, while repression dominates indoors. The open expanse allows Catherine and Heathcliff to inhabit a relational identity untethered from Victorian society's expectations that define class hierarchy, gender expectations, and domestic surveillance. Yet the moor is not purely emancipatory. Its potentially dangerous environment renders it incapable of sustaining the forms of belonging it briefly enables.

Claes Lindskog emphasizes that the novel's open skies and sweeping landscapes generate a spatial vastness that destabilizes identity rather than resolving it (66). The same boundlessness that permits emotional authenticity also erodes the possibility of permanence, foreshadowing the destructive trajectory of Catherine and Heathcliff's bond once it is forced back into domestic structures. In this sense, the moor operates as a threshold space by revealing the artificiality of social boundaries without offering an alternative system through which identity might endure. This connection is emphasized by the film adaptation as weather and the environment is key in its storytelling.

The Film

Andrea Arnold's adaptation translates these spatial dynamics into a physical and sensory cinematic language. Dialogue is sparse, and meaning is carried through mud, wind, rain, and touch. The camera lingers on Heathcliff's body in space, showing him running across the

moors, pressed into the earth, or trapped within the decaying interiors of Wuthering Heights. The house in the film appears dark and animalistic, reinforcing the sense that identity is produced through physical endurance rather than symbolic meaning. Arnold's portrayal of Heathcliff foregrounds race and bodily marginalization, aligning with bell hooks' claim that the margin is a space produced by domination but capable of becoming "the site of radical possibility" where new ways of being can be imagined (20). Heathcliff's position outside the social interiors of power renders him simultaneously vulnerable and defiant. The moor is shot in wide, disorienting frames and it becomes a fleeting space of bodily liberation where Catherine and Heathcliff exist without speech or social restraint. Where the novel relies on architectural symbolism, the film insists on spatial immersion.

For hooks, the margin is not chosen freely but imposed, and it is precisely this condition that gives it political and experiential significance. Heathcliff's repeated return to the moors reflects this imposed marginality from being excluded from the interiors of power and respectability. He inhabits a space where identity is shaped through bodily endurance rather than social recognition. Arnold's emphasis on touch, breath, and physical proximity aligns with hooks' insistence that marginal spaces privilege lived, embodied knowledge over abstract authority.

From this perspective, the moor does not simply function as an escape from oppression but as a space where resistance is enacted through presence itself. Heathcliff's body is racialized and marked as out of place within the domestic interiors of the Heights and the Grange, so he gains a form of agency in the openness of the landscape. Yet, as hooks warns, the margin remains a space of vulnerability as well as possibility. It allows critique of the center without guaranteeing safety or permanence. Arnold preserves this tension by refusing to romanticize the moor as a stable refuge. The film frames marginal space as necessary and precarious, underscoring how freedom for characters like Heathcliff can exist only temporarily at the edges of a social world structured to exclude them.

This unique spatial and social structure also allows for a reversal of gender roles. Importantly, in

the film more scenes of Catherine and Heathcliff running through the moors are included than in the novel. Instead of imagining the dynamic, the adaptation extends the narrative through visual interpretation. In these scenes, Catherine is the one leading the pair and Heathcliff is struggling to catch up with her. They don't touch each other, but once Heathcliff catches up, his distance remains. She's usually running far ahead from him, showing her control of the situation and the dynamic out in the moors, a margin without social structure. This situation that would not come about naturally in the Linton's home or in their yard. The moor is able to exist as a female-dominated margin. It is a space where freedom and strength are celebrated, and the expected gender norms reversed. Heathcliff becomes the one who is unsure and following in this dynamic that, once they both grow up, is never seen again. The pair's youth likewise contributes to the creation of this specific margin.

Another point of adaptation in the film is the lack of emphasis on interior furnishings. In the novel, a great chunk of time is spent with Lockwood describing all the odds and ends in the Wuthering Heights household, but in the film that focus is absent. Summer J. Star notes that Brontë's furnishings and interiors function poetically (649). Arnold strips this away, replacing symbolic furniture with dirt, flesh, and weather. The result is a spatial experience rather than a narrative explanation, emphasizing how space is lived rather than interpreted.

The house is often too dark to make out definitive furniture shapes. The focus isn't on those details, and little verbal confirmation is provided to explain away the particularities. This is the prime form of information delivery in the novel. Visual disrepair instead shows viewers that Joseph, one of the few domestic servants left, isn't prioritizing the appearance of the Heights. So, instead of seeing how strong the doors are to hold up against the wuthering winds or showing the variety of guns, the film dedicates the most interior attention to a single piece: Catherine's oak-paneled bed, spanning floor to ceiling in her room. It is the biggest piece of furniture and the one shown the clearest. The panels create a new walled off space separated by curtains, where Catherine is shown to spend a great deal of time hiding when not out

running in the moors. Furniture, in this case, is vital to depicting Catherine's personality in the film which uses environment to make meaning that isn't expressly shared in the novel. By isolating Catherine within the towering oak bed, an interior space that is both shelter and confinement, the film visualizes how architecture and objects articulate emotional states without dialogue, allowing environment to function as a form of expression.

Across both works, space produces "spatial voice," a term Kevin von Duuglas-Ittu uses to describe how *Wuthering Heights* allows environment to speak emotional truth where language fails. For von Duuglas-Ittu, landscape and architecture function as expressive systems that externalize psychic conflict; the moor's vastness registers desire and grief that the rigid grammar of domestic interiors cannot contain. Heathcliff's identity, fractured by domestic exclusion, therefore finds articulation through movement across thresholds rather than through dialogue.

This spatial expressiveness is not neutral but structured through competing environmental regimes that shape the significance of how bodies feel and move. Huang Xiuqin argues that the novel stages a continual clash between nature and culture that are "two different ways of life" (63), and this instability is spatially organized. Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange do not simply house characters but impose competing modes of embodiment, one rough, exposed, and permeable to weather, the other regulated, polished, and disciplinary. Arnold's film intensifies Huang's claim by minimizing social interiors and privileging elemental textures like the noise of howling wind or the thick mud stuck to animal bodies, so that identity appears less socially constructed than environmentally conditioned. The camera's proximity to surfaces transforms space into a sensory force that acts upon the body.

Taken together, these spatial regimes refuse synthesis, producing a geography of selfhood defined by incompatibility rather than development. As Steve Vine observes, the novel's power lies in its refusal to resolve spatial contradictions (340), and this irresolution persists in the adaptation. Neither text offers a stable site where Catherine or Heathcliff can exist without conflict. Each location demands

the renunciation of some aspect of the self. The moor promises freedom yet produces exposure and loss, while domestic interiors offer structure at the cost of psychic fragmentation. Spatial movement becomes a tragic mechanism rather than a path to liberation.

Seen through this spatial lens, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Andrea Arnold's adaptation refuse the comforting idea that tragedy is simply the result of bad choices or doomed love. Instead, they expose a world in which every environment scripts the body and narrows the self. The Heights breeds intensity but traps it in cycles of violence. The Grange polishes identity into something socially legible but hollow, and the moor offers a fleeting margin where freedom can only be felt because it cannot last. By translating Brontë's architectural symbolism into the raw components of mud, breath, wind, and touch, the film makes visible what the novel already knows, that space is not a backdrop but a system that produces a hierarchy by exclusion where desire breeds resistance. No character can move between these environments without losing something essential, and no house can hold the whole of who they are. What emerges is a geography of identity defined by incompatibility, not through belonging, where the cost of survival is self-division and the promise of freedom is always exposed to collapse. In this landscape, the tragedy of *Wuthering Heights* is not written in the stars or in the heart; it is built into the walls, carved into the thresholds, and carried in the distance between one place and another within the hope of a second chance generation.

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Not An Angel, Just A Woman: Domestic Abuse and the Significance of Space in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Netflix's *Maid*

Alyson Baugh

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, by Anne Brontë, was published in the Victorian period, and Netflix's TV series *Maid* was released in 2021. Despite being from different time periods, both stories explore domestic abuse, particularly through the significance of space and environment. Both texts use their individual stories to explore the double meaning of space and the reclamation of domestic spaces, and to redefine what makes a home a home.

Not An Angel, Just A Woman: Domestic Abuse and the Significance of Space in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Netflix's *Maid*

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"Home" is a word often associated with security and comfort, but for those experiencing domestic abuse, home can be a source of suffering and confinement. Texts such as the Netflix TV show *Maid* and the classic novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë bring the issue of domestic abuse out of the shadows and into the light with an exploration of space and how environment and domestic abuse are intrinsically tied together. Each text approaches the questions of space in unique ways. Similarities show the persistence of domestic violence and the influence of the environment on domestic abuse as a societal and cultural issue across time periods. The texts accomplish this by exploring the double meaning of space, and by showing the reclamation of domestic spaces and the possibility of finding safety and community after escaping domestic abuse. In both *Maid* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, women fight back against domestic violence, not with a physical weapon but with their upending and reclamation of space in a society that pushed them into the margins.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is a novel written by Anne Brontë and published in 1848 under the pseudonym Acton Bell. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* the main character, Helen, falls in love and marries Arthur Huntington. Arthur eventually becomes abusive towards Helen. Helen sticks to her beliefs that she can change Arthur until their child becomes involved, Arthur's negative influence on their child growing by the day. To protect her son, Helen leaves Arthur and finds refuge at Wildfell Hall. There, she meets Gilbert and begins to move forward.

The second text explored in this

essay is *Maid,* a TV show released by Netflix in 2021 that tells the story of Alex, a young woman escaping an abusive relationship. The show begins with Alex and her boyfriend arguing. Her boyfriend throws a dish at her that almost hits their daughter, Maddy. This prompts Alex to realize she needs to leave. To provide for Maddy, she becomes a maid. Alex eventually returns to her boyfriend when he helps her in her moment of need after her mother's suicide attempt, only for the abuse to continue. When Maddy is in danger once again, Alex leaves a second time, this time for good.

Spatiality is central to both texts, particularly domestic spaces, transitional spaces, and the meaning of home. In her book *Space, Place, and Gender,* Doreen Massey writes, "Space is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location" (168). Space is not just the physical nature of an environment; it is the construction of the space through purpose, design, emotions, perceptions, symbolism, and so much more that turn a physical environment into a lived space. Massey further argues that space is formed and interpreted based on:

> The specificity of the interactions which occur at that location [nowhere else does this precise mixture occur] and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social reactions at that location [their partly happenstance juxtaposition] will in turn produce new social effects. (168)

Social relationships add to the construction of space but also complicate the meaning of an indifferent space. For example, a house is just a house until social relations make it home. The unique union of specific social instances and the spaces in which they happen are what allows a space to be understood by the participants within that space. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Maid* both explore this matter of space, complicating ideas of home, entrapment, and ownership of space.

This polarization between home and entrapment is illustrated in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* which shows how space can be complicated by emotion and perception. In the novel, Helen escapes to Wildfell Hall to hide from her abusive husband. Early in the narrative, Helen cares a lot about fitting the societal

standards. Once she arrives at Wildfell Hall, she no longer tries to fit into society but extricates herself from it completely. She becomes practically a recluse, and the space of Wildfell Hall allows her to do so. Wildfell Hall represents a transitional space in Helen's journey by being both a place of freedom and a prison. Helen has escaped her abusive marriage, and she recognizes the safety Wildfell Hall gives her. She says, "Surely in this spot, I could remain unknown" (Bronte 306). Yes, Wildfell Hall gives her safety, security, and shelter, but it is also a place of solitude and anonymity. She has moved to a village where she has no friends and no connections except for her son and her brother. She has even left her identity behind, using the alias of Helen Graham. No one can truly know her. Revealing her story could be complicated and even dangerous, especially in a village prone to gossip. Helen is isolated, has lost all sense of familiarity and connection, and is, for all intents and purposes, unknown. Wildfell Hall is simultaneously a means of freedom and a prison.

Maid also tackles this friction of home as a place of security and entrapment. After Alex's mother harms herself during a manic episode, Alex is comforted by her abusive boyfriend and aided in taking care of her mother. This leads to Alex returning to live with her boyfriend, where things seem to be going well for a while. On her own, Alex has faced poverty, complications from the welfare and legal system, and even homelessness for a short period of time. Returning to live with her boyfriend provides her with financial support, shelter, and comfort, until the abuse starts again. Alex feels trapped in the place she calls home, blaming herself for her own decision to come back yet unable to leave. Leaving means returning to poverty, homelessness, and solitude. This trapped feeling is masterfully illustrated in a scene that takes place in Alex's imagination. In this scene, she is stuck at the bottom of a tree trunk, looking up at the escape at the top of the tree, impossibly out of reach. She lies down and accepts her fate, representing a decision to stay with her abusive boyfriend.

In both texts, home represents a complicated dichotomy between security and entrapment. Doreen Massey states,

> Such understanding of the identity of places requires

> them to be enclosures, to have boundaries and therefore and most importantly to establish [one's] identity through negative counter position with the Other beyond the boundaries. (169)

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* Wildfell Hall is an enclosure due to its aspects that put it in contradiction with dominant society. This is represented by its isolation from society and how it allows Helen to go against societal norms by leaving her husband. In *Maid,* Alex's home with her boyfriend is an enclosure because it leaves her trapped in an abusive relationship but still provides shelter and resources that she was fighting to get when trying to make it on her own. Both texts show that it is not simply a matter of leaving a harmful space or staying in a safe space, but rather, a physical space is complicated by emotions and how that space serves the person in some ways but harms them in another.

However, while space can act as confinement in some situations, it can act as liberation in others. Wildfell Hall offers Helen an escape from societal norms while encasing her in solitude, until someone goes against societal norms and enters that space with her. Gilbert comes to Wildfell Hall to meet Helen; Helen rarely leaves Wildfell Hall to meet Gilbert. This seemingly small detail suggests that Gilbert is willing to enter into a space with Helen instead of expecting her to fit into the dominant space. The idea that women must make themselves fit into specific spaces is an important and problematic principle of the "Angel in the House" ideology, which prevailed during the Victorian era and was based on a poem by Coventry Patmore. The Angel in the House expressed the prevailing Victorian view that a woman should marry and act as the moral compass of the home, protecting her husband from sin. The ideology created separate gendered spaces—public and private. Public spaces referred to larger societal spaces, physical and theoretical, such as politics, economics, business, and so on, that were only associated with men. Women, meanwhile, were meant to remain in the private space of the home.

While living at Wildfell Hall, Helen separates herself from societal norms. She has no husband; she lives alone; she provides for herself; she raises her son alone and with non-traditional parenting methods. Gilbert is even advised

multiple times not to get involved with her because this separation from societal norms gives rise to a lot of scandalous gossip; it is even suggested that Helen has a sexual relationship outside of marriage. Gilbert ignores the gossip, and instead of expecting Helen to align herself with societal norms, to enter the dominant space, Gilbert enters into her isolation with her. This is a stark contrast from Helen's marriage to Arthur, who reinforced the lines between public and private spaces. Arthur expected Helen to be there for him while never being there for her. This difference between Gilbert and Arthur is an impetus for Helen to develop trust and eventually love for Gilbert. Therefore, Wildfell Hall may be both a prison and a means of freedom, but it is ultimately a gateway for Helen to overcome the trauma associated with domestic abuse and move towards a better, more hopeful future.

Maid also narrates the possibility of a better future after domestic abuse through transitional spaces and the reclamation of domestic spaces. First, *Maid* includes a transitional space that helps Alex find her footing after leaving her abusive boyfriend. In a domestic violence shelter, Alex is able to find safety and community, as well as stability in a very tumultuous time. After appearing in court when she is accused of kidnapping Maddy, Alex begins to regret leaving her abusive boyfriend and questions whether what she experienced was abuse. She lies on the floor, a visual representation of how defeated she feels by all the previous events, and her new friend finds her there. When Alex expresses her regrets and doubts about leaving her boyfriend, her new friend at the shelter says, "Before they hit you, they hit near you. Next time, it was going to be your face, and you knew that" ("Ponies" 00.25.43). This line gets through to Alex and gets her to physically get up off the floor. Without this transitional space, and without the growth that comes with her experiences in this space, Alex likely would've returned to her boyfriend almost immediately after leaving.

However, because the domestic violence shelter is a transitional space, Alex eventually has to leave and make it on her own. Leaving the shelter feels like starting over, but Alex has grown tremendously since she left her boyfriend the first time. This time, the hope for a better future is stronger. After

leaving her boyfriend the second time, Alex returns to her job as a maid. However, this time, she is introduced to a new clientele—hoarders who are ready to fight their hoarding addiction. Through hard work and determination, Alex tackles the jobs no maid would ever dare take on, and in doing so, she is able to support herself and her daughter and save up money to move to Montana.

Alex becoming a maid is a literal reclaimation of domestic space. Where once Alex was trapped in the home, kept there by threat of violence and deterred from leaving by the difficulties of making it on her own, now, she makes a living by cleaning the clutter and mess from domestic spaces. By making spaces livable and functioning again for others, Alex secures her own means of escape from the prison of domestic abuse.

Both Alex from *Maid* and Helen from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* go on a journey of discovery in which they redefine home in the aftermath of domestic abuse. Both Alex and Helen have lost sight of the meaning of home in the midst of abusive relationships and dislocation. When no home feels safe, happy, or permanent how can home be recognized, much less found? Both Helen and Alex need to discover that in the aftermath of domestic abuse.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* physical places mirror the experiences of the characters within. Grassdale, the home Helen shares with Arthur, becomes "infected with sin and sorrow," just as her relationship becomes infected with pain and mistreatment (Bronte 300). Wildfell Hall bears the appearance of a place "long since neglected" and "gloomy," symbolizing Helen's experience as she is secluded, heartbroken by the turn of her marriage, and shrouded in mystery and anonymity (18). Both Grassdale and Wildfell Hall act as different kinds of imprisonment. Helen says, "For if I could only keep retreat unmolested... [I] should be quite content to live my life in security" (302). She has given up on finding a true home and settles for what she can get: security and safety, even if it means giving up connection. That is, until she meets Gilbert. Helen and Gilbert fall in love, and Helen is eventually able to trust him with her story. When Helen returns to Arthur to care for him in his time of need, driven by her perceived responsibilities as a wife, she believes Gilbert will forget her.

She tells Gilbert to wait six months before contacting her, almost as a test to see if he will remember her in six months' time. However, to Helen's surprise, Gilbert does come to find her after the end of her proposed deadline.

At the end of the novel, Helen and Gilbert marry, and after Helen's experiences with her marriage to Arthur, the fact she would trust her heart to another is a testament to how far she has come since leaving Arthur. The once reclusive, guarded, isolated Helen Graham allows herself to trust Gilbert, to reclaim, not only her right to love and be loved, but also the meaning of home

Grassdale and Wildfell Hall were not home because, for all intents and purposes, Helen was alone, unloved and trapped by Arthur and then isolated at Wildfell Hall. As Helen learns, love without security does not make for a happy home, and neither does security without love. Only when she finds love and connection with Gilbert does she find home because home is much more than just a physical space. It is a web of connections and all the needs that space fulfils. If any need is not fulfilled by the space, home will cease to be a home. With Gilbert, Helen finds the requirements of home met. Even as physical environment changes, their relationship carries the love, security, and connection that turns a physical space into a home.

Maid also presents home as a complex intersection of factors. Physical space certainly matters, as shown when Alex is temporarily homeless, shuttled between interim homes including the domestic violence shelter, and lacking the security that comes with having a stable home. However, physical space is not all that matters, and that is displayed when Alex has shelter and basic needs with her abusive boyfriend but lacks love, security, and safety. Alex struggles to strike a balance between having the physical space of home to survive and having the emotional space of home to thrive. She goes on a journey to find the meaning of home and how to achieve it for both survival and happiness.

The show ends with a slightly ambiguous but hopeful ending. Alex is granted full custody of Maddy when her boyfriend signs over his rights, and Alex and Maddy move to Montana. It is a little uncertain what happens then because the television show does not depict how Alex and Maddy fare in Montana. The viewer gets

the distinct feeling that while this is the end of one journey for Alex and Maddy, it is also the start of the next. That being said, the ending of the show is hopeful as Alex and Maddy are given the blessing of a fresh start, a new beginning away from the space that trapped them. Alex says,

> The trail up there is long and zigzaggy. The hike will be hard. But we're going to make it to the top, and when we do, I'm going to tell her that the M stands for Maddy. That this whole new world is for her down on the other side. ("Snaps" 00.50.00)

This concludes Alex's journey to create a stable and loving home for Maddy and to break the barriers of the abusive home that kept both Alex and Maddy trapped. Alex has figuratively knocked down the walls and opened the world for both Maddy and herself. She has created a new home that is open, free and loving, and even as physical space changes, that feeling of home remains cemented and permanent. Alex says it best when she says, "Our space is a home because we love each other in it" ("Cashmere" 00.43.01).

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and *Maid* are texts from two different time periods, telling two different stories, and yet the similarities between *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Maid* are striking. In their similarities, these two texts show how even as surface level appearances have changed, the deeper roots of these issues linger. Domestic abuse, entrapment in domestic spaces, and the struggle to find home when home has lost its meaning are all topics still relevant today.

These issues of domestic abuse and societal barriers to escaping it persist. Both *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Maid* bring these issues into the light and open the eyes of audiences to the truth of domestic abuse. These stories matter and are not just limited to the page or the TV screen. These stories are all around us and always have been. Fictional or not, these stories need and deserve to be told.

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Purgatory as Explored in Live Theatre Spaces

Aleaha Patton

This article discusses how the idea of Purgatory is explored in three stage plays: Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Peter Tarsi's one-act play, *Tracks*, and contemporary musical, *Ride the Cyclone*. All three plays take place in a version of Purgatory that shows characters interacting with both space and the other people in the space. Reading the plays in connection with Edward Soja's theory of Thirdspace and Stanley Vincent Longman's "The Spatial Dimension of Theatre," the author examines how the liminal Thirdspace of live theatre helps audiences grapple with the concept of Purgatory.

Purgatory as Explored in Live Theatre Spaces

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Theatre is a space that has actors, sets and props working together to bring abstract visions to life, allowing a crowd of people to experience an idea in an embodied reality. When multiple versions of the same script are performed, there will inevitably be differences among them. For each run of a show, a different cast is brought into the process, resulting in a brand-new interpretation of the original work. Being able to physically see and hear that difference manifest is something unique to live performance. Live theatre has the capacity to present imagined worlds in a realized way. In this manner, theatre is what Edward W. Soja defines as a Thirdspace: a space that combines real and imagined worlds. As a Thirdspace, theatre has the potential to physically manifest abstract concepts.

One concept that has received frequent focus in live theatre is the idea of Purgatory. Purgatory is the in-between, the space of possibility or stasis between what came before and what comes after, regarding what happens when we die. When we bring a space like this to life on stage, we explore how humans might behave in it. Theatre makes us feel, and it makes us think about how we would interact with that space. In this paper, I consider the exploration of Purgatory in theatre as an example of just how important live theatre is to the realization of abstraction. This paper compares three plays that bring audiences into an experience of Purgatory: Peter Tarsi's one-act play, *Tracks* (2006), Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist one-act play, *No Exit* (1944), and *Ride the Cyclone* (2009), a musical by Brooke Maxwell and Jacob Richmond. Through this comparison, I show how the use of space is central to a play's engagement with complex ideas.

Live theatre is a space that makes use of separation. The audience is physically separated from the actors on stage, becoming

spectators of the story. A theatre is a space where the real world, the audience, meets with the imagined, the stage. American performing arts educator, Stanley Vincent Longman, talks about this separation in his article, "The Spatial Dimension of Theatre." Longman describes two points of contact between the show on stage and the audience. The *locus*, as he defines it, is "the meeting point between the signs of the actual stage activity and the audience's imagination, producing of course imagined activity" (49). Through set design, lighting, sound, and the actors, theatre physically embodies the abstract. The audience's perception of how familiar the space is to their reality also factors into the audience's ability to engage with it. For example, a play that is set in a modern world similar to our own will require less imagination on the audience's part, while a play set in a fantastical world would require more imagined activity from the audience to fill in any gaps one would face from being introduced to a new world.

The second point of contact, the *sensation,* is defined as "the effect roused in the audience as the play's experience produces a correlation between its inner life and reality" (Longman 49). For a space like Purgatory, the audience is likely to empathize with the characters, lamenting their deaths that brought them to this in-between space. The *sensation* is always more likely to be heavily related to the characters and their stories, as that is what the audience will feel connected to. Just as the familiarity of a setting factors into audiences' ability to connect, humans tend to easily empathize with stories and experiences that are like their own. A play that explores depression is more likely to deeply affect those who have experience with it compared to those who do not. The goal of theatre is to create conditions in which the audience can see different stories and relationships and form a connection to them.

Longman's ideas of *locus* and *sensation* are applicable to the Thirdspace that is theatre. The *locus* is most applicable to what we perceive as real, so things such as the set or props are going to aid in the audience's experience of *locus*. The characters of a show all have their own stories, whether we see them on stage or not. When a show's characters share their stories as the main storyline is moving along, the audience is likely to experience *sensation* in

relation to what is shared. Longman explains, "theatre contrives to provoke an image of reality. It gives us actuality in the form of carefully prepared and staged actors who with a willing audience create an imagined existence and, finally, usher in a sense of reality" (48). Theatre combines the reality of relationships, stories and people with the imagined stories and experiences of all of that combined. It is an artform that allows audiences to experience new realities and reimagine old ones.

Purgatory exists as its own kind of Thirdspace. It combines what we know from reality with what we imagine or hope to be true. According to Roman Catholic and medieval Christian beliefs, Purgatory is a space that the dead must visit to cleanse themselves of their sins before entering heaven ("General Council"). It is liminal in the sense that it is the transition or boundary between two points in time and space—in this case, the boundary between life and death. It is a point of contact between what is known from life on earth and what is envisioned about life after death.

On Stage

The three texts examined here, *Tracks, No Exit,* and *Ride the Cyclone,* all explore the idea of Purgatory in some way. The sets, props and characters in a show are always important but especially so when the concepts being explored are not concrete. *Tracks* is the most physically realized version of Purgatory, taking place in a subway station with tracks going in two directions, representing two potential destinations. *No Exit* is similarly physical, taking place in the physical space of a drawing room. While *No Exit* is canonically set in Hell, the option to leave and move on is presented in the form of a door, thus making it a liminal space closer to Purgatory than to hell. *Ride the Cyclone* has the most abstract take on Purgatory out of all the shows. The set is minimal, wide open, and empty, embodying a concept of Purgatory that many people imagine when thinking of the concept.

All three of these works make use of at least two aspects of theatre to bring the imagined space of Purgatory to life on a stage. One particularly powerful tool in theatre is character work. The background of the character, the archetype, and the acting choices made by the actors all work together to flesh out a character on stage. All three

pieces have a variety of characters. When a show has characters with familiar stories, traits, clothes, humor, and so on, less imagination is required of the audience, bringing them to a *locus* that is like the real word and allowing them to be more focused on the *sensation* rather than the imagined reality that is being formed on stage.

When theatre explores abstract concepts, concrete markers in a set can be helpful to the audience as they are forced to use less imagination to make sense of the story. *Tracks* is a depiction of Purgatory on a live stage that employs physical symbols to ground the narrative. In *Tracks*,

> A group of strangers meet in a dirty subway station. They have arrived with limited personal belongings, their watches have stopped and they all claim to be in different cities. Soon they learn there is no way out of the station, and the unfortunate truth is told to them: they are all dead. (Dramatic Publishing)

The space of the subway station simplifies for audiences the concept of Purgatory as a suspension between two potential destinations: heaven and hell. The central tension of the play is in the characters' uncertainty about which platform they are on. Characters take turns reflecting on their lives in order to understand which platform is which:

> As the subway train finally approaches, they must decide whether to stay and ponder their actions further, or to have faith and climb aboard to their final destination. (Dramatic Publishing)

By setting the play in a subway station, the play makes use of a setting that people are likely to be familiar with, whether that be through in-person experience or through television and media. The station gives the audience a version of Purgatory that they can very easily imagine. *Locus* is heavily realized through this approach, as the physical set of a subway station grafts the abstract of Purgatory onto a physical reality.

Tracks explores concepts of life and death, good and bad, heaven and hell. It focuses on the stories of the characters and less on the setting that the characters are in. As such, the audience is much more likely to experience *sensation* more than *locus*. With a cast of ten characters, the play has many stories for the audience to relate to and resonate with. For example, the story of High School Boy and

High School Girl is one that the audience is likely to feel deep sympathy for. By the time these two characters show up at the station, the audience already knows that those in this space have died. As the characters come to the realization for themselves, the audience learns that the two were coming home from an anniversary date when they got caught in the rain, causing their car to roll down a hill and ultimately leading to them arriving at the station. Because no character is named, the audience members are able to relate to the characters through archetypes. The anonymity of two students allows the audience to imagine themselves in their place, facilitating their experience of *locus*. An audiences' ability to place themselves in the subway station through their connection to the characters also increases their chance of experiencing a strong form of *sensation*. As the characters share their stories, the audience comes to know their personalities, the actions they've taken, and how they've ended up in this space.

Similar to *Tracks*, *No Exit* takes place in a setting that is close to reality: while *Tracks* brings its characters to a subway station, *No Exit* brings all of its characters into a drawing room. The play's famous line, "Hell is other people," suggests that *No Exit* takes place in Hell, rather than Purgatory. However, many readers consider the setting of the play to be a liminal space that better resembles the concept of Purgatory. Sartre's *No Exit* follows three characters as they find themselves in a windowless drawing room, in which they interact with one another and reveal their pasts. Like most stories that take place in Purgatory, the characters have all died and been brought to this unknown in-between. Due to the nature of the room, the setting of *No Exit* feels like a waiting room of sorts. This is especially true considering that the characters ultimately have the option to leave through a newly opened door.

This idea of Hell as a waiting room is heavily supported by the purpose of drawing rooms in the real world. Historically, people of wealth and status typically had at least one room in their home whose purpose was to host guests as they waited to be seen by the owner of the house. In *No Exit*, the characters are brought to the room and then wait for the chance to move on to something unknown. As they serve the purpose of waiting rooms, drawing rooms are inherently

liminal. Sartre's choice to set the play in a drawing room increases the reality of the *locus* for the audience. The parallel between the setting of the play and the purpose of drawing rooms in reality is a great example of theatre's ability to turn anything into a Thirdspace. The setting is an imagined space even though the idea of a drawing room was pulled from the real world.

No Exit makes use of a very simple set design, with the play itself having no scene changes, and all the action taking place in a single room. The room has no windows and only one door that is closed and, presumably, locked from the outside. Inside the room are three couches, each one a different color and style. They are believed to represent the three characters, a claim supported by the fact that all three claim a couch at some point in the play. The setting of this play is still close to real life and so the audience uses little imagination. Like *Tracks,* this play allows the audience to experience more *sensation* than *locus*. This is because the characters in Sartre's *No Exit* are extremely human in their actions and interactions. At first, they try to stay civil, being on their best behavior around strangers. Over time, they begin to let their true natures show. Joseph Garcin, a Brazilian journalist, claims to be in hell due to the treasonous views he wrote about. Estelle Rigault, a young woman from France, claims to be in hell for having an affair. Inez Serrano, a lesbian postal worker, calls the other two out on their lies. As Nasrullah Mambrol writes in their literary review,

> Inez is attracted to Estelle, who has long depended on men to validate her self-worth. Drawn to the formerly womanizing Garcin, Estelle (and Garcin) will be continually frustrated by the scorned and man-hating Inez.

No Exit is a piece where the interactions feel very real and human, reducing the need for the audience to experience *locus*, and increasing the experience of *sensation*. The liminal space of the drawing room is located in hell where the hell is the people around you. The characters argue and bicker but even when faced with the choice to leave, to venture into the unknown, they all decide to stay in fear of finding something worse on the other side of the door. This play depicts Purgatory as its own kind of Hell, in which dread

paralyzes characters. The liminality of the drawing room exposes the characters' inability to act.

What happens when the space of the stage does not provide a link to the physical world (like a subway or drawing room) for characters to inhabit? The empty stage of Richmond and Maxwell's *Ride the Cyclone* shows how theatre can create connections for an audience, even without the *locus* of an allegorical setting. The play follows the stories of six choir students who are involved in a freak rollercoaster accident. The six students find themselves in an empty space where they must plead their case for a chance to go back to just before the accident and become the sole survivor. Instead of the more traditional take of a judge in Purgatory, the children themselves are tasked with making the final choice. Their Purgatory is not a choice between heaven and hell, but a choice between life and death. The musical doesn't focus on what happens after the choice is made, but on the chance for a life to be saved by the decision the students make.

Ride the Cyclone tackles the concept of Purgatory in the most abstract way of the three texts. The Purgatory of the play is what people typically imagine it to be: an empty space with nothing in it except the people being judged and the person doing the judging. That emptiness gives the children a chance to comment upon the space at the end of the song, "Uranium Suite." They sing, "Earth is sky and sky is ground / did we finally leave our town?" The implication is that the place they've come to is a space of nothing. Because of its extremely abstract physical form for the concept of Purgatory, this musical illuminates the meeting of the Thirdspace of Purgatory within the Thirdspace that is theatre. The set is simple, making the most use of lighting, sound, and props to give the audience some form of a reality-based *locus*. Since the setting of the musical is so bare, the audience is forced to use more imagination. The stories that the children share must be explored differently than they would have been had the *locus* been more realistic.

Ride the Cyclone has six characters for people to latch onto, and each child could be considered a caricature or part of an archetype. Ocean is the Type-A overachiever, Noel is the only gay man in their hometown, Constance is the "nicest girl in town," Ricky is the shy introvert with an

overactive imagination, Mischa is a Ukrainian exchange student and the resident bad boy, and Jane Doe is a mysterious figure with no memory of her life before. She is the only unidentified body from the accident (Richard). The familiarity of the characters' stories gives the audience the realistic *locus* that the setting lacks. The intimacy of the characters' stories gives the audience *sensation,* the ability to imagine themselves in the space of the characters. Audience members empathize with the children's situations, specifically the fact that the children are forced to choose who gets to live when all of them have had their lives cut tragically short.

The musical takes the initial concept of Purgatory and makes something new for each character. Like most musicals, *Ride the Cyclone* has a variety of songs that are used for storytelling during the show. Each child has their own song where they either talk about their dreams or regrets. These songs are where *locus* becomes the most real for the audience. These songs make use of props to aid the storytelling. Take the song, "Space Age Bachelor Man," as an example. This song is sung by the character Ricky Potts, who is an introvert with a big imagination. It tells of a world that the character imagined while still alive. In this song, Ricky sings about being visited by alien cat women whose galaxy is at risk of collapse without his help. He is asked to save the Zolarian race through the act of repopulation. Although quite bizarre, the story comes to life on stage through the use of props such as cat ears and tails. Another example is the song, "This Song is Awesome," sung by the character Mischa Bachinski. This song is about Mischa's dream of being a rapper. For this song, the children make use of props such as fake gold chains, sunglasses, and handheld microphones to bring Mischa's dream to life in a liminal space. The use of props such as these are important for shows that make use of abstract settings. The audience hasn't been given anything physical to attach their reality to, so props are used to let the audience experience some form of realistic *locus*. The idea that an empty space can somehow conjure up these items is another way that *Ride the Cyclone* makes the concept of Purgatory into a Thirdspace. The props bring the children's hopes and dreams to life through the smallest reality marker possible. The audience can then attach their

own interpretations to those items and experience *sensation* through the character's interactions with it. As an effect of that, those props end up taking on a bigger importance than they may have had in real life.

Theatre gets to take on the challenge of physically embodying the abstract. The exploration of Purgatory on stage shows how we take what we know and are familiar with from the real world and fit it in with an imagined world. Imagining Purgatory is the perfect example of humans trying to make sense of what they don't know. The many different versions of Purgatory can both comfort and disturb, asking us to consider whether we would hope for something better or be content with waiting.

Theatre is a wonderful artform for expression. Its capacity to explore difficult concepts and find ways to physically manifest them for an audience is something that is unique to the art form. Plays allow audiences to experience their biggest questions brought to life through the imagined life of a character on stage.

The exploration of abstract concepts such as Purgatory will always be important to the human experience. Humans are questioning and curious and will find ways to explore the unknown. Purgatory in live theatre is so important to this process. It not only demonstrates the effictiveness of theatre in realizing the abstract; it also allows us to explore important questions about life beyond death, providing a comfort that people may not know they need.

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Spatiality in McCormick's *Sold*

Josie Pressnall

Human trafficking and sexual slavery have persisted for thousands of years and have affected billions of people. It is a human experience that deserves to be written about, recorded, and understood to the same degree that wars are. American author Patricia McCormick brings this issue into focus for young readers in her young adult verse novel, *Sold*, published in 2006. The novel focuses on a young girl named Lakshmi who is sold into sexual slavery by her stepfather, a reality most young Western readers never have to face. Using Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of topophilia and what Robert T. Tally Jr. labels "topophrenia," this paper examines how McCormick works to cultivate empathy in young Western readers.

Spatiality in McCormick's *Sold*

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Introduction

What makes a banned book controversial? Often, it's daring to open the doors of rooms that hide the ugliest parts of humanity that make a book the subject of heated debates. Banned books face opposition because they expose what we'd like to ignore: things like racism and violence. Sex, in particular, is a great offender in the library of banned books. We pretend it can't be disgusting or vulgar and when a book depicts its ugliness that book is rejected. In reality, sex, or the corruption of it, is the source of so much pain and suffering. The graphic depictions of violent sex in *Sold* (2006) by Jennifer McCormick make the book a prime target for critique and banning.

In scholarly spheres, *Sold* faces a different challenge: it is contentious because the author is a Western woman writing about a non-Western injustice, and many scholars believe it to be more harmful than helpful in ending human trafficking across Nepal and India. The chief objection is to the way McCormick frames America saviors in the narrative. How then, do we account for the impact the novel has on its intended readership of young Westerners? Intended for high school audiences, the book aims to raise awareness about the crucial issue of human trafficking—and it does just that. Does banning this book prevent readers from engaging in an important conversation?

By examining the novel through a spatial lens, I argue that McCormick's novel has a unique capacity to reach across the divide of Western discomfort to stir readers against this injustice. McCormick's use of space is a distinctive quality that connects readers to the pressing issue of trafficking. The way in which its spatial elements elicit sympathy can be understood by utilizing Yi-Fu Tuan's idea of topophilia and his writing about its opposite, which Robert T. Tally names "topophrenia." This essay argues that McCormick's attempt to shed light into the barred windows of the brothel rooms in India, where victims and survivors

are subjected to horrible things, is worth the attention it has received. Despite its shortcomings, it can serve as one contribution to a full picture of spaces that need more examination—spaces that have been ignored for so long in the name of our comfort.

Acclaim and Critiques

McCormick's book has been met with enormous praise alongside enormous controversy. Some of its awards include ALA's Top 10 Best Books for Young Adults in 2007 (Young Adult), National Book Award Finalist in 2006 for Young People's Literature (National Book Foundation), and the Quill Award for Young Adult Literature in 2007. In 2014, book was adapted into a feature film starring Gillian Anderson.

Sold is the seventh most-banned book in America, despite these successes, according to a 2022-2023 list by PEN America (Asaadoon). In 2023, moms in Berkeley County, South Carolina brought their district's attention to the book. One of the moms, referred to only as "Dixon" states, "I don't think that exposing young minds to graphic depictions of rapes, sexual assaults and beatings of a minor child really has any literary value" (Harris). McCormick has expressed her frustrations with the book's controversy, alleging that these bannings are being orchestrated by a power that has a vested interest in keeping the stories of trafficked children out of America's collective consciousness. In an opinion piece in *The New York Times* she says,

> These challenges are not grass-roots responses to books coming home in students' backpacks; they are campaigns orchestrated by a national clearinghouse with shadowy funding and apparent links to groups such as the Heritage Foundation. (McCormick, "Opinion")

The book's banning is evidence of its importance and actively goes against McCormick's goal of spreading awareness of sexual trafficking to sheltered Western kids.

While concerned parents critique the book's "explicit content," literary and social analysts critique the book's ending, asserting that the ending promotes "white saviorism" and exoticises Nepal and India for its Western readers. Critics argue that the book paints an inaccurate portrait of the lives of people in South Asia. Binod Sapkota cites Manika Subi Lakshmanan and Edward Said to

frame the book as a neocolonial allegory and mirror to orientalism. Sapkota writes, "American consumer products and cultural exports function hegemonically" (54). Given the valorization of great American inventions like Coca-Cola and TV in the novel, the ending, in which an American saves Lakshmi,

> feels like a marketing tactic to engage readers, but it distorts reality by absolving America's role as a wealthy consumer of the trade while reinforcing the idea that Nepali people cannot save themselves without Western intervention…By doing so, it subtly enforces the notion that salvation must come from the West rather than from within. (54)

Dipak Raj Joshi similarly critiques McCormick's failure to mention local agencies such as Anuradha Koirala and the Maiti Nepal shelter for women and children in the body of the narrative—these are tacked on at the end in her acknowledgements. Joshi writes, "The novel is about a social problem but the novelist's efforts are seen to be invested in effeminizing, romanticizing or exoticizing the Nepali society rather than in improving the situation" (1). In addition to McCormick's representation of the social landscape, Joshi raises concerns about the graphic representation of Lakshmi's experiences. Joshi cites Dominick LaCapra's[1] work on trauma writing, saying that McCormick's use of "writerly imagination" has the effect of "exaggeration and exoticization of the problem."

Keeping the critiques of the mentioned scholars and parents, the following spatial analysis of Sold aims to appreciate McCormick's writing of space while utilizing the theoretical lenses of Yi-Fu Tuan, additionally recognizing that McCormick cannot, and is not, speaking directly in place of, or for the non-Western survivors of sex trafficking and American imperialism."

McCormick's Project

Sold is a story written entirely in vignettes, short moments in time that capture powerful images. The vignettes are written in verse, which lends a fleeting feeling to these scenes within the novel. McCormick chooses to center the

1 LaCapra, D. (2001). *Writing history, writing trauma*. New York: Johns Hopkins UP

narrative on a thirteen-year-old girl named Lakshmi who lives in a rural Nepali village with her Ama (mother), her baby brother, and her stepfather. She dreams of a tin roof for their house, and this dream becomes her doom when she agrees to go into the city to work and send money home to her family. She is lied to and sold into the sex trade by her stepfather for gambling money. Lakshmi is taken from her village by a strange woman and carted across the Nepali-Indian border with the help of someone she calls her "Uncle-Husband," who pretends to be legally married to her to get past Indian authorities. Mumtaz, the owner of the brothel "Happiness House," forces her into sex work by drugging her and selling her body to men. She abuses Lakshmi verbally and physically by starving her, berating her, beating her, and much more. Lakshmi makes friends with some of the residents, but when the brothel is raided by the Indian police with the aid of an American who is part of an organization based in the U.S with the purpose of liberating victims of human trafficking, Lakshmi goes free and has to leave them behind.

McCormick initially set out to write a journalistic piece on the state of human trafficking in Nepal. She wanted to shed light on the situation, but after staying a month in India, she found she had much more to say on the matter than a single article could cover. She interviewed both victims and perpetrators (Alsaadoon). She strove to understand the places and experiences of the girls she depicts, stating in her afterword that,

> As part of my research for *Sold*, I traced the path that many Nepalese girls have taken—from remote villages to the red-light districts of Calcutta. I also interviewed aid workers who rescue girls from brothels, provide them with medical care and job training, and who work to reintegrate them into society (20-26).

McCormick describes her approach to writing and her motivations behind the book's creation saying,

> There hadn't been anything that looked at the experiences from start to finish of how a vulnerable family, a vulnerable girl can be drawn into being trafficked. I feel like that kind of story opens up your heart in all ways that statistics in general stories do not. (Alsaadoon)

McCormick's desire to portray the

perspective of a "vulnerable family" necessitates a portrayal of that family's environment; it necessitates a portrayal of the countries and spaces McCormick visited during her research. McCormick's portrayal of these things is best viewed through lenses provided by the works of Yi Fu Tuan, a Chinese-American author and geographer-philosopher. Tuan writes extensively about the formative power of topohrenia, or love of place, and later describes how its opposite, fear of place, wields similar power. Robert T. Tally describes this anxiety as topohrenia. These concepts provide a valuable framework for understanding and simplifying a character's relationship to their narrative space while simultaneously keeping its complexity.

While acknowledging powerful critiques of the novel of the mentioned scholars and parents, the following spatial analysis of *Sold* aims to consider the novel's influence in terms of how the writing connects Western audiences to the difficult subject matter that many of them would prefer to ignore. Additionally, it recognizes that McCormick cannot, and is not, speaking directly in place of, or *for* the non-Western survivors of sex trafficking and American imperialism. The spatial reading that follows is an attempt to understand that impact through theories of spaciality.

Spatial Analysis

Yi-Fu Tuan, in his book titled Topophilia: *A Study on Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, defines "topophilia" as a neologism:

> useful in that it can be defined broadly to include all the human being's affective ties with the material environment. These differ greatly in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression. The response to environment may be primarily aesthetic: it may then vary from the fleeting pleasure one gets from a view to the equally fleeting but far more intense sense of beauty that is suddenly revealed. More permanent and less easy to express are feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood. (93)

This idea of being closely tied to one's environment applies particularly to those that work outside or in the home daily, directly interacting with their material world. Tuan writes that

farmers have a special connection to their environment because, "Nature is known through the need to gain a living… Muscles and scars bear witness to the physical intimacy of the contact" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 97). Lakshmi in *Sold* lives in rural Nepal and thus depends upon the earth. Her daily ritual is recited when she says, "Each morning as I go about my chores—straining the rice water, grinding the spices, sweeping the yard" (McCormick, *Sold* 5). This tactile, verb-heavy line shows just some of the ways a Nepali girl might interact with her environment by taking care of it and preparing the food grown from the soil outside her door. In Tuan's words, Lakshmi is established early in the novel to have "physical intimacy of material dependence" with the valley she lives in.

To fully empathize with Lakshmi's attachment to the valley, readers are supplied with vivid sensory imagery. Tuan explains why this is the case: "The person who just 'sees' is an onlooker, a sightseer, someone not otherwise involved with the scene" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 10). The age-old "show, don't tell" rule in writing fiction comes into the conversation when McCormick attempts to have audiences experience the Himalayas through Lakshmi's eyes, ears, and nose. Lakshmi doesn't just see the valley every day; she lives in it, fully present. To evoke "emotions deeply," the author must rely on more than just visual descriptions because the character's experience of their environment does not end at what they see, especially when that character has topophilic feelings towards their surroundings as Lakshmi does.

McCormick employs this technique most heavily in the vignette titled, "Beyond the Himalayas." The vignette starts with a visual description, because as Tuan suggests, "seeing is believing," and what better way to establish a scene than by illustrating the vivid colors of dawn, "already torched with sunlight, while the village below / remains cloaked in the mountain's long purple shadow" (*Sold* 9). The vignette continues by adding movement to the scene:

> Napping babies will sway in wicker baskets, / and lizards will sun themselves outside their holes. / In the evening, the brilliant yellow pumpkin blossoms will / close, drunk on sunshine, while the milky white jasmine will / open their slender throats and sip the chill

Himalayan air. (9)

At first glance, most of this vignette seems to be composed primarily of visuals, but when readers think about it through Lakshmi's experience, we can see tactile and olfactory descriptions, too. She is not talking about how the "chill Himalayan air" feels in her own throat, but instead the throats of the milky white jasmines. The sensory details are second-hand and thus they imply an even deeper understanding of her surroundings than if they were delivered presently in first person. Tuan writes that, "It is difficult for an adult to recapture the vividness of sense impressions that he has lost (except occasionally) as in the freshness of a view after the rain…A child, from about seven or eight years old to his early teens, lives in this vivid world much of the time" (*Topophilia* 56). Maybe adult readers have forgotten what it means to see the world through a child's careful eye, but McCormick allows them to see it again through Lakshmi.

The valley does much more for Lakshmi in topophilic terms besides materially providing her with stimuli and nutrients; she stores her memories inside of it and makes sense of the world at large with the help of its mountains. Tuan describes this side of topophilia by saying that when it (in this case the writing) is compelling, we can, "be sure that the place or environment has become the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol" (Tuan *Topophilia* 93). This is most evident in the vignette titled, "Something Beautiful," where Lakshmi likens her mother to the "swallow-tailed peak" and the goddess Lakshmi, her namesake. The vignette starts by drawing parallels between Lakshmi and her mother, showing that they have a similar relationship to their shared environment by doing chores within it: "Up and down the mountain, a heavy basket braced on her / Back and held fast by a rope around her brow, she is bent. / Under the weight of her burden" (McCormick, *Sold* 7). This piece from the vignette serves many purposes, one of them being an example of how the Nepali people get their water. McCormick highlights the fatiguing reality that many people in rural Nepal face: an abundant supply of water, but scarce means of retrieving it. Deeptima Shukla explains,

> Nepal is a country rich in water resources. Three major rivers—Kosi, Gandaki and

> Karnali originate from Nepal's Himalayas and join Ganga in the Indian territory. Nepal due to its incapability to harness its water resource owing to lack of capital and technology is dependent on India for this purpose. (365)

This detail illustrates the rural nature of Nepal for readers while also setting up up a complex relationship with neighboring India.

The passage ultimately lifts up Ama's character, emphasizing her strength and role in the family's survival alongside Lakshmi's love and admiration for her. The second stanza in the vignette characterizes the land itself, personifying the very mountain Ama climbs up and down for water as the goddess Lakshmi, "Whose brow is fierce and noble, / whose breast is broad and bountiful, / whose snowy skirts spread wide above us. / She is beautiful, mighty, and magnificent" (McCormick, *Sold* 7). Tuan would characterize this description as a symbol in Lakshmi's imagined geography that serves to help her make sense of the world around her. He writes, "The artificial environment they have built is an outcome of mental processes—similarly, myths, legends, taxonomies, and science. All these achievements may be seen as cocoons that humans have woven to feel at home in nature" (*Topophilia* 13).

Perhaps Lakshmi realizes this, because in the next two stanzas she returns her attention to her mother, the one "objectively," not topophilically, deserving of her worship: "And her slender back, which bears our troubles—and all our / Hopes—is more beautiful still" (McCormick, *Sold* 7). If readers apply the same topophilic logic to Ama as they do to the mountain, they can see that Lakshmi has a sense of place *within her mother* that she loves. She is a place of safety, sustenance, and beauty, just as the mountain provides these things. In another of his books titled *Landscapes of Fear*, Tuan writes how crucial one's first environment is to their development:

> The first nurturing environment every human infant explores is its biological or adoptive mother. The first stable objects in the dawning consciousness of an infant are other people, and without objects a human sense of the world cannot emerge. (7)

With the established understanding of how Lakshmi loves her Himalayan valley home, readers can empathize with how

she feels when she is taken from it. Tuan writes in *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* that,

> To be forcibly evicted from one's home and neighborhood is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world. (99)

Lakshmi tries to hold onto this "sheathing" in the vignette titled "A New World." She says in the last few lines, "The mighty swallow-tailed peak. / It grows smaller the farther we walk" (McCormick, *Sold* 58). Her symbol, the swallow-tailed peak, serves as her sheathing, her anchor to the valley and her topophilic feelings. But later in the novel, she loses sight of this and is fully ripped from her initial understanding of the world. Tuan writes about the fear of getting lost extensively in *Landscapes of Fear*: "We may safely assume that fear of disorientation—of getting lost—is universal. Above all, the small child needs to feel anchored in a center of nurture and of security" (21). Lakshmi's fear of disorientation is evident when she tries "to remember each hut, each village. / I try to memorize / each twist in the path so I can find my way home at festival / time next year" (McCormick, *Sold* 58). This is where her topophrenia, or fear of place or landscape, begins.

Her fear of disorientation is heightened later in the vignette titled, "Crossing the Border." Lakshmi doesn't differentiate between countries when she says, "Soon we are moving, the feet of the rickshaw puller padding noiselessly on the dirt path. I ask Uncle Husband when we / will cross the border. He says we already have" (McCormick, *Sold* 79). Shukla explains that the Nepal-India border is historically porous in order to encourage trade. It additionally lacks any geographic border to distinguish between the land of two countries (2). This adds to Lakshmi's fear, and thus the reader's. It acts as a "nail in the coffin" for her lost sense of direction and path to home.

In Tuan's *Landscapes of Fear*, he dedicates chapters to "Fear of Disease" and "Fear in the City." These are the two primary fears Lakshmi has towards her new surroundings, and both are evident in the vignette titled, "On the Bus": "The man next to me empties his nose out the window, / pinching one side shut and blowing on the other, and for a / moment I am afraid

that I will lose my meal again" (McCormick, *Sold* 67). Tuan's concept of the fear of disease and the city is present in this vignette. Humans are naturally disgusted by smells that might bring about pestilence. Tuan highlights the city's ability to produce illness and the consequence of people being in close proximity to one another. This is especially designated to the poor, as Tuan writes, many people have a "distaste for and fear of the poor as a potential source of moral corruption and of disease" (*Landscapes* 157). The fear could specifically come from the volume of people on the bus. In rural Nepal, people wouldn't be so densely packed together. He explains that fear of the stranger is explained as inextricably linked to the fear of the city because one cannot have a city without its "human denizens" (156). He goes on to say that,

> It is suggestive that many Occidental children want to be firemen or policemen when they grow up, thus expressing a need to assume authority and overcome their sense of impotence and anxiety before both the physical environment and strange adults.

Lakshmi might not have any prejudices against the poor or sick, but her natural state is one of fear—fear of catching something. This passage can also be read as the expression of the Westerner's fear and perception of what it is like to be on a South Asian mode of public transport. Her fear is employed again when she gets off an equally crowded train and witnesses the lack of waste management in the vignette titled "City Ways," where she says, "Then, all around me, the women lift their skirts, squat like / crows, and relieve themselves on the open ground" (McCormick, *Sold* 84). Lakshmi's disgust could serve to act as our own to make her travels more perilous and a far cry from her aesthetically beautiful Himalayan home.

When Lakshmi finally gets to the brothel, she is forced to combine topophilic and topophrenic experiences to survive. More accurately, she must pit them against each other in a battle over her mind. This battle and contrast are best represented in two vignettes: "Between Twilights" and "What You Hear." The former contains the memories she clings on to and uses as a shield against the horrors happening to her in the latter.

In "Between Twilights," Lakshmi smells the fabric from her

old skirt to conjure up memories of home and comfort herself. The skirt smells of "mountain sunshine…. freshly turned soil and clean laundry / baking in the sun" and the "woodsy tang of a cooking fire" that she associates with tea and roti. She does this to "get by / until the next twilight" (McCormick, *Sold* 126). This mirrors the motions she goes through with her mother in the vignette titled "Maybe." She is talking with her Ama about all the things they could do with their money if they didn't already owe it to other people. The ending stanza reads, "...we linger over a luxury that costs nothing: / Imagining what may be" (29). In both instances Lakshmi indulges in the sensory wonders stored inside her mind to cope with her present reality.

Oftentimes, relying on past or imagined pleasures is not enough to escape the present pain. In the vignette titled "Remote Control," Lakshmi describes how she often employs dissociation when she is with men: "Sometimes, I pretend that what goes on at night when the / Customers are here is not something that is happening to / Me. I pretend it is a TV show that I am watching from far, far / Away. I pretend I have a button I press to make everything / Go quiet. And another one that makes me disappear" (McCormick, *Sold* 157). This is an imagined, mental space she retreats to in an effort to escape all forms of stimuli. Combatting abuse directly with memories of the Himalayan air will not realistically always work to survive ongoing abuse like the kind that is depicted in "What You Hear." The vignette is unaltered to preserve the powerful saddening effect it is intended to have on the reader:

> Before it starts,
> you hear a zipper baring its teeth,
> perhaps the sound of a shoe being kicked aside in haste,
> the wincing of the mattress.
>
> Once it starts,
> you may hear the sound of horns bleating in the street below,
> the peanut vendor hawking his treats,
> or the *pock* of a rubber ball as the children shout and play in the school yard nearby.
>
> But if you are lucky,
> or if you work hard at it,
> you hear nothing.
>
> Nothing, perhaps, but the clicking of the fan overhead,

the steady ticking away of
seconds
until it is over.

Until it starts again.
(127)

This devastating vignette exhibits Tuan's characteristics of topophilia derived from the senses in an opposite way. The ability to take in her surroundings—once a skill that enriched her life—now enhances her pains. Both "Before Twilight" and "What You Hear" use intense sensory imagery to invoke as much empathy in the reader as possible, and to showcase not only what is physically happening when Lakshmi is being abused, but what is happening mentally and emotionally. She is numbing herself and escaping from the present moment.

The blending of fear and love are displayed again in the vignette titled "The Cost of A Cure," where Lakshmi gets a fever and has nightmares in which the imagery of her home gets distorted by the imagery of the brothel. An American woman with a clean white robe and the treat made from snow she longs to enjoy is replaced by Mumtaz giving her medicine. She dreams that she runs out of the claustrophobic house and into the only images of the streets filled with the images she keeps repeating she knows: the peanut vendor, kids playing with a ball, street dogs digging through trash (McCormick, *Sold* 188). This vignette can be seen as an example of what happens to someone who is overtaken by their topophrenia in illness. As Tuan explains, "The body's integrity is the foundation for our sense of order and wholeness. When we sicken, so it seems does the world" (87).

Lakshmi would be forever stuck in this cycle of having dark and light imagery battling for the control of her life consciousness if it weren't for the controversial ending where she is "saved by the American." It's important to note, however, that Lakshmi is the one who must decide her fate. In the vignette titled "The Words Harish Taught Me," Lakshmi remembers words taught to her by Harish, the young boy living in the brothel, and takes a huge risk to give the American's card to the tea vendor. Her actions get her to safety and kickstart her life outside the brothel. What's more explicit is that she has to make the choice not to go into the closet with Anita after Anita tries to convince her to.

Lakshmi's moment of conflict and climax ends with her decision to shake her head and go a different path: "Then, slowly, she lets go of my arm, closes the door between / us, and I hear a sad and final sound: the lock sliding into place" (McCormick, *Sold* 262). Lakshmi must decide between staying at the Happiness House and going into the closet, thereby settling for finding peace only in the TV in her mind and the common area, staying in the hallway and never acting, or stepping out to face the unknown. This scene is a literary description of what Tuan describes as the "awareness" in "the difference in emotional temperature between 'inside' and 'outside'" (107). Lakshmi is suddenly made very aware of the barrier between the two and is forced to decide. We the readers of course know she chooses the "outside."

Conclusion

One can see after close reading and spatial analysis within Lakshmi's environmental experience that the presence of topophilia enriches the reading of *Sold* and highlights the internal workings of Lakshmi's character. Topophilia's presence in the novel, as Tuan would argue, invokes empathy because the experience of loving or fearing a place is universal, sensory details are especially forgrounded, and the feelings are directly translated across space, time, and cultures with little friction.

McCormick's novel invites readers to look closely at spaces that are inaccessible to them and kept behind closed doors. Banned books like McCormick's do this so readers can witness human cruelty and the indomitable human spirit that responds to it. Despite the novel's flaws and inherent Orientalism, it draws Western readers to the story of a Nepali girl in a Himalayan mountain and Indian brothel in a way that stays impactful after critical reading, illuminating the spatial experiences of non-Western people for the consumption of Westerners so they might act. By utilizing spatial theories like Tuan's in reading and writing controversial or untold stories, we can understand how *Sold* reaches readers of all nationalities, bringing people closer together by giving voices to those that would have otherwise stayed in a darkened brothel room.

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The Properties of Water in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*

Margaret True

Throughout Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*, water is a central motif, informing our understanding of both individual characters and the town as a whole. This essay focuses on the character of Sylvie during the time when she was the primary caretaker for her nieces, Ruth and Lucille, and was charged with managing domestic space. Sylvie was not an instinctual homemaker and construed her "womanly duty" to fit her style of living to survive. To make these claims, the article analyzes Robinson's metaphors comparing the house to Noah's Ark, and comparing Sylvie to a mermaid on a ship. Both allusions concern water in some way. The analysis engages spatiality theory by Michael De Certeau and Doreen Massey. All of this is to understand Sylvie as a character, the women akin to her who have been forced into a matronly role due to societal norms, and how to transform an unwelcoming space into one of comfort.

The Properties of Water in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*

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Water is often understood as an agent that shapes space. Bodies of water mark borders or connect communities, organizing landscapes and the societies that inhabit them. Throughout Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping,* water is a central motif that shapes individual characters, and, in a broader sense, the whole Foster family. This essay argues that the lake and other water images create a fluid sense of space in the novel. The analysis focuses on two key metaphors: the house as Noah's Ark, and Sylvie as a mermaid out of her element. Both allusions concern water in some way. The analysis engages passages from spatiality theory by Micheal De Certeau and Doreen Massey, as well as scholarship regarding mermaids, and Biblical readings of Noah's story. All of this is to understand how the simple element of water is a complex spatial force in the literary landscape of *Housekeeping*.

Chandler Harland observes in his reading of Henry David Thoreau:

> Water therefore inherently contains a double element, a double signification which, invariably, tends to project either the fear, the death of humans, or the spiritual, physical transformation of man. (4)

The same sense of doubleness underpins Robinson's treatment of her novel's central body of water, the lake at the heart of town.

The setting of *Housekeeping* is the fictional town of Fingerbone, Idaho. Two sisters, Ruth and Lucille, are the central characters with Ruth providing first person narration throughout the story. After the shocking suicide of their mother, the sisters reside in the house that their late grandfather built, and they are under the care of different women throughout their childhood. First there is their maternal grandmother, then their grandmother's sister-in-laws, Nona and Lily, and finally the girls' Aunt Sylvie. Each caregiving

"era" alters the girls' experience of domestic space, but it is Sylvie's residency that drastically impacts the home and the trajectory of the novel. Sylvie changes the house's ecosystem to allign with her fluid domesticity, and unsettles conventions of order and stability. By the end of the novel, the girls have the choice to live Sylve's nomadic unattached life or one of calm stability.

Robinson was born in 1943 in Sandpoint, Idaho, a small town that inspired her first novel, *Housekeeping*. Educated at Pembroke College, the former women's college at Brown University, and later earning a Masters and PhD from the University of Washington, Robinson pairs rigorous intellectual training with a lyrical style. When *Housekeeping* was published in 1980, it established her as a respected author with a well-developed voice, especially for the author of a debut novel. In a speech given by Mark Athitakis in 2012 for her National Humanities Medal, he claims,

> The qualities that define Robinson's fiction emerged fully formed in that first novel: watertight sentences, an attentive voice that demands close attention, and themes of integrity and home.

After her debut novel, Robinson did not publish another piece of fiction until 2004 with her book, *Gilead*, whose trilogy won, respectively, the Pulitzer Prize in fiction, the Orange Prize (now the Women's Prize for Fiction), and the National Book Award.

New York Times reviewer, Anatole Broyard, notes the nuances of domesticity in *Housekeeping*, recognizing that the title of this book does not equate to the subject of the novel. He says, "Robinson's 'Housekeeping' is not about housekeeping at all, but transience." The true meaning of the book comes through to the reader when one is looking beyond the overt message to find the subtext. Broyard understands that Robinson's writing is made for those who are willing to do literary analysis and sift for meaning. One example of Robinson's layered use of imagery is the way in which water-based allusions throughout the novel shape the main characters, as well as how domestic spatiality paired with delinquency affects the narrative.

A Mermaid out of Her Element

The first important water-

based comparison is when Ruth says, "Sylvie in a house is more or less like a mermaid in a ship's cabin" (Robinson 99). Christine Wilson digs deeper into this in the article, "Delinquent Housekeeping: Transforming the Regulations of Keeping Home." She brings to light the fact that mermaids do not belong on ships, just as Sylvie does not belong in the house (304). Sylvie makes it obvious to readers that she feels captive being the one forced to keep house—she is kept instead of doing the keeping. Wilson points out that a mermaid's home is the ocean, a place of flow and transience. Similarly, Sylvie is most comfortable in the transient life of riding on the rails. Digging deeper into the mermaid comparison helps us to understand that Sylvie does not belong there and must make accommodations for her to feel a sense of peace.

To understand the symbolism of Sylvie being compared to a mermaid, one must understand the history and symbolic traits of mermaids. Folklore states that mermaids are beings who hold control in multiple ways: being able to control the weather and the waves. This power is reinforced in a familiar present-day example, Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, when a character comments that the beautiful weather must be due to King Triton's benevolent mood. Often for these abilities mermaids are viewed as manipulative, however, "It is not unheard-of for a mermaid to value human life and desire to save it" (Knight 20). This characterization of mermaids echoes Harland's sense of the doubleness of water. Knight says, "Many scholars neglect to recognize that the mermaid is a hybrid symbol: she signifies more than one thing at a time" (19). The ocean is an uncontrollable force that is impossible to manipulate, but a mermaid finds their own sense of control within this environment. Additionally, mermaids can usually only exist in the ocean where they wield power, but thety are unable to exist on land as humans and other animals do. Thus, mermaids are simultaneously powerful and vulnerable, depending on the space they inhabit.

Mermaids' supernatural ability to control the elements around them parallels Sylvie's strategies of shaping her environment as a coping mechanism during her homemaking years. Having spent years riding trains, she attempts to create an environment that is akin to the one that she was taken out of.

A normal person could not resist mermaids' powers (controlling weather, etc.), and Sylvie, likewise, begins to influence her nieces, Ruth and Lucille. As the matriarch of the house, she sets the tone and the girls have no choice but to react to it. Many of the habits that Sylvie gained from living in such an unstable environment she only transfigured slightly. Ruth says, "It seemed to me that if she remained transient here, she would not have to leave" (Robinson 103). Some of the ways in which she remained transient were wearing her coat constantly, refusing to unpack her belongings, and sleeping outside of the house. These are obvious habits of someone who doesn't live in a single place. She could have chosen to adapt to her new unwelcome space, but instead, like mermaids, Sylvie stays true to their narrative. She insists on a mobility that unsettles the town's expectations of womanhood.

When Ruth compares her nonconformist aunt to a mermaid in a ship's cabin she explains, "she preferred [the house] sunk in the very element that it was meant to exclude" (Robinson 99). What Ruth is saying is that mermaids do not belong on ships; that is not their habitat. A mermaid cannot swim or survive anywhere on dry land. Sylvie is similarly unable to survive out of her element.

Sylvie is transient in the way that mermaids are as well, traveling from place to place and not being known to stay anywhere for a long period of time. Before she is bequeathed the responsibility of her young nieces, Sylvie had been a "delinquent" who lived on the railways in the Great Depression. Her ways of living are judged harshly by the general population. The women of the town sit in the house's parlor with their niceties attempting to bring order to the girls' life that they believed Sylvie could not provide (179-180). In a way, Sylvie's existence living on the rails is as mythical to the townspeople as a mermaid's existence—too fantastical and not stable enough.

Mermaids are sometimes portrayed as oppressed or misunderstood creatures in their folklore, which correlates with them also being primarily portrayed as women. They appear as damsels that either need saving from men, at times being captured by fisherman. In Sylvie's case, there is a feeling of captivity in the role imposed on her by patriarchal forces. Her life is policed through the expectations

that women must be homemakers. Doreen Massey's work in *Space, Place, and Gender* shows that home is an example of a gendered space. She says,

> And this gendering of space both reflects and has effects *back* on the way in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live (186).

Massey understood this at a young age and later realized that she could, "[m]ultiply such examples" (186), proving that the home is unfortunately not the only space that has become gendered. Gendered spaces are oppressive, and damages both society and individuals. In Sylvie's case, she does not fully submit to gendered roles, but she definitely feels the oppression of them. Her rejection of expectations through her remaking of domestic duties and spaces, becomes its own critique of the norms imposed on her.

Sylvie's Ark

The second water-based allusion is the way in which the house acts as an ark, with specific mentions towards the Biblical story of Noah's ark. Both Noah's ark and the family home in *Housekeeping* are built out of found materials by the family patriarch, and both manage to survive drastically changing environments. In the story of Noah and his family from the book of Genesis, God is not pleased with how far humans have strayed from his will so he says,

> I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds, the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them (Genesis 6:7).

He decides to flood the entirety of Earth but chooses to spare Noah and his family by giving Noah specific instructions on how to build an ark that will ensure their survival. The flood lasts forty days and forty nights (Genesis 7:4) and, ultimately, "Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died" (Genesis 7:22). After the flood, Noah, his family, and the animals they brought are the only inhabitants on Earth. This event was a chance for the creatures of the Earth to reset themselves in alignment with God's will instead of according to human imperfection. After the flood, the ark's inhabitants continue with their lives as usual and focus on rebuilding what the flood had destroyed. God keeps his promise

and there are no other accounts in the Bible of this extreme of a flood recurring.

The biggest similarity, bigger than the fact that both "arks" were built by the patriarch of the house, is that both vessels are protecting their inhabitants from the tumultuous environment around them. In Noah's tale, the threat of water is physically more imminent and a life-ending problem. The storm that wiped every creature off the face of the Earth was miraculously not capable of destroying the sturdy ark. In *Housekeeping*, the water that the house is protecting them from is not a direct physical threat, but more a looming mental threat to the family. The water from the lake has caused significant generational trauma for the family which has been passed down from the grandmother to Ruth and Lucille. At the beginning of the book readers learn that Edmund Foster, the patriarch of the novel's characters, had a career of working on the railroad, which subsequently led to his untimely death. A train crashes into the lake, killing the passengers aboard, including Edmund (Robinson 8). This leads to the Foster's matriarch raising her daughters as a single parent.

Years later, one of these daughters, Helen, is raising two girls by herself when she drops them off at her mother's house. While they are sitting on their grandmother's porch, she uses her neighbor's car to drive into the lake (Robinson 23). This ultimately kills her, paralleling the way that her father had died years before. Regardless of this generational trauma, the house stays sturdy and steadfast. When things are changing, the family home that Edmund built remains intact.

Another similarity between the two stories is the idea that what happened in rocky waters is not known to the survivors of the accidents. During the vast flood that God created, the people and animals who were physically in the flood died, and there was no trace of them afterwards. In *Housekeeping*, there is little to no closure regarding either Edmund's or Helen's deaths. Both accidents come as a sudden shock to those left behind. The water contains answers that the main characters of the novel are unable to access. Where is the train that went into the lake with Edmund's body and is it still there? Was Ruth and Lucille's mother's death purposeful or was it an accidental slip? The water keeps these secrets.

Michael De Certeau's discussion of "Spatial Stories"

in *The Practice of Everyday Life* offers a useful framework for understanding how things can exert force as delinquents: people/entities that were supposed to be eliminated but are remaining in "nature, in our home, in streets" (129). Although a physical or concrete form may have been destroyed, De Ceretau argues that their presence can continue past their death. The example that he uses is how at the fall of antiquity the popularity of Greek gods went away, but their presence in the places they were influential continued. Similarly, tragic incidents continue to shape the Foster family's existence for generations. The stories of Edmund and Helen in the lake "haunt the narrative" of their family, and the town.

In an act not unlike Noah's, Sylvie must adapt the family's home to navigate turbulent waters. The house existed years before Sylvie was its primary caretaker, which also shows the transformation that the house is capable of. Wilson says,

> The invocation of Noah's ark implies the possibility of rebuilding domesticity and functions as a logical conclusion to Sylvie's unconventional, boundary-breaking housekeeping. (305)

Ultimately, both Noah's ark and the Fingerbone house can negotiate water. Wilson argues that "Rather than deny the inherent instability of the house, and more largely of a potential stable home, Robinson fabricates a domesticity that can negotiate instability with ease" (306).

Conclusion

Water serves as a structuring principle in *Housekeeping*. It holds trauma that creates the exigence of the novel, proving that water holds the ability to create and mold people, as well as experiences. Similarly tragic incidents continue to shape the Foster family's existence for generations. Robinson uses the mention of mermaids and Noah's Ark to show how the lake is a source of both family trauma and adaptability.

Chandler Harland writes, "The constant attention given by people to water is mainly due to its ability to create fantasy and explain the origin of things" (6). In the case of *Housekeeping*, water creates a space in which a "mermaid" such as Sylvie can thrive, compared to the stable domestic space that constricts her instead. On the other hand, water's unpredictable nature shows that to create survival for yourself,

and others, turbulence must be embraced instead of rejected. Water as a central theme in *Housekeeping* shows human potential to adapt to fluid spaces.

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