WATCHUNG REVIEW

PATHWAYS TO DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE CURRICULA

REDEFINING THE HUMANITIES

Pathways to Diverse and Inclusive Curricula
The Way Forward

A. J. Beehler &
Lash Keith Vance

Johnny Can Write

Poor Johnny. After sixty-five years, he still can neither read nor write well; he has become the unelected and unsolicited representative of all that is failing (or not) in our education system K-16. Ever since the 1955 publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Rudolph Flesch (due to not being taught phonics), Johnny's scholastic deterioration began registering in writing and reading abilities. *Newsweek's* "Why Johnny Can't Write" popularized the trope and provided for the perennially resurrected panoply of statistics for literacy decay. From the moment after the *Newsweek* publication, themes of correctness, assessment, disability, ability, and the state of education have all used Johnny to discuss the state of writing and educational paradigms (Schlesinger 2; Parker and Meskin; Elgin; Newkirk, Cameron and Selfe; Crist; Wellborn; Donald; Macdonald; Shalit; Bartlett). All manner of pedagogical advice, including books about teaching Johnny traditional grammar and sentence diagramming, have come to light (Linden and Whimbey).

Nearly thirty years later, after the original article has been interpreted as part of a White backlash against movements for Black linguistic justice and as part of a larger democratization process for students, Johnny's advancement or lack thereof continues to inspire scholars as a helpful trope to discuss composition processes, especially in the context of directed self-placement movements and student agency and equity (Naynaha; Maloy; Toth; Ketai). After scores of articles and books featuring ne'er-do-well Johnny, this fictional student still has popular resonance as he has been recently warned against the confines of the five-paragraph essay (Warner). As recently as 2020, Johnny (now an engineer in this case), has had difficulty writing for his job (Floyd).

I.   Measuring Declining Student Writing Scores

Is the case of Johnny, representative of the millions of college students and a plethora of writing methodologies, truly indicative of writing in the United States? At the same time that college students like Johnny are now being asked to evaluate their own writing skills through placement protocols, recent data (2019) from the National Assessment of Education Progress reveal a substantial subsection of the student population still struggling with literacy, as reading assessment scores have sunk 7% for 12th graders since 1992; indeed, only 40% of students were considered reading proficient or better ("Naep Reading 2019 Highlights Grade 12"). The statistics for writing are worse, with only 27% of students working at or above proficiency standard, according to the most recent national data set available ("Naep - 2011 Writing: Grade 12 National Results").

Post-pandemic data from 2023 show scores for reading having precipitously declined at all selected percentiles, with scores indicating the largest single drop in reading scores year-over-year for over thirty years (NAEP). Declining performance is complicated, and the data reveal a more complex picture than might be suggested at first blush. Some high performing students, for example, have continued to outpace those students in the bottom third, improving as others worsen. The vast majority of students have experienced declines, while the top-tier students, who had shown increased progress before the pandemic, have sunk in the rankings. This data, then, suggest at some level that a bifurcation may be taking place.

II.   The Educational Landscape for Directed Self-Placement

Now, educators across the United States face the promotion of directed self-placement (DSP), and they are about to give Johnny his very own rubric to ascertain where he stands. The irony is stark. Just as student test scores in reading and writing have fallen, they are being asked to evaluate their own abilities. In this context and referencing their own demands of burgeoning enrollment, Daniel J. Royer and Roger Gilles brought into sharper focus the issue of DSP when they published their landmark article "Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation" (Royer and Gilles). To be sure, the concept of DSP provides a host of very enticing boons to students, faculty, and institutions alike. Through a series of questions and surveys depending on what program one considers, the process enables writing program administrators to place students into writing courses, even sometimes satisfying fundamental writing expectations and requirements. As part of this process, various protocols and models for DSP have been developed over the years.

Citing "the well-documented limitations of placement tests--the artificiality of direct writing and the questionable reliability and validity of traditional direct assessment" (59), Royer and Gilles point out that DSP can address administrative challenges of registration by relying on the efficiency of students to place themselves into appropriate writing classes. Of course, as Edward White points out in the foreword to *Directed Self Placement: Principles and Practices*, "DSP assumes that students will be mature enough to choose the course that is right for them, if they have enough information and pressure to choose wisely" (Royer vii). Such an assumption should be of particular concern when considering the full role DSP inhabits in placement practices. Lest one forget, DSP was originally introduced at community colleges because placement in writing courses was primarily done through high school GPA, not through a systematic and thorough evaluation system. In this context, DSP was certain to be more beneficial than GPA alone.

Here is the educational landscape in which DSP finds itself. Naturally, all compositionists seem to agree that accurate placement of students informs student success. Also, as would be expected, disagreement arises when an attempt is made to articulate how accurate placement can occur in praxis because of disparities in procedures inherent in the still-developing practices of DSP (Aull; Gere, Aull, Perales Escudero, et al.; Toth and Aull). As Royer and Gilles note, DSP avoids the labor and potential cost of reading an oppressive number of portfolios and provides an answer to concerns regarding the validity of ACT scores (60). Other underlying incentives for DSP can also be detected. For example, scholars have noted that institutions are often quick to rely on admissions tests for placement as a balm for budgetary woes (Huot, O'Neill and Moore; Isaacs and Molloy; O'Neill, Moore and Huot; Peckham). Because budgets are always a topic of interest, this pressure to adopt placement mechanisms that are framed as cost-cutting measures should be carefully balanced with concerns over the validity of placement vehicles.

A.   General Concerns with DSP

No less enticing is Royer and Gilles' observation that DSP "feels right" and involves "the restoration of interpersonal agency" (Royer and Gilles 61), often establishing a sense of self-efficacy among students. These immediate rewards are tempting to all stakeholders involved, and the process, especially in light of growing reservations about standardized tests (many institutions have adopted a "test-optional" approach with regards to admissions), might naturally lead some scholars to the same conclusion Dan Melzer made:

> For decades, the campus writing program at my institution was a system that
> perpetuated an outdated and ineffective model of literacy--a system whose problems
> will be familiar to many WPAs working to reform writing at their institutions. A one-

shot timed writing test placed half of the first-year students in non-credit-bearing 'remedial' courses. (Melzer 75).

As with many institutions, Melzer's observation and critique prompted change, causing writing courses across the University of California system to de-privilege examinations while incorporating these high-stakes assessments as part of overall course grades. Critique led to some changes in policy and incorporation of student voices as part of the placement process.

Melzer is not alone as other critics of current placement systems have posited that the judgments regarding placement decisions made by academic authorities via standardized placement tests or GPA are suspect and should be tempered with multiple measures (Kenner), especially with a well-formulated DSP program (Jones; Wang). Some critics have even suggested that, "It is difficult to read the rhetoric of 'underprepared' students as anything other than an attempt to reassert the preexisting social and racial hierarchy by glorifying the mechanism—standardized skills tests – which reinforced it" (Armstrong, Baptista Geist and Geist 82). Reading standardized placement tests as conclusive acts of power requires practitioners in the field to "resist the impulse to allow our colleagues' anxiety to drag us back toward the systems we now know to have been inequitable and ineffective" (Armstrong, Baptista Geist and Geist 88). In their proposed either/or system, any act or inquiry that disputes their position turns into an attempt to retain power. This could not be further from the truth.

Mansbridge and Shames also notably mention that, "When movements inspire reaction, including the rise of counter movements, that reaction need not be wholly or at all about power, either coercive or as capacity" (Mansbridge and Shames 632). No doubt all parties involved in the placement debate are interested in student success, so considering the full history of standardized placement vehicles, Mansbridge and Shames' admonition should be heeded rather than subjected to the logical fallacy of slanting: "It is not easy in practice to distinguish between wanting to right a perceived wrong and wanting to return to a situation where one had greater capacity to turn one's preferences or interests into outcomes" (Mansbridge and Shames 632). The concerns of such scholars as Keith Law from Merced Community College that "Now, students can bypass remedial courses based on high school transcripts" are founded in many years of practice and expertise (Law). To characterize such reactions as a "backlash" might suggest the presence of another logical fallacy all scholars should guard against, that of the overhasty generalization. In an effort to improve student performance, address student agency, and build student confidence, arguments like Law's should be thoughtfully considered rather than marginalized or dismissed. As Mansbridge and Shames note, forms of resistance are not necessarily attached to power and backlash. Clear logic and genuine engagement of the questions and important roles of standardized placement tests are the most likely paths to aiding students in their quests to become thoughtful readers and powerful writers.

DSP, however, is progressing at an entirely different pace from its initial debut and has, perhaps, unforeseen pedagogical implications, and opposition to DSP or wholesale alterations to placement systems can be labeled as an attempt to retain power without having the need to actually investigate the repercussions. According to DSP proponents, many structural and institutional problems can be resolved and dispatched through DSP (curtailing the number of developmental courses, mixed student success statistics, student satisfaction, fallible placement mechanisms). The installation of DSP can, in an instant, eliminate the problem of so-called "developmental writers" as they can be immediately placed in upper tier courses. Such placement practices, however, end up depriving many of these students of the helpful scaffolds that university systems have invested real money in. Some research, in fact, has shown that DSP deployed in a large university context was not ultimately valid but required further research (Gere, Aull, Green, et al.).

B. Dunning-Kruger Effect and DSP

Ultimately, in this process, DSP relies upon the individual student, and that complication is almost certainly a profound one because DSP is dependent on perception, interpretation, subjectivity, and identity. The role of the expert voice is diminished if not entirely effaced in such a system. DSP engages, and to a *real* extent, privileges the student lens, and that lens is more likely to suffer from distortion than the lens of the more experienced, dispassionate, and professionally grounded lens of the writing instructor, especially if the instructor's lens is grounded in a well-developed program that offers real possibilities for student improvement as a result of accurate placement. Commenting on the challenges of interpretation, Bonnie Norton reflects on such subjectivity by considering how, "the conception of social identity as a site of struggle is an extension of the position that social identity is multiple and contradictory" (Norton Pierce "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning" 15). As Norton notes, entering college students, whom we must remember are often eighteen or nineteen years old, are contending with a tension-filled site of struggle, one that is plagued with many variables in the individual that are often at odds with each other, which she connects to the world of imagined communities (Norton Pierce "Imagined Communities, Identity, and English Language Learning in a Multilingual World").

Into this formative and seminal moment, we are asking the vulnerable student to review the courses and, as Royer and Gilles frame it, have students "realize [their] decision today should not be taken lightly" (57-58). Students very well may wish to make a responsible decision, one that will serve them well, and being involved in such a decision could certainly create a powerful sense of agency and self-efficacy as Royer and Gilles contend. Can students, though, even with the best intentions, dispassionately and objectively negotiate the "site of struggle" that Norton theorizes about?

The goodwill of all involved should not be doubted, for the stakeholders undoubtedly desire that students make the most accurate placement possible to secure the most likely path to success. However, the much-discussed Dunning-Kruger effect provides provocative data as to how a person's ability profoundly affects their self-perception of their own skills (Critcher; Dunning). Since the publication of the landmark article, other researchers have pursued the study of the Dunning-Kruger effect to determine its efficacy across modalities (Jansen, Rafferty and Griffiths; McIntosh et al.; Pennycook et al.). Their findings, especially in terms of the evaluation process of low performers, support the idea that lower performers may have difficulty in evaluating their own skills or abilities. Jansen, Rafferty, and Griffiths have provided a quantitative methodology to this effect in two separate studies: one for 3,515 participants who solved grammar problems and one for 3,543 participants who solved logical reasoning problems (Jansen, Rafferty and Griffiths 760).

One can certainly make an argument of extrapolation that the individual's perception, most especially that of an entering college student, is less likely than the seasoned professional (who in many cases may have reviewed hundreds if not thousands of student samples) to make a nuanced decision, one that mitigates if not avoids altogether the "site of struggle" and the myriad complications that reside in that site. This can be especially true in the case of writing, which incorporates a myriad of skills.

C. Bright Spots in DSP that Benefit Students

While a plethora of questions about DSP dot the landscape of composition, some researchers have posited positive outcomes for DSP, especially in terms of programmatic validity, policy reform, and student retention (Estrem, Shepherd and Duman; Ruecker et al.; Inoue). Some current practices in the University of California support some of the best practice structures of DSP.

Royer and Gilles, for example, have commented on how essential a meta-education is for students during the act of DSP, as knowledge of the different composition courses and the expectations of those courses are key components to placement practices. After all, one is more likely to make an accurate assessment and placement if one has more awareness of course structures.

In the University of California, all students are required to demonstrate a proficiency in writing before advancing at length in their studies, and that expectation is best articulated in the regulations of the Academic Senate. Chapter two ("Requirements for the Bachelor's Degree"), article one ("General Requirements") states the following in sub-section 636.A:

> University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement is a reading and writing proficiency requirement. Each student must be able to understand and to respond adequately to written material typical of reading assignments in freshman courses. This ability must be demonstrated in student writing that communicates effectively to the University faculty.

While students need to demonstrate this proficiency to satisfy the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR), those students who do not satisfy the requirement can be placed in a support course designed to assist students in addressing issues commonly associated with second language acquisition, or a higher-level class designed to serve students who are more proficient in English. Not all students who place in the lower-level classes are second language learners, though a majority are. Likewise, not all students who place in the higher-level class are native speakers of English.

D. A DSP Case Study: Student Survey at UCR

Every year, a small number of students slated for developmental writing classes at the University of California, Riverside request to have their placement reviewed, and the Director of ELWR, Paul Beehler, reviews these cases to determine the proper placement in ELWR courses. De facto, these reviews become a limited form of DSP within the context of registering for a writing class that satisfies ELWR, and UCR honors this commitment with the significant amount of time required to review a student's request. The counseling component in DSP seems to be of utmost value, but this component also requires significant resources, so some institutions may be tempted to yield to budgetary pressures, curtailing essential counseling that ensures the efficacy of DSP structures. Like Royer and Gilles suggest, the student at UCR is given a comprehensive explanation of the classes available and the expectations for those classes. Beyond this basic information though, there is an exhaustive review of the student's writing sample (with the student present), a discussion about the student's experiences in writing classes, a review of the writing courses the student has taken, and a conversation about reading practices the student relies upon. Typically, half of the students who request a review will rescind that request once this full process has taken place. The other half of the students will often proceed with pressing a desire to be advanced to a higher-level writing class.

A significant reason for withdrawing a request is a student's growing awareness about the rigorous expectations in first-year composition. This revelation, one that requires significant time and reflection, often gives students pause, and for good reason. The students typically are not aware at all (nor should they necessarily be) about college expectations in composition courses. Depth of knowledge of the different courses, then, is very important in helping students understand the system they will work in, and this full knowledge likely requires a thoughtful exchange of observations and questions between the student and someone who has significant experience with the composition classroom.

The significance of the role such knowledge plays in students' decisions is starkly revealed through the data of some powerful surveys the University of California, San Diego and the

University of California, Riverside administered. These respective surveys (UC San Diego's 2017, 2018 and UC Riverside's 2020 survey) reveal robust data returns that undoubtedly have led to a more accurate understanding of student thinking; the first set of results is now available for analysis based on the following student demographic. These classes are designed around the concept of basic writing and developmental writing. Students who do not satisfy the English Language Writing Requirement (ELWR) through any number of mechanisms (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, SAT, ACT, transfer credit, or the UC Analytical Writing Placement Exam) at UCR are then placed into either Basic Writing 1 and 2, Basic Writing 3, or English 4. A grade of "C" or higher is required in English 4 to satisfy the ELWR and advance to first year composition, identified at UCR as English 1A.

COURSE	DESCRIPTOR
BASIC WRITING 1 & 2	The most intensive work for multi-lingual students takes place in these two courses.
BASIC WRITING 3	Many multi-lingual students also populate Basic Writing 3, which emphasizes academic English and expression.
ENGLISH 4	Some language fundamentals are addressed as well as organization, structure, and content development.

The UWP deployed two surveys, one during week three and one during weeks nine and ten. Because the surveys were anonymous, different students may have responded to the different surveys. Still, the surveys provide an opportunity to gauge attitudes towards placement and, possibly, how those attitudes might evolve, especially in terms of a self-assessment of their placement.

Week 3 Survey Deployment
Question: When you first heard about the placement, which of the following statements best describes your feelings?
(N=288)

I felt the placement was accurate	157
I felt that I should be placed in a different pre-English 1A course.	25
I felt the placement was inaccurate and that I should be placed in 1A.	106
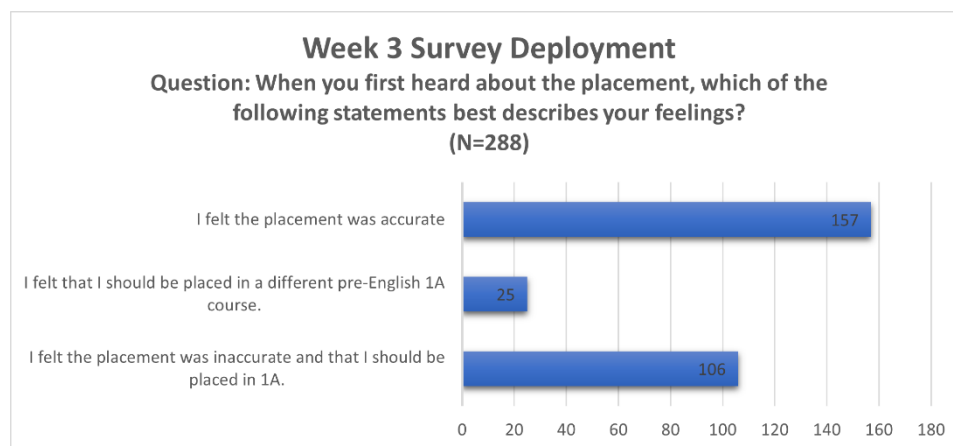
While a sizable number of students – 54.51% – felt placement was accurate, a significant number of students – 45.49% – felt they were not placed accurately. This group of students initially felt, from their experience and knowledge, that placement practices outside of Directed Self-Placement or Collaborative Placement were problematic. In working with students through Collaborative Placement or relying extensively on student judgment in Directed Self-Placement, many students

(45.49%) indicate they would experience an elevated level of tension regarding the accuracy of their placement.

This tension is further underscored by another question on the first survey that was deployed:

Week 3 Survey Deployment

Question: Now that you've had a chance to come to your Basic Writing 1 and 2, Basic Writing 3, or English 4 class and see what the class involves, have your feelings about your placement changed?
(N=288)

No	
Yes	

0   50   100   150   200   250
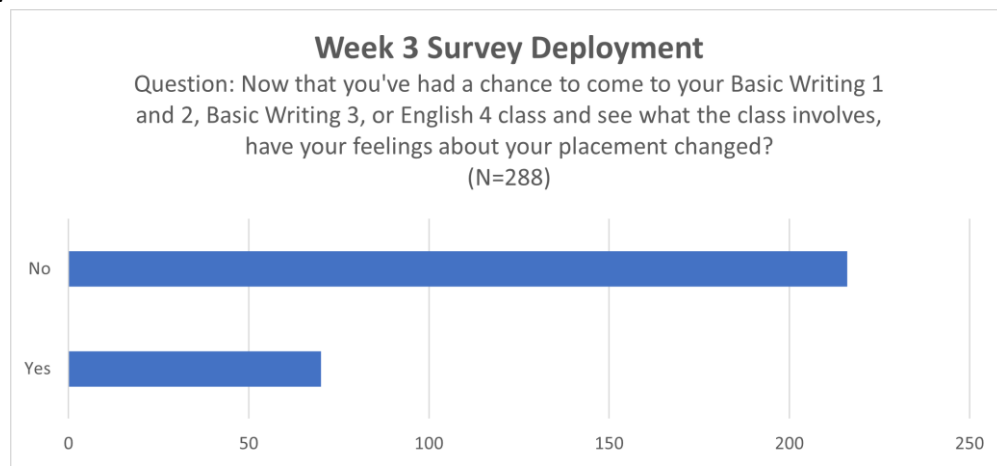
In the third week of classes, the students responding to this question overwhelmingly (N=216), with 75.52% of the responses, stated that their feelings about placement had not changed. A minority (N=70) of students totaling 24.48% of the responses indicated that their feelings about being placed in their writing class had changed over the three-week period of instruction. In other words, students in week three had not received enough instruction and perhaps distance from the exam itself to disrupt their initial emotional response to placement.

E. DSP and the Intervention of Instruction: Survey Results

That so many students had not changed their position on their placement is even more remarkable when one considers that 45.49% of the students were confident that their placement was inaccurate. Even more striking, though, were the responses to the same question that was posed in weeks nine and ten ("Now that you've had a chance to come to your Basic Writing 1 and 2, Basic Writing 3, or English 4 class and see what the class involves, have your feelings about your placement changed?").

Weeks 9-10 Survey Deployment

Question: Now that you've had a chance to come to your Basic Writing 1 and 2, Basic Writing 3, or English 4 class and see what the class involves, have your feelings about your placement changed?
(N=288)
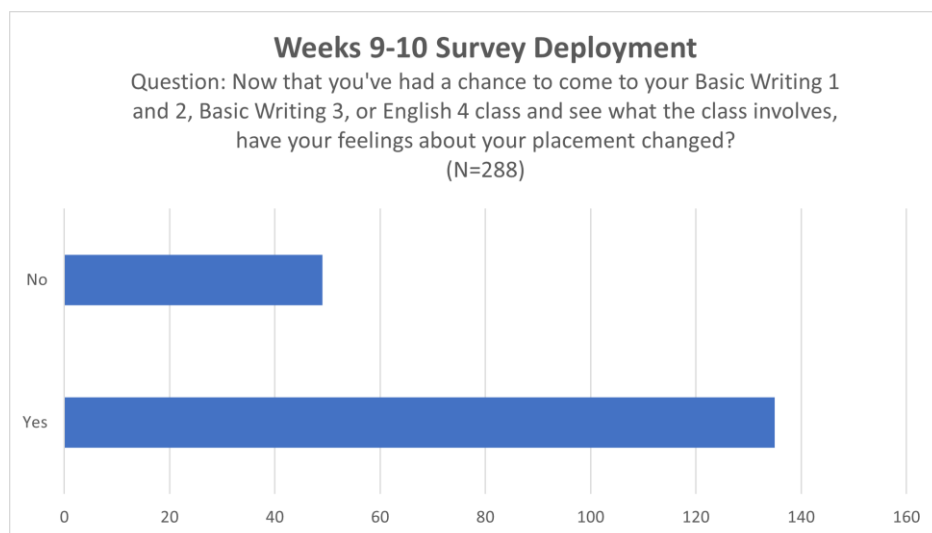
The responses (N=184) to this question in weeks nine and ten are inverted. A significant majority of students, 73.37% (N=135) state that yes, their feelings about their placement in their writing course had changed with a minority of 26.63% (N=49) indicating that their feelings about their placement had remained the same. This statistic provides insight into the value of understanding what is entailed in the different writing courses. Being enrolled in the writing class for nine or ten weeks provides students with valuable insight into what academics the class will address. When students are immersed in the material, they then have a genuine chance to perceive and understand what weaknesses need to be addressed in their writing. Without this time and intense instruction, students seem to lack some of the perspective and introspection required to accurately assess their skills, and without that insight, the chances of error in either DSP or Collaborative Placement (CP) appear to be noticeably increased.

In a CP system that involves the insights of writing instructors and academic counselors, some reliance on such a third-party presence might mitigate some of the students' distorted views about their writing, at least as these questions seem to suggest. The draw on resources, however, is considerable.

A second question, identical in nature, posed in the surveys administered in week three and weeks nine and ten also lends insight into the accuracy of students' perceptions of their writing. Framed as "On a ten-point scale with one being 'completely disagree' and ten being 'completely agree,' please respond to the following statement: 'I was placed accurately in my composition class.'," this question is designed to lend insight into a refined understanding of student perception. For DSP to be accurate, students would need to have a high level of confidence and insight into assessing their abilities to make the correct decision about what class is most suitable for the student.

While not fully dependent upon student self-assessment of writing skills, Collaborative Placement nonetheless still relies on the student's perception and assessment of writing skills. Under the CP model, much depends on the detail of how much influence a student has in the process. Notably, the vast majority of students did not have an opportunity to learn about ELWR classes before enrolling, though some students may have gained limited knowledge about the classes through the catalogue and some discussion through counselors or correspondence. As such, students principally gained their knowledge of the ELWR courses through several weeks of instruction before the first administration of the survey and nine to ten weeks of instruction before the second administration of the survey.

Students responding to the first survey express a wide distribution over the ten-point scale.

Week 3 vs. Week 9 Comparison

Question: I was placed accurately in my composition class.

Week 3--N=260;Week 9--N=184

Completely Disagree   ■ Week 3 ■ Week 9   Completely Agree
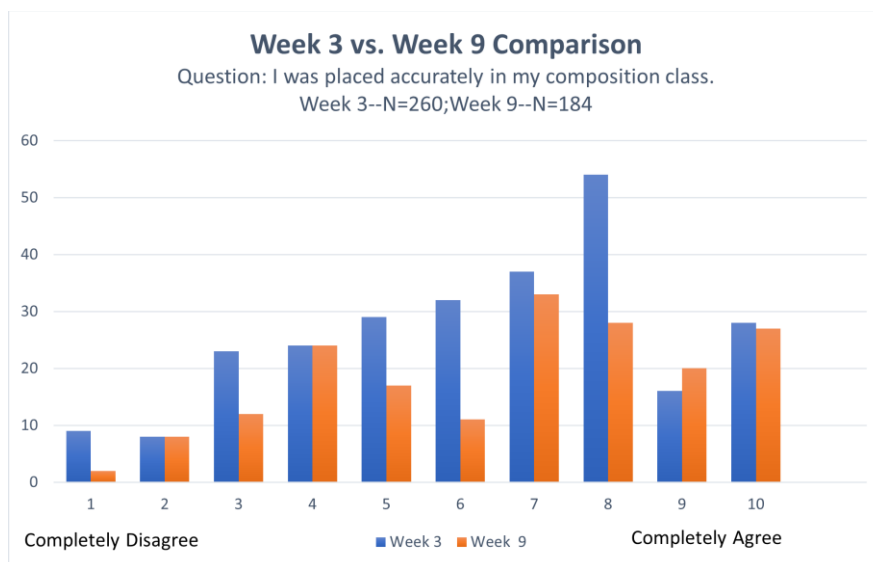
In Week 3, fifteen percent of the respondents, then, felt very strongly with a score of nine or ten out of a ten-point scale that they were placed accurately in their composition course when asked in week three of a ten-week quarter. Conversely, six percent of the responses fell in the one and two range, suggesting a strong lack of confidence in the placement that occurred.

This grouping suggests that a minority of the students who responded to the survey doubted the placement towards the beginning of the quarter when they did not have the advantage of extensive, first-hand knowledge regarding the composition course to which they were assigned. Such a lack of deep knowledge would almost certainly be prevalent in all students facing a CP or DSP system unless the students somehow had an opportunity to participate in the classes or receive intensive counseling. Even if students could briefly participate in the classes or rely on a phalanx of highly trained counselors, the students would likely still operate on limited knowledge. The result of this survey question suggests that students in a CP or DSP system might very well be making decisions without the requisite knowledge to ensure accuracy of placement.

The conclusions drawn from the student responses are further illuminated with the backdrop of the second question posed in the follow-up survey that was distributed during weeks nine and ten. By week 9, students had the full benefit of perspective. They had worked with their instructors and comprehensively engaged the curriculum. In other words, a more complete store of knowledge regarding the class they were placed into and their reactions, for good or ill, could more fully inform their judgments. The results from the full survey suggest many students come to a more profound understanding of the initial placement once they have seen the ELWR course and devoted themselves to the process, regardless of whatever initial resistance may have been proffered at the beginning of the term. In question two of the follow-up survey, a shift occurs among the one hundred and eighty-four (N=184) student respondents.

After progressing through the ELWR course, then, about the same percentage of students felt the placement was inaccurate with a slight decline to five percent. However, in the upper range of nine to ten (a score that suggests a highly accurate placement), the percentage of respondents increases from fifteen percent in week three to twenty-five percent in weeks nine and ten. This increase is statistically significant and suggests a higher degree of confidence among students when considering placement once they have the full benefit, experience, and perspective that accompanies completing an ELWR course. As mentioned earlier, this survey is ongoing, and the continuation of

the survey promises more robust results that can further shed light on the value (or lack thereof) of student perceptions that can affect CP and DSP.

UCSD conducted another survey similar in nature that polled more students and so should be interpreted as more robust than the ongoing survey at UCR. The results from the UCSD study are even more striking and illuminating. Because the UCSD study is more comprehensive and had nearly 100% participation from the student body enrolled in the courses, the results are more precise than the UCR study. Students were asked the same direct question, "Do you feel you were placed in the right course," at three distinct moments in the academic calendar: before class, during week one, and during week ten. Three academic years were considered: 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020. The course surveyed, AWP 1 and 2A, is a class dedicated to students enrolled in preparatory composition courses that lead towards FYC. In all three years, the number of students who indicated that the placement was correct increased each time the survey was administered. In Fall 2017, the percentage of students who responded "yes" increased from 58.9% before class to 76.3% during week one to 87.3% in week ten for AWP 1 and 2A. The following two years revealed similar results. In Fall of 2018, 54.5% of students in AWP 1 and 2A responded "yes" to the survey question. That percentage increased to 70.5% in week one and then 90% in week ten. Again, in the 2019-2020 cohort, a similar trend is present with 62% responding "yes" to the survey question before classes began. Then, in week one, the percentage increases to 75% and, finally, in week ten, the percentage increases to 90% (UCSD, Survey).

The results from the UCSD survey point to a more pronounced trend that can be detected in the nascent UCR survey: *As students gain familiarity in the course content and expectations of the university, an appreciation for and understanding of the initial placement becomes apparent.* The studies suggest there is likely no substitute for actual experience in the class. Even after a week of instruction, students already become aware of the benefits attached to the course. In the 2017 cohort, the increase in the percentage of students responding "yes" is 17.4%. In the 2018 cohort, that increase equates to 16%, and the increase in the 2019 cohort is 13%. In each case, even a full week of instruction is enough to see a statistically valid increase in students recognizing the accuracy of the placement. The full appreciation of the accuracy of the placement does not manifest itself in student responses until the last week of instruction, at which point students have become fully aware of the benefits of the courses.

This study, like the one at UCR, suggests that the placement mechanisms used for ELWR are effective but are recognized to be so by the students only once a full immersion into the material takes place. Without that full immersion, students might remain only marginally aware of the benefits of that placement. The DSP and CP models might be able to provide some form of this use of instruction in placement, and, if so, DSP and CP might very well work as placement processes. However, without this kind of first-hand knowledge on the part of students, a misunderstanding of placement and the accompanying value of that placement could occur, and that misunderstanding potentially would be a significant disservice to the students.

III.   An Earthquake in the Foundation of Higher Education

Charting the major inflection points, or Gladwell's "tipping points," reveals the liquefaction taking place in the foundations of higher education, as standards are molded to the times. Chronicling the literary history of our institutions, especially during times of transformation, provides context for understanding our institutions, where they have been and where they are going. We are at such a tipping point in terms of writing instruction, as increasing budgetary pressures and the desire for social equity become entangled with perceived remediation and traditional writing instruction. DSP finds itself squarely in the middle of this discussion as a symbol of democratization

for students, a supposed shining flashlight of student empowerment in the wreckage left by abandoning traditional standards without replacing them with something else. Institutions may be facing a collective abandonment of expertise developed by years of placement experience in lieu of students answering a series of questions and then settling on the course they elect to take.

In some ways, DSP may represent the purest evolution of the university into a corporatized institution as students are transformed from individuals seeking guidance into customers who choose their own path (Soucy; Saunders; Engwall). Under such a paradigm, of course, the customer is always right. Already university campuses—and to some degree community colleges as well—lure students to their hallowed halls through the amenities they offer: climbing walls, monstrous gyms, student centers, etc. College professors sojourn at the pillory on Rate My Professor, an unofficial ranking system used by students to score their instructors, especially in terms of the ease of their classes or even how "hot" the instructors are. Research units continually strive and vie for funding from corporate entities.

This is not to say that educational institutions with traditional standards and placement practices are beyond criticism – far from it. After all, the annual Western Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation procedure ensures reflection on the part of administration of programs. The student success in the case of UC Riverside (as provided in this paper) was not attained by blindly adhering to procedures inherited from 1980; we compile data; we survey instructors and students; we gauge efficacy through multiple data points.

Any program—whether it be math, science, or writing—ought to not only have clearly defined standards and student outcomes, but they should also have a support mechanism in place for those students deemed lacking in reaching those expectations. DSP may be a reaction to unnuanced or ill-conceived programmatic decisions that place students in developmental courses without the scaffolding or even the expert voice to help them succeed. Does that mean that unsatisfactory writing has suddenly transformed into satisfactory? What might such a perilous approach herald in an era that celebrates the death of messengers rather than a commitment to understanding and addressing the scope of problems? How does DSP democratize colleges when it helps to take away the (costly) support mechanisms and scaffolds that some universities provide?

Conceivably, some college institutions may have placement exams but then fail to have the support mechanisms in place for students who find themselves in developmental courses. This flawed approach, most likely dictated by funding, places a student (and many institutions were using high school GPA) without providing the necessary scaffolds for success. However, some bright spots such as the corequisite models suggested by Becky Caoette may offer the necessary curricular choices and support mechanisms, especially for ESL students (Caouette); UC Riverside may work as a type of model (though imperfect) because administration has so far systematically supported writing by funding accurate placement activities, creating multiple tiers of developmental writing courses, and deploying the most experienced instructors to teach these developmental courses.

A common and powerful refrain found in CP and DSP is the need to honor the democratic process and student agency, and providing a platform for voice, equity, and racial justice is absolutely necessary (Poe, Inoue and Elliot; "Tyca White Paper on Placement Reform"). Plato's *Republic*, of course, presents "The Allegory of the Cave" for consideration, a model that relies on individual agency in an educational process to establish a state of enlightenment. Student agency is essential in the educational process, yet relying solely on student agency especially during the initial process of an educational journey is problematic. The reasoning seems to some extent to be circular. For a student to make an educated decision about receiving an education under the CP and DSP models requires students to have knowledge and an education through that knowledge. A kind of leapfrogging over expertise transpires in such a system. Lest one forget, the very word "education," derived from the Latin *educare* meaning to rear, suggests that leadership in a kind of parental capacity

is integral to agency. Without close guidance, especially in the initial stages like placement, education may devolve from purposeful direction through raising up to *errare* or the meandering activity one engages "to wander," again from the Latin.

Scholars of the history of academic institutions will likely look back on the DSP movement as a pivotal point in the change of the trajectory of academia. Indeed, DSP as a movement could be helpful to writing programs and the development of student writing skills if used properly, but one would be remiss if one did not recognize the full commitment of resources necessary for effective DSP or CP systems. Namely, universities would require a phalanx of experienced and highly trained counselors. For the most effective programs, students would need to spend weeks in actual classes before a final placement decision could be tendered.

In striving towards a more equitable vision of placement through DSP or CP, discussion could focus on institutions developing more transparent and fair grading systems for placement examinations, reviewing current procedures, developing surveys of students to measure the efficacy of instruction, providing increased professional development opportunities for instructors to better serve the developmental writing population, and imagining pilot programs that more closely approximate a student's Zone of Proximal Development (Miller) Vygotsky). All these are boons that, under the right circumstances, could be initiated by DSP.

In some ways, the important movement for antiracist pedagogy in rhetoric, writing, and communication has been simplified too much by the proponents of DSP, which results in debate on placement programs and English language fundamentals as English expression in an academic context that can lead to simplified accusations of racism. Students of the literary histories of higher education might spot the polemic language reminiscent of McCarthyism when labeling whole groups of people as perpetuating racism. And *Ad Hominem* attacks rarely lead to civilized debate as the goal—the central goal—which should always be perpetuating student success. Yet, this is the precise moment in time that the institution finds itself in; *will DSP lead to a productive debate that fosters improvements in support mechanisms for students or will invective on either side win the day?*

What should not be lost in the seismic shift occurring in higher education in terms of shifting standards, expectations, and calls for equity is the students. Our octogenarian "Johnny," who has yet to graduate college (and we remain hopeful he will), still needs assistance and support.

A slim hope exists that the movements to change English and writing curricula will provide this support in a reflective and inclusive manner, one that actually considers the many good ideas in the materials of The NCTE's Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English. The path to effective placement, though, should not be tethered to convenience or short cuts. Directed Self-Placement in writing sits squarely in the middle of the discussion of standards, skill-development, social mobility and equity, all of which can be improved through robust programs at colleges and universities that offer real pathways for students to develop.[i] Not incidentally, UC Riverside was named the #2 university in the U.S. in terms of social mobility in 2023 (#1 in 2022) by *U.S. News & World Report*.

The 2022 External Review of the University Writing Program at UCR reaffirms the important role of placement and institutional support:

> Reviewers were impressed by the way the sequence of courses catered to the needs of individual students and by the program's placement of these students in the appropriate courses. The overall emphasis on acquiring key skills is laudable and helps explain UCR's success at elevating its students. The statistics about student retention and graduation are admirable—indeed, they are enviable (Chisum, Vanhoutte and Zanzucchi).

The University Writing Program at UCR did pivot by introducing a CP review process, but more importantly, the administration has not only continued its extensive support for students in the form

of a scaffolded course sequence, it has extended this support. As of Fall 2025, UCR will having the following courses that cater to different writing ability levels of students: Writing 001, Writing 003, Writing 005, Writing 007, Writing 008, Writing 009.

All of these courses enable students to eventually fulfill the Entry-Level Writing Requirement and matriculate to regular freshman composition courses. *U.S. News and World Report* ranked UCR in the 1st or 2nd position nationwide in terms of social mobility, and one of the main keys for this remains the administration's support in fostering student knowledge and skill development—and this can be clearly seen in its support of writing. Directed Self-Placement puts the onus entirely on students to effectively evaluate their reading/writing level and place themselves accordingly. Student agency is incredibly important, but it should not come at the expense of the student.

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[i] IRB approval HS 21-050 entitled, "Review of research on directed self-placement and review of current practices involving students in placement in composition courses," is available upon request.

Resisting Dark Romanticism:
"Bartleby, the Scrivener" and the Modern Gothic Affect

Herman Melville has been cemented in the American canon as a Dark Romantic author, with most of his works challenging notions of individualism and its place in society. "Bartleby, the Scrivener," however, is an oddity among his other works, detailing a mundane story about a Wall Street copyist and how his narrator boss conceives of his presence. While recent scholarship has led to speculation regarding the meaning of Bartleby's protest, specifically in relation to the Occupy Wall Street movement from 2011, there has been almost no deep examination into the story's categorization as a Dark Romantic work. "Bartleby" challenges this genre because the story refuses the didactic and cathartic modes that would typically exist in Dark Romantic stories. No emotions are sudden nor are they surprising; the story's affect is distinct in its confrontation of modern, lingering feelings of dissatisfaction, such as ennui and anxiety. The affective qualities that "Bartleby" possesses move toward a primitive understanding of the "modern gothic" tradition that is grounded in tedious, yet terrifying, realism that the Dark Romantic genre is unable to show due to its dependence on cathartic release and sudden events.

"Bartleby" contains one main affective quality that separates it from other contemporary stories within its genre: "cruel optimism." Lauren Berlant defines "cruel optimism" as "the condition of maintaining a problematic attachment in advance of its loss" (21). "Bartleby" completely embodies cruel optimism in its affect; it is how the story denies a cathartic release in defiance of Dark Romantic tropes. Cruel optimism as an affective quality relies on routine that provides the subject reason to keep the attachment despite its problematic nature and anticipated loss (Berlant 21). Dark Romantic fiction evades the conditions of cruel optimism through its inherent grounding in the archaic cathartic mode, a psychologically disorienting setting, and a melancholic didacticism. Since cruel optimism demands a consistency of form, Dark Romanticism's muddled boundaries regarding cathartic release and event suddenness are incompatible. There is no expectation of attachment to the events or characters as the Dark Romantic story progresses, since its affective mode is geared toward a catharsis that demands a release of emotion by the story's end. Dark Romantic narratives are also inherently decisive in affect and do not meander on possibilities in the same manner as cruel optimism (Berlant 23). While most Dark Romantic fiction confronts darker human emotions, the confrontation is always meant to be didactic in its cathartic release—readers quit the story with a definitive lesson that leaves no room for speculation. Though "Bartleby" confronts all the same bleak themes relating to individualism and identity as seen in Dark Romantic fiction, its cruelly optimistic affect grants it nuanced emotions and attachments that test its genre categorization.

Cruel optimism is rife within the narrator's own relationship with Bartleby, rendering the copyist an object of his desire for more productivity as much as his desire to learn about him. His attachment is not driven by Dark Romantic tropes, such as monomania, but rather out of pragmatism. However, Melville's commentary on the loss of identity in a modern setting still holds true in the narrator's objectification of Bartleby for the sake of his business, as well as the attachment he has wrought to him. The narrator initially only conceives of Bartleby and his work

productivity in relation to the other copyists in the office (Melville 9-10). While the narrator takes note of Bartleby's uncanny productivity in his first three days of work, he only recognizes its importance once Bartleby utters his first refusal to look over his work (Melville 11-3). Bartleby's first refusal becomes an impasse that the narrator will not acknowledge in the wake of his usual routine, a reminder that he cannot "interfere with the varieties of immiseration" in the same way (Berlant 23). Each of Bartleby's subsequent refusals to reexamine his work forces the narrator to reevaluate his cruelly optimistic attachment to his productivity, bargaining his positive qualities against the "passive" ones he finds unfavorable (Melville 17). The narrator continues this internal debate of keeping him for his productivity, even supplanting his desire to know more of Bartleby's history to allow for more rumination (Melville 26-27). Bartleby's refusal to perform certain tasks is detrimental to the narrator's business, but he continues this problematic attachment and successive bargaining in the hopes that Bartleby might completely adhere to the narrator's desire for a productive office worker. The narrator's attachment to Bartleby as the ideal employee is thwarted by his declaration that he has "given up copying," forcing the narrator to fire him (Melville 30-1). While Bartleby's resignation creates another impasse with one of the narrator's desires, it does not end the attachment. Instead, their new relationship becomes the means in which the narrator simultaneously affirms and denies Bartleby's humanity in accordance with cruel optimism and Bartleby's semi-Gothic, mythicized affective qualities.

Though the narrator's kindness toward Bartleby after his ejection from his job can be rightfully construed as self-congratulatory and self-serving, it is also humanizing and dehumanizing The narrator pays Bartleby several kindnesses out of his concern for seeming like a "villain" for not doing so (Melville 27). He also uses religion to justify his attachment rather than acting out of altruism, attributing his "fraternal melancholy" to their status as "sons of Adam" (Melville 23). As such, the narrator maintains his detrimental attachment to Bartleby, his charity work and subsequent pity becoming the only means in which he recognizes Bartleby as a fellow human and not a "mechanical" employee (Melville 11). The narrator's charitable acts, however, only extend as far as giving Bartleby money in the hopes that he will leave the office completely (Melville 31-32). When the narrator returns the next day to find that he is still there, he is quick to revert to his initial dehumanization of Bartleby as his desirable object of capitalistic productivity (Melville 35). After the narrator asks him this, however, he returns to his initial religious obligations to humanize Bartleby again and make himself feel better about undertaking this attachment (Melville 35-37). Instead of hoping that Bartleby will be a better worker, the narrator displaces his desire hoping that this attachment improves his reputation when these events are recounted, as the exposition establishes that he is an older man (Melville 3). The narrator's attachment to Bartleby is not the same after Bartleby is arrested, but it continues with the narrator fluctuating between regarding his employee as a fellow human or as a strange, inhuman charity case to maintain his routine, as cruel optimism dictates.

Everything about Bartleby's characterization poises him as a semi-Gothic figure estranged in his modern setting, contrasting the cruelly optimistic affective qualities of the narrator. He resists most of the narrator's cruelly optimistic slings of attachment while never engaging cruel optimism himself. Bartleby straddles life and death in the way of Gothic creatures, such as Dracula or Frankenstein's monster, calling his humanness into question throughout the story. Even Bartleby's introduction to the story casts doubt over whether he is living, dead, or undead. Bartleby's configuration in the office, as well as his work ethic, also contributes to his semi-Gothic affect. He works behind a glass screen all day with no pauses for any sort of meal breaks like the narrator's other employees (Melville 11). The narrator also observes that Bartleby never seems to leave the office for any reason or eat at all, remaining a "perpetual sentry in the corner" (Melville 15-16). He also has no discernible hobbies or personal belongings other than a savings bank (Melville 24).

While all these factors indicate Bartleby's strangeness, his Gothic affect further intensifies the longer he remains in the office, with the narrator using more obvious terms to further demonstrate how "*he was always there*" (Melville 21). Once the narrator changes office, the new tenants observe Bartleby's behavior and how he "persists haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night" (Melville 42). While the narrator reaffirms Bartleby's humanity in the charity work that he attempts, his humanness is questionable with these descriptors, blurring the lines between life and death by consistently associating him with the latter. Even Bartleby's former job as a government dead letter writer cements this association, along with his ghostly character (Melville 50). It is reasonable for readers to presume Bartleby's humanity superficially, but presuming his *inhumanity* is also equally sensible. Bartleby's semi-Gothic affect, however, comes to its full narrative capacity at the novella's end, furthering Melville's modern outlook on themes of identity and individualism that complicate the Dark Romantic mold.

Bartleby's death on its own is not shocking since the narrative continuously associates him with death. What is surprising about his death is the confirmation that Bartleby *is human* after the reader has been kept in an affective limbo. The revelation of Bartleby's humanity through his death interrupts the continuous connections between the semi-Gothic and cruelly optimistic affects that have been established, generating this shock rather than a traditional catharsis (Massumi 97). The narrative's adherence to what Sianne Ngai deems "stuplimity" also aids in the affective qualities of the ending, leaving readers with the revelation that the same debasing effects that are wrought on them by modernity are not only perpetuated in their attachment to Bartleby, but also obfuscate their own deindividualization (2642). Regardless of the significance of Bartleby's protest, there's no lesson or change that can be gathered from the revelation the ending presents, leading to a final sense of "amoral, noncathartic" apathy (Ngai 2645). Under these continuous and monotonous conditions, Melville concludes that the optimism that individualism promises cannot sustain itself in a modern setting; it acquiesces to the dullness of routine with no hope of meaningful disruption to apathy.

The affective qualities of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" challenge its relation to the Dark Romantic genre, even though the themes that are covered are similar to the genre's conventions. Melville's deviation from this form depicts a more realistic, grounded narrative of the anxieties that come with the turn to a modern, post-capitalistic society. However, "Bartleby" provides no true release or solution to these social ills, leaving readers only with the combination of affects the story maintains until its end. Bartleby's semi-Gothic affect juxtaposed against the narrator's cruelly optimistic affect not only generate the crux of Melville's social critique, but it also becomes a framework for modern understandings of the Gothic tradition that are not fulfilled by Dark Romanticism. While genre is not necessarily limiting to a literary work on its own, the confining of authors within certain genres can be constraining when it comes to discussions and questions of categorization. Attention to details such as affect in conjunction with a work's thematic elements can—and will—lead to more productive analyses of genre categorization while expanding diversity within various literary canons. "Bartleby, the Scrivener" is only the start of that affective and effective dialogue.

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Karen Ferreira-Meyers

Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion Through the Use of AI Tools, Applications, and Techniques:
A Voice from Southern Africa

Introduction

Diversity in higher education refers to the presence of individuals from various backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, disability status, and other characteristics that contribute to a heterogeneous learning community. Diversity encompasses recognizing, accepting, and celebrating differences among students, faculty, and staff. Other than describing the empirical variety of a population, the term diversity also describes measures taken to increase (and/or to valorize the existing) diversity within a given context. In the United States, for example, "the diversity approach aims to give space to a larger variety of social profiles existing in society without establishing a strict proportionality" (Escafre-Dublet 11).

Inclusion in higher education refers to creating an environment that actively welcomes and supports the participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds (Donohue and Bornman). Inclusion involves creating a sense of belonging and providing equitable opportunities for all members of the learning community to fully engage in all aspects of academic and social life, regardless of their differences (Fink and Hummel).

In some countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners. It presumes that the aim is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability (Ainscow par 16).

Inclusive education "involves a process that is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers to the presence, participation and achievement of all students" (Ainscow et al. 3).

Diversity and inclusion are critical aspects of higher education in Southern Africa, where diverse populations with different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds are present (Klarsfeld). Various studies such as those by McKinney and Swartz or Kanyopa discuss diversity and inclusion in Southern Africa. One such study by Dennis A. Francis et al. addressed inclusivity in education by examining how gender and sexuality diversity is responded to in schools in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland (now called Eswatini). The researchers collaborating in the study argued that if educational institutions in the region are to include all learners, there has to be real engagement with the ongoing realities of exclusion and marginalization. The findings of this particular study indicated the need for teacher education to intensify efforts to prepare teachers in the region to comfortably and professionally engage with and teach about issues of gender and sexuality diversity in the classroom (Francis et al. 6). Embracing diversity and promoting inclusion in higher education can have far-reaching benefits, including addressing historical inequalities, fostering social cohesion, enhancing the quality of education, creating

opportunities for underrepresented groups, promoting critical thinking, and facilitating a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives[i]. In this context, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) tools can play a valuable role in promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education in Southern Africa, encompassing various aspects such as outreach and recruitment, admissions and selection, universal design for learning (Ferguson et al. 6), personalized learning, content creation and curation, bias detection and mitigation, and accessibility. This paper explores potential for AI tools to foster diversity and inclusion in higher education in Southern African countries.

Southern Africa is a region known for its diversity, encompassing a multitude of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds highlighted by Jarkko Saarinen and Christian M. Rogerson. Christopfer Stroud and Kathleen Heugh confirmed this. Inclusive higher education that values and embraces this diversity can contribute to building a more just and inclusive society, where all individuals have equal access to education and opportunities for success, regardless of their background. AI tools in general and assistive technologies have emerged as promising technologies that can be harnessed to promote diversity and inclusion in higher education by addressing various challenges and barriers that hinder equitable access to education and opportunities (Ahmad 64).

This paper delves into the applications and techniques of AI tools that can contribute to promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education in Southern Africa. It explores how AI tools can be employed in different facets of higher education, including outreach and recruitment, admissions and selection, personalized learning, content creation and curation, bias detection and mitigation, and accessibility. By examining the potential of AI tools in these areas, this paper highlights how AI can assist in ensuring diversity and inclusion in higher education in Southern African countries while also considering potential challenges, ethical considerations, and best practices. Ultimately, integrating AI tools in higher education in Southern Africa can foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment that benefits all students, irrespective of their background.

Methodology

This study used a two-pronged research method. The two-pronged approach combining a literature review and secondary data analysis allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge and existing research on AI tools, applications, and techniques related to diversity and inclusion in higher education. The second reason for using this approach was that it allowed the researcher to identify specific AI tools, applications, and techniques proposed or implemented in the context of diversity and inclusion in higher education, with a focus on the Southern African region. By using this research methodology, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic and identify relevant AI tools, applications, and techniques that could potentially contribute to promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions in Southern Africa. I thus identified key AI tools, applications, and techniques that have been proposed or used in the context of diversity and inclusion in higher education in Southern Africa after conducting a review of the existing literature and research on AI tools, applications, and techniques related to diversity and inclusion in higher education from relevant peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, books, reports, and other scholarly sources.

What AI Can Do at Different Levels of Higher Education

According to Stefan Popenici and Sharon Kerr, artificial intelligence offers great potential for different aspects of higher education, in particular in the areas of outreach and recruitment,

admission and selection, personalized learning, content creation and curation, among other essential higher education elements (22).

Regarding outreach and recruitment, scholars indicated that AI-powered chatbots can be used to engage with prospective students from diverse backgrounds, provide information about educational opportunities, and address their questions and concerns in a personalized and accessible manner, for example through nudging (Page et al. 3). Jesse Anne Boeding noted that "the AI backbone of the chatbots is built on intentions and demands cultivated by the entire campus" (iv). Such tools can help increase access to higher education for underrepresented groups and facilitate enrollment. Similarly, admission and selection processes can be automated using AI tools. These tools can ensure fair, transparent, and unbiased processes even though bias and discrimination exist, too[ii]. For example, AI algorithms can analyze student applications and assess them based on objective criteria, such as academic achievements and skills, in principle, without biases related to gender, race, or other protected characteristics. However, these processes must be handled with care and human intervention is needed to mitigate bias[iii].

The main improvement AI can provide in higher education is that of personalized learning[iv]. According to Wafaa S. Sayad et al., it is possible to tailor educational content and learning experiences to individual needs and preferences through AI-powered adaptive learning platforms[v]. Consequently, different learning abilities, language capabilities, and cultural backgrounds can be accommodated, as Xieling Chen et al. showed. Hopefully, improved usage of AI for personalized learning will ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

Another important aspect of AI in higher education relates to content creation and curation[vi]. Today, AI tools have the potential to create and curate diverse and inclusive educational content that reflects the local culture, history, and perspectives of Southern Africa. These tools offer ways to meticulously adapt content in real-time to the learning pace, preferences, and needs (e.g., cognitive, affective, social) of each user. For example, AI-powered language processing tools can facilitate translation and localization (Nye 195) of educational materials into different languages spoken in the region, making education more accessible to students who are not fluent in English, French, or Portuguese. In "A Proposed Artificial Intelligence-Based Real-Time Speech-to-Text to Sign Language Translator for South African Official Languages for the COVID-19 Era and Beyond: In Pursuit of Solutions for the Hearing Impaired," the authors analyzed text-to-speech tools for all 12 official languages in South Africa and noted the need for further development of such applications (Madahana et al. par 10). In "Systematic Review of AI-based Language Learning Tools", Jin Ha Woo and Heeyoul Choi discussed various AI-based language learning tools developed between 2017 and 2020. These tools utilized machine learning and natural language processing to identify errors, provide feedback, and assess language abilities. In their review, Woo and Heeyoul searched for articles discussing AI tools for reading, writing, listening and speaking. We can give the following examples of such tools Duolingo, Write & Improve, LinguaChef, and LingoBot. Others are Busuu, Speexx, Memrise, Magiclingua. The AI tool development is rapid: every day new tools and applications are proposed to the market.

The link between AI and Big Data is also highlighted. Big data refers to datasets that are too large or complex for traditional data-processing applications or software to handle efficiently. These datasets are characterized by their high volume, rapid velocity, and diverse variety. In the last few decades, the use and accessibility of corpora (this is the plural of corpus and they are defined as large collections of electronically stored written or spoken texts) have emerged as a significant development in language technologies. Its utility has become so widespread that corpora use has become commonplace in various fields, ranging from fundamental linguistic research to the creation of textbooks and dictionaries. While the adoption of corpora in instructed language learning has been slower, there are indications that it is gradually gaining traction (Goldwin-Jones 5).

Nevertheless, AI tools receive criticism as the way they have been set up and "trained" has already led to bias and discrimination. But it is also possible to use AI tools to detect and mitigate bias in educational materials, assessments, and evaluations (Akgun and Greenbow 4). For instance, AI algorithms can analyze textbooks, exams, and other educational resources for biased language, (mis)representation, or examples, and provide feedback to instructors and curriculum developers for improvement.

Accessibility and inclusivity remain important challenges in the Southern African region (Hlalele and Alexander 487). In addition to using Universal Design for Learning, instructional designers have AI-powered accessibility tools at their disposal (Walton and Engelbrecht). Examples such as text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and image recognition tools, but also web accessibility (Abou-Zahra et al. 1–3) and cognitive accessibility tools (Miesenberg et al. 542) give students with disabilities access to educational materials and allow them to fully participate in learning activities.

Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion in Southern African Higher Education Institutions Through AI Development and Deployment

Several AI tools and techniques can be used to ensure diversity and inclusion in various aspects of AI development and deployment. There are tools that can be used for bias detection and mitigation such as IBM AI Fairness 360, Google's What-If Tool, Amazon SageMaker Fairness Bias Detector, and Microsoft's Fairlearn. These tools use machine-learning algorithms to detect and mitigate bias in AI models. They can help identify and address bias related to gender, race, age, and other protected characteristics in training data, model predictions, and outcomes. Fairness analysis tools and bias mitigation techniques are crucial in higher education for fostering a just and equitable learning environment. These tools help identify and address potential biases within algorithms used in admissions processes, course recommendations, and even automated grading systems. This ensures fairer evaluation, prevents biased limitations on student opportunities, and promotes a more inclusive learning atmosphere. By mitigating bias in AI-powered systems, higher education institutions can create a level playing field where all students are assessed objectively, have access to diverse learning materials, and feel valued regardless of background. Furthermore, employing these tools fosters transparency in how student data is used and decisions are made, building trust within the academic community. Ultimately, addressing bias through such techniques allows higher education to move towards a future where equal opportunities and a supportive learning environment empower all students to thrive.

Other useful AI tools to improve diversity and inclusion in higher education are those used for data collection and annotation tools. AI tools such as Open Data Kit (ODK), DataTurks, and Scale AI have the potential to facilitate data collection from diverse sources, enable data annotation with respect to various demographic characteristics, and thus ensure a balanced representation of different groups in the data.

Another set of recent but useful tools for teachers and learners are Explainable AI (XAI) tools which aim to make AI models more transparent and explainable (Khosravi et al. par 9). XAI tools provide insights into how AI models make decisions, highlight potential biases in model predictions, and facilitate the interpretability of complex AI algorithms. Examples of XAI tools include LIME, SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations), and IBM AI Explainability 360. XAI tools complement other accessibility tools such Microsoft's Seeing AI, Google's TalkBack, and IBM Accessibility Checker.

Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools such as OpenAI's GPT-4, Google's Gemini, Standford's CoreNLP can help ensure diversity and inclusion in language-related AI applications.

They can detect and mitigate biased language, promote inclusive language usage, and facilitate translation and interpretation for diverse languages and cultures.

AI-powered decision support tools potentially ensure diversity and inclusion in decision-making processes. These tools are able to provide insights, recommendations, and simulations to assess the potential impact of decisions on different groups, identify potential biases, and promote fair and equitable decision-making. Examples of AI-powered decision support tools include IBM Watson Discovery, Microsoft's Decision Service, and DataRobot. Little research has been undertaken on these decision-support tools in the education sector. Of note, however, is the paper entitled "Systematic Review of Research on Artificial Intelligence Applications in Higher Education—Where Are the Educators?", where the authors Olaf Zawacki-Richter at al. focus on such decision-support AI tools as profiling and prediction for admissions decisions and course scheduling, drop-out and retention, student models, and academic achievement.

All these tools, applications, and techniques can be important in ensuring diversity and inclusion in higher education. But, while AI tools can be helpful in promoting diversity and inclusion, they are not a standalone solution. To ensure that AI tools, applications, and techniques are developed and ethically used, human stakeholders and experts in higher education institutions have to oversee the implementation of these tools so that diverse perspectives can be upheld (Crawford et al., 7, 11). For this, constant evaluation as part of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education in Southern Africa is essential.

To be able to evaluate, there first needs to be full awareness about the existence of these tools which, at present, is limited. This also means that uptake is restricted, and it becomes difficult to have an evidence-based view of what obtains when it comes to the use of AI in Southern African education sectors, in general, and in language learning environments, in particular.

Conclusion

While the winds of change are blowing in Southern Africa's higher education sector, with a growing awareness of AI tools and techniques, the journey towards widespread implementation remains riddled with challenges. Recent research studies paint a picture of a region brimming with potential yet facing significant hurdles.On the positive side, recognition of AI's potential is gaining momentum. The development of policies addressing ethical considerations surrounding AI use in educational settings reflects a proactive approach towards responsible integration.

However, significant roadblocks lie ahead. The existing digital divide, as emphasized in research like "A Contextualized View of Learning with Technology in Higher Education," presents a formidable obstacle. Limited access to technology and infrastructure creates an uneven playing field, hindering the widespread adoption of AI tools across the region. Financial constraints further exacerbate the situation, as studies like "South African University Students' Use of AI-Powered Tools for Engaged Learning" reveal. Universities often lack the resources required to acquire and implement sophisticated AI solutions.

Compounding these challenges is a scarcity of skilled personnel. The *AI Ethics in Higher Education: Insights from Africa and Beyond* book underscores the limited expertise available to develop, maintain, and manage AI systems effectively. This lack of human capital acts as a bottleneck, impeding the progress of comprehensive AI integration.

Looking ahead, navigating these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach. Bridging the digital divide through infrastructural development and improved access to technology is crucial. Investing in capacity building programs to equip faculty and staff with the necessary skills to utilize and develop AI tools is essential. Furthermore, prioritizing ethical considerations by establishing

robust frameworks to address issues like bias, transparency, and privacy in AI applications within educational contexts needs to be addressed.

Despite these hurdles, some promising trends are emerging. A shift towards targeted applications of AI is gaining traction. Research suggests a focus on utilizing AI tools for specific purposes, such as administrative tasks like plagiarism detection and student support services, as highlighted in "Artificial Intelligence for Africa: Emerging Challenges." Additionally, efforts are underway to seamlessly integrate AI tools with existing learning management systems, promoting a more cohesive technological ecosystem within educational institutions, as emphasized in "A Contextualized View of Learning with Technology in Higher Education."

In conclusion, AI tools and techniques can significantly ensure diversity and inclusion in Southern African higher education institutions. Bias detection and mitigation, data collection and annotation, Explainable AI (XAI) tools, natural language processing (NLP) tools, and AI-powered decision support tools are some examples of AI applications that can facilitate diversity and inclusion. According to OECD (2020), there are a few hurdles to implementing AI in education. The first obstacle is building and preserving confidence in AI systems. This challenge is particularly important in education as it significantly impacts people's future employment and life prospects. Transparency and accountability are crucial aspects of AI systems in education. The second challenge is ensuring that AI systems prioritize human-centered values and safeguard personal data. In addition, AI tools are not a standalone solution and require the oversight of human stakeholders with diverse perspectives to ensure ethical and responsible implementation.

Continuous evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions in Southern Africa are crucial for the effective implementation of these AI tools and techniques. By working together, Southern African higher education institutions can harness the potential of AI to promote diversity and inclusion and foster a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. Focusing on targeted applications, addressing the digital divide, building local expertise, and prioritizing ethical considerations are crucial steps towards a more comprehensive and responsible integration of AI tools in the region's educational landscape. It's important to remember that the situation is not uniform across Southern African countries, with some nations likely being further ahead in their AI adoption journey compared to others. In addition, augmented research and development efforts tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the region are necessary to ensure the successful and sustainable integration of AI in Southern African higher education.

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[i] Most research in this field has been undertaken in South Africa, for example: Engelbrecht et al., Badat, and Smith. This does, however, not mean that inclusion is the end-all solution, as can be read in Engelbrecht et al.

[ii] On the issue of legal recourse against AI bias, see, for example, Zuiderveen, Frederik and Busuioc.

[iii] On the issue of bias and mitigation of bias, there are many studies. Here are a few of them: Deshpande, Ketki, Shimei and Foulds, Raghavan et al., Regan and Jesse.
 See, among others, Dhawan and Batra.

[iv] For a systematic overview of the literature on this subject, see, *inter alia*, Kabudi, Ilias and Olsen, and Alam.

[v] On the question of content development, see Chassignol et al. On the question of language teaching and learning using AI, see Kessler.

Jane Austen: From Androcentrism to Anthropocentrism

> Here's what may tranquillize every care and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of nature were more attended to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.
> —Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*.

The natural world was of special significance to early nineteenth century British novelists. They recognized a structural parallel between male dominance and the exploitation of nature at the time. Jane Austen, the keen observer of nature, investigated this correlation by examining the way the upper class interacted with their natural surroundings. Tree cutting, greenhouse enclosures, projects of improvements, and picturesque landscaping fueled her concern as they were constantly pursued by members of the upper class. She maps out her views of nature as innocent greenery full of vigor and vibrancy but also as something subject to human manipulation. This manipulation stemmed from the environmental preferences of the upper class, which interrupted the natural development of soil, rivers, hills, and natural meadows. At the heart of this is the anthropogenic effect, where human influence has a negative effect on the environment. At the same time, androcentrism, which centers society around the male perspective, is examined due to the connection between the way the upper class dominate and shape how nature is structured in relation to male influence.

Deborah Slicer's questioning of androcentrism as a form of oppression preceding anthropocentricism, where she examines the role of androcentrism in instigating environmental oppression in early nineteenth-century England, inspired this study. She writes, "What could it mean to say that androcentrism rather than anthropocentricism is the root of our environmental and other social problem or that it constitutes 'the oldest of oppression'" (30). She then argues that "one form of oppression preceding the other does not establish a causal link," but it is "the material conditions associated with the first oppression, in this case androcentrism led to the second, anthropocentricism" (30). In this case, it is safe to argue that the attitude of the male members of the upper class at the time, where their existence was prioritized above all other forms of life (i.e. androcentrism) informed their attitudes towards nature. This led to their exploitation of nature (i.e. anthropocentricism). To this respect, androcentric-propelled anthropocentrism places environmentalism at the forefront of critical analysis of Austen's novels. The questions to be asked, then, are: can Austen's novels be treated as models of anti-androcentric/anti-anthropocentric literature? Are they fit for modern and complex environmental analyses? And, most importantly, can her novels unveil the absence of environmental ethics as they culminate in a trajectory of androcentric-propelled anthropocentrism?

It is worth noting that Austen was never aware of terms like "environment," "anthropocentrism," or "androcentrism." These words were not part of early nineteenth century

literary or scientific lexicon, nor were they included in Samuel Johnson's dictionary (1775).[i] Yet, the relevance of these terms when studying Austen need not depend on their contemporary usage. Her concern for the alterations occurring in her natural environment were not expressed through specific environmental jargons or terminologies of explicit environmental bearings, but through her keen observations of the changes that transformed her environment. She reported these observations in narratives that reflect the literal meaning of nature subjugation and sometimes nature oppression. As indicated in the epigraph, Austen critiqued human-centric perspectives that prioritized the domination of nature and encouraged a shift towards more sustainable and harmonious coexistence so there would be "less wickedness [and] sorrow in the world" (80). This notion will aid in applying an ecocritical analysis to Austen's novels, an approach that has been highly contested since many would argue that her fiction does not have a specific environmental focus.

Austen's insights into the alterations that reshaped her natural environment are better understood when we consider the economic and political changes that affected her society. Austen wrote her novels during a period marked by the passage of the Enclosure Acts in England, Parliamentary acts spanning from 1730 to 1839. These had a great impact on land ownership and agricultural practice in England. Approximately 4000 Acts of Enclosure reshaped the distribution of open land and land ownership was transformed from communal ownership to the consolidated control of wealthy landowners. The ramifications of these acts were profound; estate owners were granted significant advantages and privileges. They gained the right to exercise unprecedented control over vast expanses of land. They dictated land use, implemented agricultural innovations, and maximized land profits through aggressive management practices. Austen was keenly aware of the repercussions of these practices. Her insights were shaped by firsthand observations, which she conveyed through the nuanced interactions and experiences of her characters. In the light of this argument, this paper aims to open a critical vantage point on projects of improvement, picturesque landscaping, and greenhouse structures, and to examine their impact on the natural environments depicted in *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Abbey*. The objective is to contextualize these novels within the framework of anthropocentrism as influenced by male-centric attitudes, thereby demonstrating the novels' sensitivity to the environmental changes that occurred in the world in which they were produced.

Austen's heroines often express their objections to nature manipulation in ways that articulate a clear message about the cultural and economic dynamics that treat nature as a mere commodity. Deforestation emerges as a recurring theme in all three novels and Austen presented it as the byproduct of projects of improvement. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny laments the cutting down of Sotherton's trees, which stretch over seven hundred acers of land for estate improvement. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is dismayed by the vast expanse of land replaced by an entire village of greenhouses. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne resents her brother's tendencies to fell trees to create a pleasure garden and an elaborate greenhouse. Yet, since the fate of the land rests in the hands of the upper-class men, women's opinions are often disregarded and sidelined.

In *Mansfield Park*, Mr. Rushworth plans a major improvement project for his Sotherton Court estate. This project will involve a restructuring of 700 acres of open land and a felling of a whole avenue of "oak [trees] entirely" (60). Fanny is the only person who mourns the loss of these historic trees; no other family members share her empathy: "What a pity! Does not that make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenue once more I mourn your fate unmerited'" (41).[ii] Despite being aware of her inability to enact change, her sadness reflects an implicit call for the preservation of nature. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer points out, when Fanny "looks out of windows and sees the sublime; she quotes Cowper against cutting down trees; she is a preserver" (613). This preservationist's eye often encounters resistance from a generically androcentric force. Edmund Bertram denies Fanny's sympathy and opposes her ideals. His response: "I am afraid the avenue

does not stand a chance" (41) is fueled by the authority vested in him and Mr. Rushworth as privileged wealthy males and a systemic bias favoring men and their viewpoints over those of women.

Improvement, in this sense, becomes an act of commercialism carried out by the elite to maximize the quality and profitability of their properties. Raymond Williams defines two types of improvements, which he believes to be historically connected, "there is the improvement of soil, stock, yield in a working agriculture. And there is the improvement of houses, parks, artificial landscape" (115). The upper class values both types: the first helps accentuate and expand their mobility and the second, which Williams attributes to their ownership of "agriculture enclosure" (96), leads to the increase of their wealth. Improvement goes hand-in-hand with the selling and buying of land, and with modernizing historically valuable estates. This, in fact, prompts an ecological debate over the moral responsibility of the gentry or, as defined by Jonathan Bate the "improvers" (549) whose environmental philosophy assesses nature as their "personal gardens" (549). This philosophy perpetuates a desire for rural manipulation resulting in extensive landscaping modifications. Compton, another grand estate owned by Mr. Smith, a close friend of Mr. Rushworth, underwent significant renovation and was hailed by Mr. Rushworth as the epitome of rural elegance: "I wish you could see Compton. It is the most complete thing! I never saw a place so altered in my life. I told Smith I did not know where I was. The approach now is one of the most finest things in the country: you see the house in the most surprising manner" (39). The richness of the countryside and the authentic feature of the landscape do not hold value in Mr. Rushworth view. The place is "the most finest" because of its modern alteration and standing exclusivity.

The gentry's obsession with the pleasure of rural sophistication speaks to their relentless effort to redesign and renovate their properties. It is a trend that transforms rural landscapes or properties into spaces that exude luxury, taste, and high societal status. Hence, they depend on landscape architects to fulfill this obsession by seeking aesthetic layouts that turn the very existence of nature into pretentious and artificial space. Kim Wilson suggests that by the time Austen was writing her novels, "a more decorative design of landscape is very much desired and works of landscape designers like Kent, Brown, and Humphrey Repton are in great demand." This fashionable trend is called a picturesque landscaping, which is a landscape design that enlarge the grand vision of picturesque by removing original plants and trees and adding decorative shrubberies and flower beds. Wilson notes, "Kent, Brown and other early improvers removed so much in the way of ornament from the landscape that the effect was rather bald, with houses rising abruptly from smooth, bare lawns decorated only with clumps of trees" (28). Landscape designers removed such a significant number of natural trees and plants that the resulting effect was stark. Property owners may believe that the visual appeal of their properties was enhanced, but significant changes affected their identity and overall sense of place.

The declining reverence for nature is evident in Austen's critical portrayal of the gentry's growing preference for improvement and picturesque landscaping. This preference was so widespread that it even affected her immediate surroundings. During her visit to Adlestrop Park, a grand estate owned by her uncle Thomas Leigh in Adlestrop village, she witnessed how it underwent major alteration carried out by Repton.[iii] This renovation was driven by a vision that culminated in serious topographical changes, one referred to by Bate as having "catastrophic ecological consequence" (136). Her uncle opened the grounds between his estate and the neighboring rectory to create one large park. He constructed a waterfall that went through an artificial flower garden while enclosing the neighboring village and walling off its natural greenery. Claire Tomalin sheds light on the high-handed dealings of those who control and manipulate nature: "This last part of the scene can hardly have been considered much of an improvement by the villagers; but they were powerless against the combined power of Repton, fashion, and their landlord" (199). The three

forms of power, highlighted by Tomlin, influenced the conditions under which Adelstrop Park could thrive and the villagers' perception of the Park. Leigh's enhancements bestowed a distinguished identity upon the estate, one that exploited vulnerable nature and disregarded the plight of helpless villagers.

Mary Berry, Austen's contemporary, was invited to Stoneleigh Abbey, another estate owned by Thomas Leigh. She visited Stoneleigh four years after Austen's visit to Adlestrop Park. She regarded any estate that was not transformed by landscape designers or untrammeled by artificial taste as a state "unspoiled by improvement" (433). In her journal, dated Oct 6, 1810, she wrote that "if this park shows some marks of neglect, it is at least, unspoiled by improvement." (434).[iv] Mary was aware that Stoneleigh was "a clumsy house" (433), but she appreciated its natural surroundings and the magnificent trees that adorned its 12,000 acres. She also knew that these trees would eventually be cut down, as they harbored "a magnificent possession of real wealth" (433). At the same time, Repton was tasked with improving Stoneleigh and he would implement picturesque designs that would disregard authentic shrubberies or historical trees.

William Cowper, Austen's contemporary and a poet whom she frequently references in her novels, expressed similar discontent with the fashionable alteration of nature. In a poem titled "The Garden" in his book *The Task*[v] (1785), Cowper made a sarcastic reference to the works of landscape designers like Brown, who possessed a sweeping capability for refashioning the English countryside: "The Lake in front becomes a lawn / Woods vanish, hills subside, and valleys rise / and streams, as if created for his use" (774-76). Cowper's discontent with this entire project is attested in the name he gives Brown in the previous lines "Lo! he comes—the omnipotent magician, Brown appears" (765-66). Only a magician has the ability to orchestrate the subsiding, disappearance, and vanishing of important features of nature. Cowper's disapproval of this capacity unveils an environmental awareness shared by Austen and Berry and translated into critical observations of nature. When Austen's contemporaries explore similar themes in their own works, they not only assert the prevalence of the problem but also the validity and the relevance of her insights.

Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* contributes, in some great extent, to the documentation of the ecological impact of the project of improvement. John Dashwood intends to enhance the Norland estate by removing historic walnut trees and old bushes that excessively "grew in patches over the brow" (185). His plans include not only the construction of artificial gardens but also greenhouse structures, which require using extensive amounts of fuel, labor, and raw material. Greenhouses were part of the horticultural interests and practices that were popular at the time. It was a cultural fashion initially fostered by the androcentric preferences of the elite and has had enduring anthropogenic effects on air, land, and plant species. Austen was a critic of greenhouse projects. She depicted them as enterprises that resulted in the felling of hundreds of trees. Jesse Oak Taylor in his article, "Realism After Nature Reading the Green House Effect in Bleaks House Greenhouses" describes greenhouses as "the quintessential habitat of the Anthropocene" (23). He considers them a technology that produces plants far from their native habitat thus creating nature apart from itself.[vi] The impact of greenhouses (also called "glasshouses" or "hothouses") is seen in the way the buildings complicate the stability of nature since plants are forced to adapt and perform the same laws of nature while growing in artificial climate. It is also seen in the toxic emission and heavy use of raw materials to maintain a tropical climate for exotic plants. Nonetheless, greenhouses remained a potent symbol of wealth and the gentry invested in the way it positioned their estates as hallmarks of wealth and taste.

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny takes pleasures in tending to her little geraniums growing in the east room, Mansfield Park's former schoolroom. She cares for them by ensuring that the room maintains a tropical temperature. At the same time, Mrs. Grant tries to make "a choice collection of plants and poultry" (41) at Mansfield Parsonage and worries about their exposure to frosty weather. Deidre

Shauna Lynch claims that these plants are "tender specimens in pots, since we listen in as she worries about the plants' possible exposure, should they be left outdoors, to the November frost that may terminate an unseasonably warm and protracted autumn" (712). The references to how to accommodate and protect the plants in Mansfield's greenhouse speak volumes to the importance placed on aesthetics and leisure pursuits within upper-class society of the time. For the wealthy elite depicted in Mansfield Park and similar settings, the focus on landscape aesthetics was not regulated by concern for environmental damage or poor stewardship. In fact, their pursuits often prioritize showcasing their status and sophistication.

In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, Catharine Morland is disheartened to observe the vast expanse of land that was cleared to make a space for an entire village of greenhouses:

> The number of acres contained in this garden was such as Catherine could not listen to without dismay, being more than double the extent of all Mr. Allen's, as well as her father's, including church-yard and orchard. The walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the enclosure. (167)

Northanger Abbey is a grand estate nestleed in the heart of a rich meadow and "a grove of ancient oaks" (160). Its antiquated beauty is dominated by General Tilney who exploited much of its resource to bolster his self-celebratory endeavors. His numerous hothouses, however, indicate bad management and uncontrolled subjugation of nature. Robert Kern attributes humans' unregulated management of nature to the tyranny of their willpower. He argues, "how much management is too much, and what balance to strike between giving nature free rein and imposing our will upon it— clearly persist into our own time in which they have become even more urgent" (17). General Tilney asserted his dominance over nature by presenting the greenhouses as sites of unregulated experimentations and trials.[vii]

Other female writers, apart from Austen, pondered the motivations behind the construction of greenhouses on the properties of wealthy estate owners. A prime example is Ann Radcliffe's novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, written in 1794, where St. Aubert is a member of the gentry who possesses a grand estate complete with an attached greenhouse. Stored in this greenhouse were "scarce and beautiful plants: for one of [his] amusements … was the study of botany and among the neighbouring mountains, which afforded a luxurious feast to the mind of the naturalist, he often passed the day in the pursuit of his favorite science" (6). He also wanted his daughter, Emily, to be an observer and an analyst of nature. He taught her to study the attributes of the rare and exotic plants that were growing in the greenhouse. She was able to appreciate every botanical aspect and drew conclusions about each plant.[viii] She did this for the sole purpose of learning and gaining knowledge about nature. But the position of the greenhouse as adjacent to her house, which was already set as a laboratory site, raised questions about the actual use of the greenhouse. What was the purpose of her learning? Was it for studying or reordering nature? Was it for cultivating or taming nature? Was it for production or reinventing? Was it for educational or commercial gains? These are the kinds of questions that challenge the motivations of estate owners who perceive nature as adaptable and modifiable.

These questions circle back to Edward Ferrars's perception, in *Sense and Sensibility*, which is grounded in similar motivations. During his ramble in the woods of Barton Valley, Marianne tries to draw his attention to the rustic beauty of Barton's hills: "Look up it, and be tranquil if you can. Look at those hills. Did you ever see their equals?" (73), but Ferrars's perception cannot conceive a healthy picture of nature during wintertime. The muddy condition of the lanes located at the bottom of the valley when it rains disrupts their usefulness and make their efficacy contingent on weather conditions. His admiration of the fine prospect of nature is not based on organic principles; all elements have to be flourishing, blooming, and most importantly, useful. He says "I do not like

crooked twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watchtower—and a troop of tidy happy villagers pleases me better than the finest banditti in the world" (81). Ferrars's idea of a fine countryside is one that finesses "beauty and utility" (80); the woods must be full of fine timber, the valleys should be rich with thick meadows, and the farmhouses should be bustling with inhabitants.

In a sharp contrast, Marianne perceives the historic tree in Norland estate as a symbol of permanence ever immune to exploitation. "And you, ye well-known trees! – but you will continue the same—No leaf will decay because we are removed, nor any branch become motionless … you will continue the same; unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade!" (23). Readers are further reminded of this everlasting quality when she emphasizes, "no leaf will decay" and "nor any branch become motionless" (23). This resilience embodies a natural forest that is impervious to alteration and, certainly, indifferent to human disturbances. This is Austen's way of holding the gentry responsible for viewing nature as measurable, malleable, and functional. She opposed the construction of greenhouses, mourned the cutting down of trees, and criticized picturesque landscape gardening. Conversely, she pondered natural landscapes, admired hills and valleys, and championed the preservation of nature.

Austen's valuation of nature is, as Kathleen Anderson terms it, "a practical, strategic work of preservationist stewardship," (91). Yet, by way of highlighting the consequences of nature exploitation, she presented male characters such as Edward Ferrara, John Dashwood, and General Tilney as the exploitative conduits whose vision lacked acknowledgment of their place within nature. Barbara Wenner explains this vision by observing that the gaze at nature takes a self-awareness approach that for men is driven by the social dynamic of power relations. In other words, their gaze is one of utilization and control: "When an eighteenth-century male with a background in the gentry gazes on the landscape he frames it in a way that objectifies it and indicate its potential for control" (4). This gaze reflects not only a societal conditioning but also a mindset shaped by historical power structures. These dynamics bolster the androcentric attitude that also turns the gentry's manipulation of the land into anthropogenic accounts of poor husbandry.

Lawmakers and public stakeholders played a significant role in shaping this androcentric-anthropogenic connection with the land. The 4000 Acts of Enclosure that were passed by the parliament solidified the elites' control over nature.[ix] These laws were enacted with the intention of consolidating open fields and common pasture into unified units. Yet, they resulted in significant alterations to the topography of the overall landscape and, in the process, exacerbated the wealth disparity by enriching a small segment of society while impoverishing villagers and laborers. The systemic degradation of land lingered for decades. Approximately six million acres of open land were enclosed giving power to estate owners to change open-field villages, marginal land, common areas, and heaths.

Jerome Blum's examination of the costs associated with enclosures and the extensive labor required to make them operational reveals the economic intricacies and labor-intensive processes involved in establishing functional enclosures. He notes that in addition to implementing "heavy soils improvements [which] had to wait until cheap sub-soil drainage became available" (503), enclosure owners had to "give … six months to fence and ditch the perimeters of their allotments, put in some 90 miles of hedge and about 180 miles of wood fence to protect the hedges until they grew strong enough to withstand cattle" (489). Blum further adds that, "Besides the allotments to the owners of land and of common rights, the commissioners had to set aside land for roads, drains, and gravel pits for road repair" (490). These measures needed to be applied across millions of acres to ensure proper infrastructure development and maintenance across vast rural landscapes.

Although Austen's novels do not overtly reference Enclosure Acts, they offer insights into the societal and economic shifts brought about by these legislative measures, particularly concerning land ownership, inheritance, and social mobility. In *Sense and Sensibility,* the Dashwood sisters are compelled to vacate their home due to the transfer of the family estate to their half-brother. While Enclosure Acts are not directly mentioned, this event underscores the economic and social ramifications of alterations in land ownership and inheritance patterns. Austen's mention of modifications made to Adelstrop Park and the anticipated remodeling of Stoneleigh highlights the power vested in landowners, which resulted in farmers' impoverishment and displacement. Another consequence of this unchecked authority was the widespread deforestation and land clearance for property improvement and greenhouse construction. Although the specific repercussions of enclosure Acts of such magnitude are not explicitly discussed, they serve as compelling evidence of Austen's awareness of the political and economic impacts on land utilization.

Austen's novels reveal the complex and often unperceived ways that anthropocentrism and androcentrism are related. When examining the various ways in which the gentry exploit nature, the argument is not about androcentrism as a form of domination that existed prior to anthropocentrism or vice versa, but it is about the material condition that led one to influence the other. Therefore, it is important to examine the gentry's environmental values, interest, and preferences, which carry complex androcentric bearings and to then argue that those bearings are the fallouts that propelled anthropocentricism in early nineteenth century England. Austen's depiction of nature reveals environmental transgressions directly linked to the androcentric-driven anthropogenic actions of the male gentry. It unveils new dimensions to the androcentric bias of the gentry wherein they objectify nature to satisfy their own vanity. Projects of improvement require a clearing of vast tracts of land and disturb the natural development of meadows. Picturesque landscaping encroaches upon the innate harmony of nature and introduces artificial designs undermining nature inherent properties. Greenhouse structures manipulate plant species and emit harmful greenhouse gases into the environment. These practices contribute to an anthropogenic impact propelled by an uncontrolled subjugation of nature. Ultimately, Austen, the keen observer of nature, provided insightful commentary on the complexities of human-nature relationship. Her critique conveyed a notion about nature as a vigorous entity too valuable to be manipulated with impunity.

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i In the digital edition of Johnson's dictionary, the term "environ" can be found; it means "to encircle," "to surround," or "to prey upon." Also, the terms "andro" and "anthro" are found as root words of verbs and nouns not related to environmentalism.

ii Famous lines from William Cowper's *The Task*. Book I, "The Sofa," pp. 338-39. The same lamentation was expressed by St. Aubert in Ann Radcliff's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), where he mourns the cutting down of the historic trees on his ancestral estate.

iii Adlestrop is a village located in the valley of the River Evenlode, three miles away from Gloucestershire, England. Tomlin mentions that Mr. Leigh hires Humphry Repton as a well-reputed landscape designer, at great expense in order to design the improvements of his estate.

iv Berry's journal is a part of a book titled Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence from the Year 1783 to 1852, Volume II. Published 1865. It contains a collection of Berry's letters and journals. This book is a reflection of the social life and customs of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries England.

v Cowper's *The Task* consists of six books. The third book is titled *The Garden*. For a discussion on how rural gardening, the domestic interior, and humans' spiritual discipline can only be achieved through the humble activity of gardening, see Thomas E. Blom "The Structure and Meaning of *The Task*."

vi Greenhouse structures were scientific technology that had an enduring manifestation in *Northanger Abbey* where Catherine Morland expresses explicit concern about the vulnerability of the natural world.

vii Although growing exotic plants in greenhouses started as a hobby for a few of the wealthy, it later promoted greater interest and demand. For further details about the multiple use and productivity of the greenhouses see Dustin Valen's *On the Horticultural Origins of Victorian Glasshouse Culture*, University of California Press, 2016, p. 420. He notes, "Located at the intersection of horticulture, medicine, and technology, the glasshouse was a critical medium through which architecture and the sciences communicated."

viii For further details on botany and gardening as a science, see Dustin Valen's *On the Horticultural Origins of Victorian Glasshouse Culture*. He mentions that "a surge of periodicals and books appeared in which the latest trends and innovations in gardening were discussed and an aesthetic approach to scientific gardening was codified by landscape theorists" (404).

ix In his book, *The Country and The City* (1973), Raymond Williams listed twenty-three areas in England mainly affected by the parliamentary procedure of enclosure. He indicates that there are two different kinds of enclosures: the enclosure of "waste" which is two million acres of uncultivated land inhabited by cottagers and isolated settlers and the enclosure of "arable fields" which is four million acres of land under cultivation inhabited by farmers, laborers, and their families. Both enclosures account for major changes in England's social and economic structures.

Walter Isaac

The Cycle of Jewish Self-Hatred:
Reading the Kyrie Irving Affair through Spielberg's *The Color Purple*[i]

Introduction

During an event, sometimes referred to as The Kyrie Irving affair, in late 2022, the American public was presented with another opportunity to navigate through the minefields of racism and antisemitism in the popular media. In this instance, basketball star Kyrie Irving tweeted a link to a controversial film propagated by Hebrew/Israelites titled *Hebrews to Negroes*. Hebrew/Israelites ("Israelites" from now on) are a predominantly African-American community that practices an Indigenous form of Judaism, the religious tradition also claimed by Jewish Americans of European descent. The Israelite communities are diverse in genealogy but many emerged during the pre-abolition colonial period, particularly as a result of both the importation of African-Hebrew slaves to the Americas and the practice of colonial-era Jewish slavery.[ii] Scholars disagree on the precise number of self-professing Israelites that exist in the United States, but conservative estimates place the steadily growing number of African-Americans with Israelite religious beliefs in the several millions, many times larger than the size of all other non-white Jewish minorities combined.[iii]

After Irving tweeted the link to *Hebrews to Negroes*, the film was widely criticized as antisemitic, and in response to its dissemination, several prominent Jewish organizations produced anti-hate campaigns to both debunk the movie's antisemitic content and publicly lambaste the Israelite community. For example, the Simon Wiesenthal Center issued a special report titled "Extreme Black Hebrew Israelite Movement." [iv] The Anti-Defamation League produced analyses of the film that likewise focused on its antisemitic components.[v] And the American Jewish Committee launched a campaign to have the film removed from Amazon.[vi] Besides these efforts, a large social media frenzy ensued, in which various social-media influencers and commentators sought to exoticize the "*Black* [sic] Hebrew Israelite" community.[vii]

This essay has been written to posit an alternative historical reason behind certain Israelite groups' desire to delve into antisemitic conspiracy theories. It relies on four fundamental assumptions. First, and perhaps most provocatively, the author firmly believes that the antisemitic beliefs of Jewish groups labeled "extremist" are usually attributable to culturally normative causes and reasoning. This does not absolve people of racist reasoning. It is simply an admission of the mundanity of racist and antisemitic concepts in various diaspora communities. In other words, antisemites in an antisemitic culture appear in history as normal persons. This is no less true of mainstream (white American) Jewry as it is of the Israelite community. Second, the author believes that if one honestly analyzes the dominant causes of said antisemitism, it is possible to construct a more proactive, less reactionary and more robust approach to its prevention than Jewish civil rights organizations have produced thus far. Third, irrespective of whether social justice advocates endorse or dismiss the doctrinal positions of certain Jewish religious groups, prevention of all types of antisemitism should remain the goal of said advocates' work. And fourth, the following analysis is less

a rigorous reading *of* Spielberg's *The Color Purple* and more a set of historical and societal observations "alongside" his film. Nevertheless, and despite the aforementioned axioms, there will be many who see in this essay nothing more than a rudimentary attempt to justify contemporary antisemitic ideologies. If that is the reader's conclusion, then so be it. That said, I will ultimately leave it to the reader to discern whether their concern is merited.

In the present analysis, I will argue that by contextualizing the Kyrie Irving affair in the history of race relations within the Jewish community, the incident exhibits an imperfect, but clearly parallel aetiology of specifically American Jewish antisemitism (or an anti-Black form of what Sander Gilman labels "Jewish self-hatred"). Furthermore, I will argue that the cogency of this aetiology is exemplified by the Thanksgiving dinner scene in Stephen Spielberg's *The Color Purple*, particularly when used as an allegorical heuristic device. The scene is well known and understood, so by using it, I will clarify a number of lesser-known historical complexities in American Jewish race relations. The characters can help those unfamiliar with such relations understand the antiblack forms of "co-ethnic recognition failure" among American Jews.[viii]

The allegory is as follows: In the scene, the men who sit around the Thanksgiving dinner table broadly represent predominantly Euro-Jewish American institutions (a.k.a. "mainstream Judaism"). The oldest man in the scene is played by Adolph Ceasar, and he echoes the first generation of Euro-Jewish families who primarily came to America seeking freedom, new opportunities and refuge from centuries of antisemitic violence. Mister, "Adolph's" son in the script, represents contemporary Jewish institutions (rabbinical councils, Federations, community media, civil and human rights groups, political action organizations, etc.) Mister's children, including his oldest son Harpo, represent the younger generations of Euro-American Jewry, particularly those communities that support the aforementioned institutions.

The women at the table broadly represent Indigenous and predominantly Afro-Judaic (including Israelite) American institutions, each broadly demarcated along lines of recognition from the mainstream Jewish community (or the men at the table). Celie represents the Israelites not recognized as Jews by mainstream Jewish institutions. Her sister Nettie represents tens of millions of continental Africans who have maintained traditions of Jewish or Hebrew descent for centuries (and who are also not recognized as Jews by mainstream American Jewry). Sophia represents the 20th-century generations of Israelites who practiced European-style Judaism, hoping to integrate with mainstream Jewry. Shug Avery represents the "Jews of color" that are recognized (in either a Eurocentric or rabbinic way) as "authentic" Jews by the dominant culture. And Mary Agnes represents the millions of African Americans of professed Israelite beliefs, almost unanimously unrecognized as Jews by mainstream Jewry.

Celie: "It's time for me to get away from you! … And your dead body will be just the welcome mat I need."

Adolph Ceasar: "You can't talk to my boy that way."

When *Hebrews to Negroes* was tweeted by Irving, many Jewish community leaders rightfully noted the erroneous references to Jewish death—and specifically the Holocaust—contained in the film. And as the event became locked into a national and international news cycle, Jewish civil rights organizations emphasized concern about the film's implication that claims about Jewish deaths in the Holocaust have been exaggerated.[ix] Yet, in the dinner table scene, the viewer is immediately presented with a sympathetic case for Celie's irreverence towards Mister's potential demise. Her reference to Mister's "dead body" is not only characterized by ridicule and irony; it accompanies her decision to *leave* her husband Mister, an action which would presumably make his death negligible in importance.

The irony is that, regardless of Celie's decision to leave, Mister's death would allow Celie to feel safer articulating another narrative about life being married to him.

Like Mister and Celie, Israelites and mainstream Jewry have been forcibly "married" to each other for centuries. During the pre-abolition period, Jewish sex trafficking made the Israelite community inseparable from the Atlantic world's rabbinic Jewish communities in important ways. The slavery-era's Israelite communities demanded the creolization of African cultural forms with western European Jewish ones. Thus, colonial-era Jewish communities were often multiracial, and this history of interracial Jewry became increasingly muted as more Jews from Europe immigrated to the Americas after the Civil War.[x] The unspoken problem behind dealing with the cultural differences between Israelite communities and immigrant rabbinic ones was that a) sexual violence was the primary means by which Jewish racial stratification was engendered, and b) rabbinic Judaism from the colonial period was largely complicit, and often encouraging of, slavery.[xi] And without understanding how sexual violence mutes its victims, it is difficult to understand why survivors of colonial-era Jewish slavery would wish for the deaths of those (mainstream Jewish institutions) who benefitted from the original violations. The first and most provocative charge of the Irving affair, for example, was that *Hebrews to Negroes* celebrated Jewish death in a way that could empower the enemies of Jews. Yet when accused of such behavior, Irving resisted. According to him, "I initially acted out of emotion to being unjustly labeled Anti-Semitic … I had no intentions to … perpetuate any hate … I know who I Am" (Deliso). In other words, Irving was asking a question implicitly that this essay poses explicitly: "How can I hate Jews if I myself am a Jew?" This is why *The Color Purple*'s Thanksgiving dinner scene exemplifies Irving's point, as well as the reason many African Americans expressed support for Irving during the controversy. By the time the scene takes place, the viewer is already well aware that Celie has experienced years of physical, psychological and sexual violence at the hands of Mister. So, her hatred of Mister is not only predictable, it is presumably already deemed rational by the audience. Mister's father, as played by the aptly named Adolph Caesar, likely refers to historic leaders who espoused antisemitism and Jew-hatred. Caesar's character (representing the first generation of postbellum European Jewish immigrants and heretofore referred to as simply "Adolph") is of a short and weaker physical stature than his son Mister, yet because Mister (Jewish-American immigrants' progeny) had become economically stable, Celie (the Israelites forcibly sold into slavery/marriage with Mister) reminds Adolph that Mister's abuses against her were merely an intergenerational transference of Adolph's experiences of abuse. Celie, for example, describes Adolph's son as "dead horse shit" and his grandchildren as "rotten kids"; each description being signs of decay, despite her abuse-ridden efforts to raise and take care of them all. These terms, "rotten", "boy", "dead (body)", "horse shit", "low-down dirty dog", cannot be seen as merely Celie's raw expressions of hate. They are also signs of an emerging female-led rebellion that is impossible to understand without knowing the history and intensity of violence that has preceded the event.

> Celie [speaking to Mister]: "You took my sister Nettie away from me. You knew she was the only somebody in the world who loved me. [But when Nettie and my kids in Africa] come home, we're gonna sit around and whoop your ass."
> Mister [snickering]: " … Woman, you talkin' crazy…"

With this exchange the viewer is introduced to the existential and theodicean genesis of Celie's hatred towards Mister. She was angry that men in her life, including and especially Mister, had destroyed her access to loving and affirming family relationships, particularly in the case of Celie's sister Nettie. By telling Mister that "You knew she was the only somebody in the world who *loved* me," (emphasis added) Celie was confessing that Mister understood the power that severing Celie from loving relationships would have over her. By hiding the letters proving the existence of Celie's

African family, Mister could keep her in complete ignorance about both the reason for her existence and the fact that her existence was known, loved, cherished and desired by other Indigenous people across the Black diaspora. Unfortunately, there is a long history of Black indigeneity in the African diaspora being both ridiculed and denied as a historically legitimate site of knowledge and cultural production (Hawkes). Hence, Mister's retort: "Woman, you talkin' crazy." For Israelites, acknowledging the existence of indigenous African and African American Jews has always been a thorn in the side of mainstream Jewish historical societies and the like, usually because said organizations were never meant to represent those African Jews' historical and cultural interests. Yet by focusing primarily on the needs of European and rabbinic Jewry, mainstream Jewish institutions gave veracity to Israelites' accusations of Jewish racism. And the reason is simple: *Intentionally severing victims of human trafficking from their kinspeople perpetuates the trauma of slavery itself.* Although there are a plethora of primary source materials and historical artifacts to be found among Israelite communities, the glaring absence of Israelite presence in "mainstream" histories and museums of American Jewry continues largely unabated until the present day.[xii] One of the great scholarly oversights of twentieth-century American-Jewish studies was the assumption that racial structures that governed ordinary Jewish life from the precolonial era had no impact on discourses of race within postbellum American Jewry. The absence of Israelites and their African-Hebrew kinspeople in both the scholarship and popular literature on American Jewry is precisely why most European-American Jews (along with some Jews of color affiliated with predominantly white denominations of Judaism) granted credibility to the claims made by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the Anti-Defamation League and the New York Times that African Americans of self-professed Israelite heritage did not only have no relationship with mainstream Jewry, but also that their claims about the inauthenticity of rabbinic Jewry were themselves recycled manifestations of *non*-Jewish antisemitism. But in fact, the Israelites' claims appear to be only one aspect of a "tit-for-tat" that has been going on in American Judaism between the Jews *recognized* as Jews by European colonizers and the Jews *racialized* as Negroes or Blacks by the same. Consider the following sketch of how this symbiosis of recognition and racialization has been represented in postbellum generations: A variety of texts, books, journals, and articles, written across various genres, make arguments that are very similar to those of Sephardic religious authorities from the 1700s regarding Afro-Judaic heretics: both the enslaved and formerly enslaved Africans with traditions of Hebrew descent aren't *real* Jews, but rather simply Blacks and Mulattos with a loose, inauthentic connection to Judaism.[xiii] 20th century anthropologist Ruth Landes, for example, makes it clear that for the Israelite communities Judaism is little more than a "garbled pretence" that "has never become significant in the Negro life of the United States or elsewhere" (177-178). Howard Brotz, author of *The Black Jews of Harlem,* is more generous. He tries to explain the existence of Israelite communities by saying they are the result of Black nationalism, not an authentic or *real* Jewish ancestry (126-127).[xiv] Historian Bertram Korn, while almost admitting evidence to the contrary, encourages Caribbean rabbis to deny that the Israelites have a historical relationship with colonial-era Jewish communities. (In fact, Korn constructs Jewish slave masters as "kind" in their treatment of enslaved Africans) (27, 30). Rabbi Israel Gerber, in his text *The Heritage Seekers: Black Jews in Search of Identity*, makes a similarly questionable claim. Not only for Gerber are the Israelites not real Jews; they are mentally ill. They are actually Black people who hate themselves and have a psychologically profound identity crisis (176-197). Graenum Berger, author of *Black Jews in America*, a text published through the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, argues that the Israelites are not a historically Jewish community and should not be considered even a heretical Jewish sect. According to him, they aren't real Jews in any normative sense of the term at all (206). This is a conclusion echoed in the work of Eli Faber in *Jews, Slaves and the Slave Trade*, where he claims

(in contradiction to what's discussed in Korn's private exchanges with Caribbean rabbis) that there is no evidence people of color with Jewish surnames participated in Jewish life (151-152). In recent years, James Landing, the author of *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* made a similar claim. According to him, Black Jews (or the Israelites, indicated with a capital "B") had to be distinguished from black Jews (indicated with a lower-case "b") in order to tell the mainstream Jews of color from the African Americans who "claim" to be Jews (Landing 10). The dichotomization of Blacks from Jews in cases of Israelite communities has continued into the present generation. Jacob Dorman, author of *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions*, insists that the African and Jewish interactions during the pre-abolition period does not explain the present-day existence of "Black Israelite" communities, who "did not simply imitate Jews" but also "constructed a polycultural religion that creatively reworked threads from [various] religious faiths" (63). Eric Goldstein, author of *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity,* avoids the subject matter altogether, insisting that American Jewry did not begin to negotiate race until the 1890's (12). Edith Bruder takes the alternative approach of addressing the topic directly. But for her, the entire African continent is suspect, primarily due to Black people trying to steal (or in her words, "appropriate") real Jewish people's history.

Perhaps in an attempt to provoke new thoughts concerning the difficulties western scholars have in affirmation the existence of people who are both African, phenotypically Black and of Jewish/Hebrew/Israelite descent, historian Jonathan Schorsch in *Blacks and Jews in the Early Modern World*, attempts to address the conceptual segregation of "African" history from colonial-era "Jewish" history with the following words:

> syncretistic uses of the mezuza and other ritual *objects or rites taken from [real] Jews* show, however, that we have left the realm of a believing practice of Judaism for even more nebulous regions of affinity, empathy, and *mimicry.*
> (229-230)

Interestingly enough, Schorsch has made the broader point easy for us. The foregoing texts, including their obviously racist conclusions and problematic assumptions, were all penned by white scholars who were not born into nor raised in Israelite families and communities. Yet Jewish civil rights organizations consistently appeal to the works of such scholars and others outside of the Israelite community to depict them as existentially problematic. Yet according to the Manhattan Institute, at least approximately 4 million African Americans are Israelites (Lehman). So why, one wonders, would white scholars be invested in mischaracterizing and delegitimizing a major African American subculture?

What I have elsewhere called the "mimicry motif" is one of the primary ways that 20th century Jewish writers reinforced the notion that the predominantly African American Israelites were not really Jews. According to Lenora Berson, "Before *Negroes* ever came into contact with *real Jews*, the black masses identified with the Hebrews of the Old Testament" (emphasis added) (207-208). Graenum Berger insisted that "The Jews, as a group … impressed *Negro* leaders*, who saw Jews as models* for their own strenuous efforts to achieve self-improvements" (1). Israel Gerber agreed. According to him "the blacks began to *imitate* him [the modern Jew] and to identify with him" (188). In *We Are Many: Reflections on American Jewish History and Identity*, Edward Shapiro endorses previous authors' conclusions: "ever since the time of slavery, *blacks* have drawn on *the Jewish experience* … For groups such as the Black Jews of Harlem, *this admiration for Jews led to syncretistic religious cults* containing Jewish elements" (242, emphasis added). These examples are only the tip of the iceberg. Advocates of the dichotomous separation between "Blacks" and "Jews" are rooted in a long history of scholars such as Brotz and Gerber employing accusations of race hatred against Israelites. For example, in Landes'

early work she insisted that "in [the Israelites'] service, lectures and songs, *hatred* for the white race was manifest" (185). The litany of similar accusations need not be repeated here. A simple online search will reveal the fact that such assessments of the Israelite community remain extant. In order to resist the aforementioned caricatures, it is common for Israelites–especially those unfamiliar with the history of European antisemitism–to accuse the Jewish community of hiding their "true" legacy. Due to this accusation being misconstrued as a conspiracy theory, predominantly white Jewish organizations have labeled this claim anti-Semitic in origin. However, when viewed in light of the historical relationship between the genesis of Israelite communities in colonial-era Jewish sexual assault and the ongoing, institutionalized practice of racial segregation in American Judaism, the label of this assertion as strictly and *only* antisemitic is found wanting.

> Mister: "You're not getting any of my money, not one thin dime!"
> Celie [while standing up angrily and banging on the table]: "Did I ever ask you for anything!? ... Did I ever ask you for anything? ... I never asked you for nothing, not even your sorry ass hand in marriage! Nothing. I never asked you for nothing! …"
> Sophia [while laughing]: "Ohhh, Sophia home now! … And thing's gon' be changin' 'round here! ... Pass me 'dem peas!"

At this point one of the most famous moments in *The Color Purple* is performed by Oprah Winfrey, who plays Sophia. In the present rendering, she represents the first post-slavery generation of Black American Israelite communities. These communities (frequently labeled "Negro Jews" in the first half of the twentieth century) tried to establish a place for themselves among mainstream Jewry, but as previously indicated, they were textually rebuffed and ridiculed by white American Jews. Hence, Sophia has been abused, not only by men at the table such as Harpo, but also by the local community at large, who interpreted her presence as completely discordant with the order of things. After Sophia recognizes that Celie is (finally) leaving Mister, she begins to laugh, whereupon the table goes silent and as Adolph Ceasar quips in response, "the dead has arisen." The scene therefore returns to the theme of Jewish death, but this time it is directed from Adolph towards Sophia, who has experienced a degree of hostility and brutality that has effectively silenced her for many years. In the present rendering, this silencing is not only symbolized by the refusal to discuss slavery and American Judaism. It is also the refusal to discuss how the Israelite community itself has changed since the times of slavery. For the same communities that two generations ago were publicly ridiculed as confused, psychologically disturbed and propagating race hatred were also frequently denouncing twentieth-century antisemitism. (See headline below from the 1934 Philadelphia Tribune):
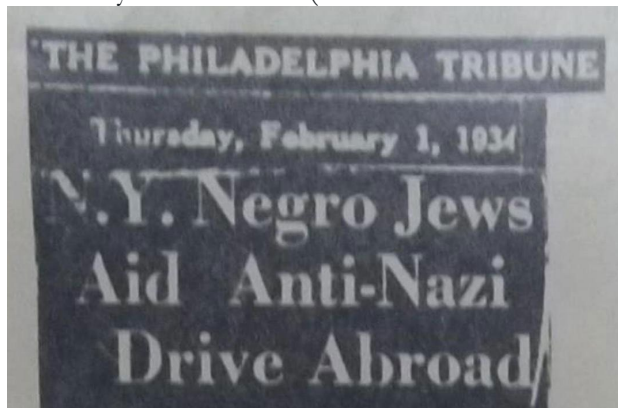

Figure 1 *The Philadelphia Tribune* headline, 1 Feb 1934.

This story was not the only such instance where Israelites from prior generations publicly denounced antisemitism as a globally reprehensible phenomenon. And if Israelite communities have a history of publicly disavowing antisemitic ideology, particularly in support of the same Ashkenazi Jewish communities who could not recognize them as fellow Jews, then in light of the Kyrie Irving affair, one could reasonably ask: "What happened? … How could a community go from publicly denouncing antisemitism to embracing it?"

Once again, *The Color Purple* is very instructive for our analysis. In the dinner scene, when Sophia begins to laugh, a distinctively Jewish theological discourse (i.e., the resurrection of Israel, the Saints, etc.) enters the conversation. Adolph's reference to Sophia as "the dead" coming back to life is an explicit reference to Resurrection narratives. In the Hebrew Bible the resurrection refers specifically to "Jews" and "Israelites" who come together again by dispersed communities leaving their foreign lands of captivity in order to reunite with their distant cousins, peoples who are also descendants of Israelite ancestors.[xv] Likewise, the reference to "home" carries an important symbolic function here. It is not the case in black families that "home" means only a place of residence. Traditionally, "going home" for African Americans meant that after death, one goes back to Africa to live with one's ancestral people, specifically the people from which one was stolen because of enslavement. Hence Sophia knows "There is a God" because "One day I was gonna get to come home (i.e., Africa, or the Promised Land of Israel)." Her confession is an extraordinary moment of theological and ethical bonding between her (rabbinic Israelites rejected by mainstream Jewry) and Celie (Israelites who rejected mainstream Jewry's treatment of the rabbinic Israelites). This union parallels the cycle of racialized Jewish self-hatred, in which Jewish communities not only experience rupture, but also generate new, heretofore unacknowledged vectors of recognition and love.

The foregoing recognition of love is an aspect of Israelite teachings that seems to have been missed in the media coverage of Irving's apology. It is fitting that he reminded his fans that "I know who I am." Despite Israelites being a byproduct of modernity and colonialism, their existence is also evidence of an ongoing social reality and potentially a new situational context. For example, there is a moment in the scene where the woman formerly known as "Squeak" stands up to announce her alliance with Celie and Shug. Harpo objects, saying, "Listen. Squeak …" But she immediately interjects by saying that his signification of her on the basis of her high-pitched voice was incorrect. *For Israelites, this correction in name from racial/biological imposition to the confession of one's true heritage/name is a kind of resistance against colonial antisemitism.* Their assertion of being a Jew is not a consequence of antisemitism. It is an act of resistance to antisemitism. Thus, being labeled as "Squeak" is not altogether different than being labeled as a "Negro" or as a "Black" (as in racial slurs such as "*Black* Hebrew Israelite" or "Black Israelite"). Out of resistance to her colonial labels, she not only declares what her name is, but also what her name is not. "My name ain't Squeak," she says. By introducing herself as "Mary Agnes" she begins to articulate an entirely new, mixed, Indigenous dimension of her background, a dimension clearly outside the knowledge and conceptual framework of Mister and his children, including even her partner Harpo. Like Mary Agnes' declaration, Irving's confession that "I know who I am" is another way of saying that his existence transcends Blackness, Africanity, and other racialized significations superficially imposed on Jews like himself.

When Israelites articulate the belief that their identity is more than a colonial-era racialization, a profound form of resistance to one of the lasting effects of human trafficking—the removal of one's name—has taken place. In Mister's case, when he begins to see that the women at the table have not only begun to publicly express positive, life-affirming relationships with each other, but also that those relationships have begun to be undergirded by a theological ethic of care, persistence, survival, and love, he only then begins to see the community whose correspondence had always

rested outside the parameters of his control. Nevertheless, this is not a community Mister can allow himself to love and affirm and appreciate. In the scene he has invested too much of his personal self-esteem in his power to police the women at the table, especially Celie. And the prospect of Celie being too independent to control only rouses his suspicion and anger. In the same way, instead of celebrating Israelite affirmations of their ancestry, mainstream Jewry's response often parallels Mister's assumption of the reason behind these communities' existence: a hidden financial motive. "You're not getting one ounce of my money, not one thin dime!" he says, a statement reminiscent of popular 20th century accusations that Israelites were trying to deceive white Jews into giving them charity.[xvi] But corrupt economic motives are just the beginning.

The mainstream effort to justify the existence of Israelite communities—both in the Americas and Africa—often follows an antisemitic diatribe depicting Israelites as morally inferior to Shug, or those Jews of color who are recognized as "authentic" according to Euro-rabbinic tradition. "All you're fit to do is be Shug's maid," says Mister, and thus the divide-and-conquer tactic is meant to rouse Israelites to anger and confirm the accuracy of the racial stereotypes: "violent", "hateful", "extreme", etc. After declaring that Shug knows how to "stand up and be noticed," a barrage of Mister's insults follows: Celie is "ugly", "skinny", "shaped funny", and doesn't know how to speak to people.

There is an aspect of antisemitism which breeds noxious, reactionary exoticisms, even among Jews themselves. If justifications for Jewish existence are demanded in antisemitic systems of hierarchy, then bondage, policing and ghettoization often follow. In cases of antiblack antisemitism, "real" Jews of color aren't the "extremist" Israelites who are ignorant, misinformed, incapable of communicating effectively, and publicly spout Jew-hatred and vitriol. Yet, when Jewish institutions fail to confront their history of racial slavery and colonialism, they do little but recycle hatred spewed from the mouth of Judaism's racial underside. This is why the resulting "tit for tat" and back-and-forth never seems to end without tragic consequences. Hence the declaration Mister makes about Celie: "I should have locked you up and only let you out to work!" And Celie's response is to declare that Mister's plans to place Celie in a new kind of bondage will backfire, leading to his demise: the theme of Jewish death returns.

> Celie [with anger and passion while holding a knife to Mister's neck]: "I curse you! … Until you do right by me, everything you even think about is going to fail."

Celie's curse against Mister reflects the rationale behind why antisemitism was embraced by some Israelite communities by the late 20th century. The explanation of how segments of the Israelite community went from decrying antisemitism to being publicly accused of it is rooted in 20th century American Jewish history.

European Jews who immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had no desire whatsoever to face *resurrected* forms of antisemitism in the United States. Once arriving in the United States, these Jews realized that American structures of social reality were governed far more by racial phenotype than any other aspect of mundane life. As a result, the institutions which Jewish immigrants began to construct for their communal welfare included the same kinds of mechanisms that protected white Americans from the legal and socioeconomic consequences of integration with African diaspora populations.[xvii]

Among these mechanisms was the public denial of what was widely known among white Jewish scholars and students in the mid-20th century: that Africa hosted large communities of people who practiced either Judaism or traditional religions that profoundly approximated Biblical Judaism. Writing in the 1960's, even journalists such as Erich and Rael Jean Isaac, who intended to disprove African Hebrew communities, had to confess that "the remarkable analogies between elements of

Biblical Judaism and many traits of the African cultures south of the Sahara have persuaded many [contemporary] students that such traits constitute 'Hebrewisms' and are the result of what must have been active [Jewish] proselytizing"(146).[xviii] Thus, the widespread academic knowledge about African Hebrew communities placed American Jewish communities and institutions in a politically difficult quagmire when it came to issues of race. Racism within the Jewish community was organically connected with ongoing discourses about religion, gender and politics. At a certain point, several American Jewish institutions collected enough artifactual and economic resources to archive the history of predominantly white American Jewish communities. Religiously, the Conservative and Reform movements began to flourish, and scholars such as Salo Baron, Jacob Rader Marcus, and Bertrand Korn were given access to a wide variety of extant cultural artifacts to participate in the project of expanding institutions such as the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati and the Center for Jewish History in New York. In addition, professional organizations such as the American Jewish Historical Society and the Association for Jewish Studies appeared; all of which were invested in presenting Eurocentric and racially segregated narratives of Jewish historical presence. Due to the growth of these institutions, leading researchers possessed academic knowledge of both the interraciality of colonial Jewish communities and the historicity of African Hebrew traditions in ways that your average member of the European Jewish immigrant community and synagogue did not. Yet as we have seen, decisions were made by influential authors to deny the historical reality and legitimacy of Israelite communities' inclusion in literature representing normative Jewish existence.[xix] Scholarly books, religious school curricula, Jewish seminary coursework, etc. therefore all became reflections of African American Hebrew communities' historical and cultural *absence*. The process of severing Israelites from African Hebrew communities, such that to simply affirm an Israelite community's existence as Jews was deemed heretical or questionable *at best*, was akin to the kind of cruelty exhibited by Mister's attempt to hide Nettie's letters from Celie, letters confirming that Celie's existence was remembered, loved, and cherished by her family living in Africa at the time.

When Eurocentric scholars encountered Israelite communities at the turn of the twentieth century, they probably feared that their existence would compromise immigrant European Jewry's access to racial whiteness.[xx] To be white was a *legal* category, in both secular and Jewish religious law, and access to whiteness carried direct implications for one's access to civil liberties, both secular and religious. And so, the problem was never the fact that African American Hebrew and/or Israelite communities were too small in number to be politically significant for American Jewry. It was the opposite. Israelite communities had significantly higher degrees of liturgical and philosophical openness to non-white populations, and so it was the prospect of Israelite communities being too numerically significant that Eurocentric Jewish institutions found threatening.[xxi]

Meanwhile, Hebrew/Israelite communities such as Rabbi Matthews' Ethiopian Hebrew congregations in New York, Rabbi Abel Respes' *Adat Bayt Moshe* congregation in New Jersey, or Rabbi Levi S. Plummer's congregation Temple Beth-El in Suffolk, Virginia represented growing African diaspora populations that Jews of European ancestry were not prepared to integrate with, irrespective of the cultural and historical kinship that could be confirmed between them.[xxii] Even if Euro-American Jewry did affirm the legitimacy of such communities, then because of their double-minority status, mainstream Jewry may have feared the consequences of addressing the social problems arising therefrom. For the Israelites however, any Judaism that condoned slavery and/or racism was an illegitimate Judaism. Contending otherwise would have been tantamount to Celie agreeing that Mister's abuses against her were in some sense legitimate. By denying the existence of African Hebrew communities and in some cases, the very biological families from which some Israelites could establish kinship ties, twentieth century historians of American Jewry committed far

more than simply an evasion of scholarly investigation. Given the circumstances of chattelization and family dismemberment, circumstances not unlike those borne between Celie and Nettie, Israelite leaders made the claim that honest historians had the responsibility to rectify historical wrongs by including African peoples in their representations of global Jewry. And the extent to which this was dismissed is the extent to which Israelite communities became suspicious of predominantly Euro-rabbinic narrations of Jewish history. In time, this suspicion would not only be reflected in their teachings, but it would also appear conspiratorial to the many African Americans who are aware of their indigenous Israelite traditions.[xxiii] And therein lay the main social problem revealed by the Kyrie Irving affair: Jewish institutions themselves have done a poor job of ameliorating American Jewry's racialized self-hatred, a phenomenon that scholar of Afro-Judaism, Dr. Andre Key, dubs "antiblack antisemitism."

In recent years, African and Middle Eastern scholars have begun to grant more historical legitimacy to the religious discourses articulated by postbellum Israelite communities. Organizations such as the Obadyah Alliance, the Omenana Defenders and the American Jewish Historical Society have begun to examine the pre-abolition relationships between colonial-era African Hebrew societies, enslaved Africans, pre-abolition American Jews of color and canonical European Jewish history with a different set of lenses. The result is not only a dramatically expanded account of modern Jewish history in the global South. It is also a recognition that the religious claims of Israelites were not simply rooted in ethnic mimicry and imaginary theological speculation. In other words, contemporary writers on Afro-Judaism are beginning to substantiate Israelite worldviews that in previous years elicited skepticism and ridicule from large segments of Euro-American Jewry.[xxiv] Hence, Shug Avery's revelation to Mister: "Now comes the time for me to tell you… It's time for us to go… [and] Celie is coming with us."

Both Jewish and Israelite antisemitism, particularly the antisemitism locatable in the groups labeled "extremist" or "radical," is partially attributable to the historic ridicule and humiliation of Israelite existence by predominantly white Jewish American institutions. In the midst of the controversy, the Israelite community's support of Irving demonstrates that when one is dealing with victims of human and sex trafficking, continually producing literature that erases their pre-enslavement ancestry contributes to the survivors' experiences of violence. This is because the entire point of trafficking human beings is precisely to annihilate their kinship ties to those life-affirming co-ethnic relations. So in cases where a particular ethnic identity (such as Jewish/Israelites) arises in the aftermath of enslavement, the refusal to acknowledge a historical context in which it is reasonable for such persons to *exist* actually contributes to their experience of alienation. The resulting hatred, therefore, is not only predictable; *it could very well be preventable*. To effect this change, historians of American Jewry must pivot by writing intellectually honest and racially inclusive accounts of Jewish history, thereby removing the basis for this aspect of conspiratorial accusations against Euro-Jews, whether they occur within or without the Jewish community.

Very few people who have either read Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* or seen Steven Spielberg's film version can deny that Celie's character had legitimate grievances against Mister, grievances that made her hatred comprehensible. And at the dinner table, in front of everyone, the first words she uttered after announcing her desire to leave were "You're a low down, dirty dog." Until that moment in the movie, Mister's insults towards Celie would not have brought the table's conversation to a halt. But in this case, it was Celie's decision to publicly issue a degrading moral judgment against Mister that did so. This is the true meaning of "the curse" that Hebrew/Israelites have constantly lobbed at Jewish Americans of European ancestry: when the history of American Judaism is written in a racially inclusive manner, the American public (represented by the movie

viewer) will more accurately understand the roots of their criticism and (at times) hatred of Euro-rabbinic Jewry–*and* vice versa. As a rule, Jewish civil rights organizations have avoided this topic, and scholars of Judaism have refused to even issue an apology for the racist practices in the field, presumably from the fear that any discourse involved in Jewish misdeeds would necessarily devolve into discursive legitimation of antisemitic rhetoric. But Euro-American Jewry's concern about the topic of slavery, *in the context of Hebrew/Israelite ideology*, is clearly not rooted in a potential alliance between white nationalism and Afro-Judaism (a concept that, on its face, should elicit doubt). Rather, Israelite discontent with Euro-rabbinic Jewish normativity is rooted in the kind of violent, misanthropic, abusive family dysfunction that's revealed in situations like *The Color Purple'*s Thanksgiving dinner scene. After all, far more than anything else, the *de facto* historical evidence of Jewish involvement in slavery–whether as victims or masters–rests in the mere existence of African American communities who call themselves "Jews", "Hebrews" and "Israelites" on the basis and belief of biological descent. If *this* existential proof is not a persuasive form of evidence for the cultural impact of racism, slavery and colonialism on both Jewish history and its representation, then no artifactual record, no archival collection, and no amount of research will justify the antisemitic labeling of Israelites as "fake" and "extremist." This is why Irving was unrepentant, even in his apology, when he insisted that "I know who I am." To him, he had never committed any violation at all, except existing in the manner that made sense to him. Hence Celie's final retort to Mister:

> I'm poor, black…
> I may even be ugly.
> But dear God,
> I'm here!

And Celie is not here in this scene alone. Shug Avery is here. Sophia is here. Squeak is here. Irving is here. And tens of millions of African Hebrews are here as well. And apparently, none of them will be going away anytime soon. Scholars of Jewish Studies, therefore, would be wise to take note.

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[i] Upon the start of the Israel/Hamas war of 2023, the author was concerned that by publicizing this essay, it would unintentionally be consumed by the recent media attention given to antisemitism, particularly in the context of academia. This concern was never meant to be the purpose of the present essay, which was originally composed prior to the start of the war. Coincidentally, the final draft of this article was written less than 48 hours after a Hebrew/Israelite congregation fell victim to a crime of terroristic intimidation when in November 2023, a Hamas sympathizer admitted to driving their vehicle into the meeting house of a small midwestern Hebrew/Israelite community. Yet, despite being the apparent victims of a hate crime, security officials and the news media labeled the congregation a hate group, thereby minimizing the violent incident as something other than an attack on the Jewish community. The same week, not only was the author, a liberal Israelite rabbi of Palestinian descent, approached by a university student group supporting Palestine and requesting that he be their faculty sponsor, he was approached by a prominent journalist about the circumstances surrounding an apparent physical altercation between a group of Israelites and pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

Contrary to his initial concerns, the author believes that such wartime incidents reveal both the saliency and insidiousness of antisemitism that goes unchecked within the Jewish community. It is telling that in each of these three instances, it appears that non-Jews of Palestinian descent, even in the context of a terrorist attack, recognized the author as an Israelite (and thus a Jew), despite large contingencies of the American Jewish community itself declaring otherwise. What can be seen in these episodes is that Jew-hatred is a very old and complex set of phenomena. And if not confronted directly–even in its Jewish incarnations–Jews may find themselves fighting legitimation wars against each other instead of the historical roots of antisemitism itself. It's the author's hope that the present article will assist civil and human rights workers to identify more constructive ways to prevent antisemitism, regardless of who draws from its wellsprings in order to be seen, heard and recognized.

[ii] For a description of the relationship between rabbinic communities and pre-abolition human trafficking, see author's previous article on the topic. https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/rhetoric-jewish-solidarity/

[iii] For the most recent statistics regarding Israelite beliefs, see the Lifeway study on African American attitudes concerning Israel, where not only up to 9.5 million African Americans believed the core tenets of Hebrew-Israelite beliefs, but the belief system appears to be more widely accepted among younger African Americans, with nearly 30% of 18 to 34 year olds endorsing Hebrew/Israelite teachings. https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Philos-Project-African-American-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Report.pdf

[iv] https://www.wiesenthal.com/assets/pdf/black_hebrew_israelite_movement-12-2022.pdf

[v] https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/hebrews-negroes-what-you-need-know

[vi] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/kyrie-irving-hebrews-to-negroes-amazon-antisemitic/

[vii] The word "Black" is italicized because the racialization of the phrase appears to be an invention of persons outside of the Israelite community. The author, after visiting dozens of congregations throughout the United States, was unable to find any group who did not contest the term "Black" as an adjunct to their self-understanding. Every group he encountered made it explicit that they preferred to be known as simply "Jews", "Hebrews" or "Israelites," without the racial marker.

[viii] See Aviva, Ben-Ur. *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History*. NYU Press, 2009, pp. 188-189.

[ix] See https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/hebrews-negroes-what-you-need-know

[x] See https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/rhetoric-jewish-solidarity/

[xi] The precise figures of this phenomenon are unknown, but Caribbean rabbis wrote about "thousands" of people of color of Jewish descent in the Lesser Antilles (see note 8). Anecdotal references confirm the widespread practice. See Judah Cohen. *Through the Sands of Time: A History of the Jewish Community of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands*, University Press of New England, 2004, pp. 52-53, 146-147.

[xii] The historical research on this can be easily located and synthesized from various sources, including but not limited to: research conducted by Caribbean rabbis in the mid-20th century, c.f. Cincinnati American Jewish Archives file on "Black Jews" in Bertram Korn papers; Jacob Rader Marcus *United States Jewry 1776-1985*; Mordecai Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*; Robert Cohen *Jews in Another Environment*; James Landing *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* and Walter Isaac "Locating Afro-American Judaism" in Blackwell's *Companion to African American Studies*. In addition to these secondary sources, several antebellum and

postbellum primary sources regarding specifically Israelite communities throughout the 20th century have been neglected in the research. Firsthand testimonies of Israelite communities can be gleaned from dozens of documented accounts, including those of Wentworth Matthews, Arnold Ford, David Dekollscritta, Abel Respes, Jose Malcioln, etc. All of these persons and many others made references to the historical relationship between pre-abolition Jewish slavery and the Israelite community.

xiii Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers,1991. To see the persistence of these ideas across the 18th and 19th century, see Walter Isaac, *Beyond Ontological Jewishness*, Temple University dissertation, 2012 (open access).

xiv It's important to note that Brotz believed Israelites were affected by a kind of nationalism that was inherently anti-white, militant, resentful, bitter and sectarian. He insists that the belief that Jews are black and not white is the source of the tension between Israelites and Jews of European descent. Today, Israelites who claim that the "real" or "true" or "original" Jews embrace various spiritualities and peoples of color, not white, European and/or rabbinic, are likewise accused of being extremist and antisemitic.

xv See Ezekiel 37:15-23.

xvi The concern about philanthropic efforts is what drove the research behind studies such as Graenum Berger's *Black Jews in America*.

xvii Goldstein, Eric. *The Price of Whiteness*. Princeton, 2006.

xviii Also see Joseph Williams *Hebrewisms of West Africa*, a text that was first published in 1931 and at the time, one of the most widely circulated compilations of the African Hebrew thesis.

xix Isaac, Walter. "On the Rhetoric of Jewish Solidarity: A Hebrew-Israelite's Perspective." *Contending Modernities*, 9 Feb. 2021, contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/rhetoric-jewish-solidarity/.

xx A more detailed study of this history is beyond the scope of the present article. But it is clearly supported by the work of scholars mentioned in the present essay. See Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*.

xxi See Isaac, "On the Rhetoric of Jewish Solidarity," *Contending Modernities*, Feb. 2021. This is an additional insight that can be gleaned from Bertrand Korn's exchanges with Caribbean rabbis. The synagogue leaders insisted that the living memories of blood relationships between *anusim* of color (including, as the Jamaican Rabbi Hooker made clear, some participants in Israelite communities) and Jewish families remained extant. But it was also a source of tension among some of the synagogue memberships.

xxii See Isaac, Walter. "Locating Afro-American Judaism: A Critique of White Jewish Normativity." *A Companion to African American Studies*, edited by Lewis R. Gordon & Jane A. Gordon, Blackwell, 2007, pp. 512-542.

xxiii The extent to which conspiracy narratives of rabbinic Jewry's attempt to hide "the truth" about Israelite's kinship ties, biological and otherwise, have spread among African Americans is also indicated by the Lifeway study. See https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Philos-Project-African-American-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Report.pdf. P.43, 117.

xxiv See the Obadyah Alliance responsum by Dr. Dayan Yehonatan Elazar-DeMota, "Igbo Israelites: Coerced to Christianity and their Return" as well as the Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, *Report of the Public Advisory Committee for Examining Israel's Approach Regarding Worldwide Communities with Affinity to the Jewish People* (March 10, 2017). In both of these documents, one sees Jews of the rabbinic world making scholarly judgments, both religious and secular, that largely buttress the religious claims of Israelite communities–including their traditions of historic, numerically large and longstanding Jewish communities in western and central Africa.

Cameron Becker and Keith Jackson

Antiracist Curriculum Revision through Innovative Coalition Building

S cholars in rhetoric and composition have been contending with our disciplinary legacy of linguistic racism and colonization for decades, often asking ourselves the same questions or stating the same positions without a clear path for accomplishing our goals. In particular, the question of how to teach and assess students' language use beyond standard edited American English or white mainstream English has plagued the field. This article presents a case study of one writing program's attempt to celebrate and develop students' diverse linguistic resources while creating labor conditions for students and instructors that can foster positive learning and teaching experiences.

In April of 2021, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) was in the middle of the crucial undertaking of revising their 2014 Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition ("WPA Outcomes Statement"; "CWPA Antiracist Initiatives"). The Board of the organization had proposed several antiracist initiatives in June of 2020 to foster a more inclusive, diverse, and explicitly antiracist culture in the organization, and these antiracist initiatives were steps in that long and ongoing process.

However, in the execution of revising their Outcomes Statement, CWPA missed a critical opportunity to promote antiracist curriculum development and to reckon with their own history of promoting white supremacist values. According to multiple attendees, in a discussion about whether the CWPA board should have final control over the work produced by the Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force, some CWPA Executive Board members exhibited white fragility, racism-evasive rhetoric, and resistance to anti-racist change to disciplinary standards (Inoue, "Why I Left"). It is important to note that the Executive Board of CWPA was a mostly white representation of a mostly white organization, while the Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force was a collection of mostly scholars of color dedicated to antiracist work in writing studies. The fallout from that meeting included a major boycott of the organization, as well as an updated First-Year Composition Goals Statement composed and circulated by scholars of color and dedicated to anti-racist language values (Beavers et al.).

The boycott of the CWPA also represented a watershed moment for rhetoric and composition as a discipline, a moment in which we could either continue to claim an antiracist ideology while upholding the white supremacist language values underpinning many of our disciplinary standards or put in the difficult but necessary work to confront and dismantle white language supremacy in our curricula. At our university, this moment culminated in the formation of the Summer Curriculum Groups, dedicated to revising the course goals, content, and format of the first course in our university's two-course sequence of first-year writing.

Methods

This article presents a qualitative analysis of our experiences as graduate teaching assistants working on a departmental antiracist curriculum revision and innovation committee. In "The Praxis of Innovation in Writing Programs," Andy Frazee and Rebecca E. Burnett argue that innovation occurs through a "two-part mission … with one part focusing largely on our responsibility to faculty

and another part focusing on our responsibility to students" (297). Our study seeks to expand on the framework presented by Frazee and Burnett to discuss what our responsibilities to faculty and students look like when undergoing anti-racist curriculum review. Therefore, we will first discuss ways our coalition of administrators, faculty, and graduate students came together to support and enable each other's development of disciplinary knowledge, and how we applied that knowledge to promote racial equity for our students.

To do this, we will apply Lockett, et al.'s anti-racism as research methodology, which calls for "recognizing and naming racism as an existent, pervasive, deadly problem, as well as analyzing its effect on the work we do, especially in terms of how we choose that work and go about doing it" (16). Through analysis of our emails, notes, drafts, and presentations, we aim to explore common threads in our conversations that contributed to our antiracist goals, including the importance of building diverse coalitions, the need to acknowledge the ways our disciplinary and personal vocabulary has been used to uphold or transmit racist languaging values, and the significance of care work in safe, equitable, and effective curriculum revision.

Lockett et al. argue that researchers can only conduct meaningful antiracist work if we acknowledge our identity and privilege, recognize and articulate how we have benefitted from the historical and ongoing oppression of marginalized people, and "concede the limitations of [our] cultural knowledge as an outsider, recognizing that [our] vantage point will not be as rich as those intimately tied to the traditions of literacy and rhetorical prowess under discussion" (26). Cameron, a white cisgendered woman, and a former farm kid from a rural background, participates in antiracist activism because she did not recognize the racism present in her community until she was an adult. She feels compelled to reflect on and acknowledge how she has perpetuated racial bias in her classroom by devaluing or excluding minoritized students' literacies and languages. She hopes to ensure she does not repeat those mistakes, and to help new teachers in her department and in her discipline avoid making them as well.

With a similar upbringing and identity, Keith is a white cisgendered man from a working-class, rural upbringing. He's invested in antiracism for the same reasons Cameron finds herself invested and, additionally, he thinks that academia can be a space that can influence the public sphere in radical, meaningful ways. Keith also believes that enacting antiracism requires more than talking; antiracism requires action, and radical action at that. Consequently, he hopes that his students see him as an ally who is invested in their learning while being a learner himself. As a parent who often thinks of the future his kids will inherit, he realizes we have much work and learning still to do.

In our teaching context as mostly white instructors at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest, our racial privilege compounds the power discrepancies that already exist between students and instructors. The work of our committee was similarly limited because eleven of our twelve committee members were white, and our department consists of predominantly white faculty. Our racial positionalities limited our ability to connect with and understand the rhetorical frameworks we studied and the experiences of racism that informed the scholarly work we engaged with. With that limitation in mind, we did what we could to enhance our understanding by seeking out and annotating publications from scholars of color, connecting with instructors whose experiences were different from our own, maintaining self-reflexivity and avoiding defensiveness, and re-thinking the hidden definitions of some of our disciplinary language based on the stories and perspectives of marginalized scholars and students.

Forming the Committee

The first step in reviewing our curriculum was deciding what our review would entail. Specifically, the Writing Program Administration team's main goal was to scan and evaluate the curriculum for white supremacist languaging and practices, particularly in goals and outcomes. We set out with the core belief that the very institution in which we worked was supporting and maintaining white language supremacy through institutional practices, like curriculums (Baker-Bell 14). In doing so, we considered the following: what documents we should interrogate; what resources and frameworks we would use to inform our review and analysis; and what the labor would look like for the individuals in the curriculum review committee. The process of reviewing a curriculum takes a strategic and targeted approach. As the Writing Program Administration team started planning the review, we also scouted for potential individuals who were interested and invested in this sort of work.

In order to adopt a truly antiracist and inclusive curriculum, we knew that we wanted reviewers to be a mix of faculty, both non-tenured and tenured, and graduate students from different specialties and disciplines. When all interested parties had been identified and signed on to participate, our Writing Program Administrator broke up reviewers into four groups grounded in our theoretical lenses based on the heuristic process developed in "Toward Anti-Racist FYC Goals" (Beavers, et al.):

- Rhetorical knowledges
- Critical languaging
- Laboring as embodied practice
- Conventions as languaging practice

All twelve members of our curriculum review committee read the "Toward Anti-Racist FYC Goals" document, and we all individually selected relevant texts about antiracist rhetoric and pedagogy. In addition to our own course curriculum, we studied the University Core Curriculum and the State Standards for our course. As we conducted our research, each group reviewed the curriculum primarily through the lens assigned to us. For our group, the Labor as Embodied Practice group, this meant that we examined the labor students and teachers were expected to undertake based on the existing curriculum. Over the course of 7–8 weeks, each group separately applied what they learned to conduct a close reading of the existing curriculum and to propose alternatives to the objectives and requirements we had identified as promoting or supporting racist languaging ideologies. For our group, that entailed weekly Zoom meetings, swapping reading materials and notes, and reviewing each other's notes and questions in a group Google Doc, although other groups approached this process differently. Finally, all groups convened on a Zoom meeting to compare and discuss our findings, propose our alternative anti-racist course objectives, and prepared to present the new curriculum to the entire department.

It Takes a Coalition

Because we structured groups in a manner that emphasized collaboration, learning together, and sharing diverse experiences, we enacted a praxis of innovation as detailed in Frazee and Burnett's work (293–294). In this spirit, the committee was more like a coalition, an alliance of individuals from diverse socioeconomic, professional, and disciplinary backgrounds who could work together not only to mold a new curriculum, but to mold each other, too. No single group was made up entirely of faculty or entirely of students, and no individual was designated as the leader of their group. In crafting these diverse and egalitarian groups, we were especially focused on how group members could help each other develop existing and emerging expertise (Frazee and Burnett 301). Just as we wanted reviewers to have diverse experience levels, our WPA also aimed for each group

to have representation from an array of disciplines and specialties to help ensure each group's curriculum revisions were approached from multiple analytical perspectives.

We believe this approach afforded the committee multiple approaches and perspectives to reviewing the curriculum and primary syllabi. This is the most important and integral aspect of gathering a curriculum review committee: ensuring that those who teach within this curriculum have a say in how it is revised. Without true representation of multiple perspectives from the program, any review is bound to achieve very little in the way of inclusive change. A review made up of few perspectives will not be representative of the local values and teacher/student realities. The professional development that occurred within groups was just as important, maybe more so, as the proposed curricular changes that would affect students.

Our group is an example of one such coalition. We both worked on the Labor as an Embodied Process group, along with Dr. Ludwig, a faculty member with a PhD in English Literature and experience teaching a unique community-based writing course at our institution. Meanwhile, at the time, Cameron was in her second year of the PhD in Rhetoric and Composition program. She had identified her scholarly interest in disability studies and critical embodiment through her own experiences as a disabled woman, and her coursework in global rhetorics had prepared her to talk about the diversity of rhetorical philosophies and frameworks available to ENG 103 instructors interested in expanding their rhetorical knowledge. Cameron's experience as a solely online asynchronous teacher meant that the nature of her interactions with students diverged from those of Keith and Dr. Ludwig, but a benefit of that divergence was that she was able to advocate for the needs of online students, who are often excluded from conversations about curriculum revision. She was particularly influenced by Black Disability Studies (Dunhamn et al.) and critical embodiment pedagogy (Cedillo) and interested in investigating the ways the literacies and languaging practices of disabled students of color could be welcomed and supported in a new anti-racist curriculum.

Keith, who was a third-year PhD in the Rhetoric and Composition program, brought with him some experience with labor studies from previous interests. Through a perspective attuned to labor and its particularities, he was able to discuss aspects of labor that aren't typically explored, like invisible labor or the consequences of abstract course goals. The existing course goals, despite creating the skeleton of an intro to rhetoric and writing class, alluded very little to the work that would be expected of students. Along with the white supremacist assumptions he identified in the existing course goals, he noted that those goals assumed the labor of students was homogenous and ignored the embodied labor of students who may rely on other ways of engaging with course work. Through this perspective, he proposed that we revise course goals for clarity while trying to be more inclusive in how we envisioned the labor of both students and teachers.

Our various specialties and academic, professional, and embodied experiences were a significant asset to our process of curriculum review because we were often able to articulate the issues with a course goal or concept using multiple sources and lenses. For example, in a Google Doc discussion about the course objective, "Develop strategies for becoming more critical and careful readers of both their own and others' texts," Keith drew from his background in labor transparency, while Becker focused on recognizing the labor of students with diverse embodiments. Keith noted that our program emphasizes multimodality and requires all students to complete at least one multimodal project every semester, but course goals like this one only recognize the labor necessary in traditional text-based genres, like the research essay. Students may not understand from this language that they are expected to develop functional, rhetorical, and critical multimodal literacies (Selber), so they may not anticipate that they are also being evaluated based on their labor toward developing those literacies.

Building on Keith's idea, Cameron asked, "Maybe we think about revising the centering of reading as the necessary literacy to interpret and understand information? Does centering reading make invisible the labor students do to understand the multimodal rhetorical artifacts that make up their coursework?" She referenced multimodal cultural rhetorics (Bokor; Brandenburg) and J. Logan Smilges's "Neuroqueer Literacies, or Against Able-Reading" to support her argument. Because Dr. Ludwig had been reading Asao Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future* as well as Ellen C. Carillo's *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading,* she grounded her analysis in the questions, "How are we defining labor? Who is doing the labor? How are we assessing labor?" These different theoretical approaches led the group to craft the following rationale for altering this course goal:

> Even though we in the discipline may consider "texts" to be a neutral and inclusive term, it is still problematic in that it excludes communication in non-linguistic modes such as gestural and spatial. "Visual and verbal" similarly excludes aural and other modes which are critically important in many students' cultures and discourse communities. Referring to students' deliverables as "multimodal texts and artifacts" or simply "multimodal artifacts" (for example) denaturalizes and destabilizes the hierarchy of linguistic communication over other modes of communication (a hierarchy that is not only Eurocentric and White supremacist, but also ableist).

Coalitions of scholars from diverse backgrounds are more efficient, and the products of their labor are better supported by research. However, it is important to recognize that although our committee diversified teaching perspectives by recruiting both tenured and contingent faculty as well as graduate students, our review was limited by its overabundance of whiteness and, thus, White perspectives. We realize that an effective curriculum review committee must strive to recruit scholars from more diverse backgrounds, which should include a strong representation of people of color. This is especially important in anti-racist research and curriculum review, when we should be prioritizing and learning from the knowledge and personal experiences of students and instructors of color.

1. **Deconstruction of Language**

This limitation leads us to another major finding during this process: each participant must work without defensiveness and under the same core assumptions—in our case, that our existing curriculum upholds racist language standards and therefore must be carefully deconstructed and revised. As Beavers et al. state in "Toward Anti-Racist First-Year Composition Goals," "all programs and departments can, and should, investigate and build antiracist pedagogies and ecologies," in part by considering "how to decenter dominant (White, middle and upper class, monolingual) languaging norms and provide ample opportunities for students to embody their own languaging varieties" (3). Part of our process of decentering dominant languaging norms was acknowledging the ways our existing curriculum centered those languaging norms with a sincere desire to improve our students' experiences.

Groups were urged to view course goals through student perspectives and enact reflexive, and reflective, practice. Each group interrogated what values were both explicit and implicit within each course goal. What we found was problematic. We found white supremacist languaging and laboring values and assumptions throughout the entire document. We found dog-whistle words like "appropriate" or abstract, patriarchal phrases like "take responsibility for your own work" deeply assumptive of students' labor practices. This phrasing also violated one of the missions of innovative praxis by stifling a student-centered approach to labor and work. Our shared background in antiracist pedagogy as well as our individual disciplinary knowledge in labor, disability studies, and cultural studies helped us rhetorically analyze these words from different lenses to uncover how they

might be applied by instructors or interpreted by students as exclusionary, racist, ableist, or patronizing. With the focus on labor, we wanted to review using a student-centered approach and interrogate places where teachers were given far too much power over students' work and labor.

First, it was critical that we contended with and discussed how our privileged identities influenced the depth of our understanding and the efficacy of our antiracist work on these committees. We can only be effective allies and advocates for our students of color when we acknowledge the racism inherent in our language standards, recognize the ways we have benefitted from and upheld those racist standards, and are mindful about the ways our whiteness can inform the way our students interpret our meanings and intentions. Because some of our committee members participated in crafting the existing curriculum, and because many of us have been teaching using this curriculum for years, it was important that each of us made a conscious effort to engage in critical self-reflection about whether we were demonstrating commitment to our students or to our own processes and histories. Resisting interpretations of the curriculum as racist because we had not *intended* to apply racist languaging standards would not serve our growth as teachers, and moreover, it would continue to do harm to our marginalized students.

 We also often had to take a step back from defending how our curriculum *could* be applied for antiracist purposes to instead consider what our language choices symbolized and signaled to students. A common thread in our group discussions was that we could only make progress when we stopped focusing on what messages and ideologies we intended to convey, and thought more about how students, especially students of color, were interpreting our messages based on their prior experiences with education. For example, one of our existing curriculum's course objectives was for students to "take responsibility for their own progress." When we interpreted that goal to inform our assignments, we thought about how to give students the opportunity to exert agency and make choices about their assignments that would make the activity meaningful for them.

However, when we read that course goal with a student's perspective and experiences in mind, it immediately brought up memories of emails we had all received from students in crisis who were profusely apologizing for missing class or a due date, often for serious personal and health reasons. In those emails, our students would tell us that they weren't making excuses and did not expect us to offer assistance or alternatives for them; they were only apologizing for and trying to explain their absence or lateness, because they knew it was their responsibility to get to class and turn in assignments on time. The emails were always slightly baffling, especially because we all had flexible extension and attendance policies, and we all worked toward creating and enacting a compassionate and approachable teacherly ethos. We had always assumed our students' anxieties about absences and extensions were the result of past bad experiences in other courses or with other instructors. But after some critical self-reflection, we realized that the "take responsibility" course goal in our course documents—a phrase common to ableist, classist, and racist applications of attendance and due date policies—aligned us with an educational establishment which was not sympathetic or understanding about students' personal lives. We thus composed the following rationale for revising this course goal:

> "Responsibility" promotes a mindset of accountability to an authority figure and denies students agency in choosing their educational goals. This language choice also feels similar to other governing bodies' emphasis on "attitude," which also seems more like a mechanism of controlling students' affects than of fostering their growth as composers and communicators.

Phrases like "take responsibility for your own work" reinforce power disparities between the student and teacher by holding students accountable not to themselves but to their instructor. Since we still thought it was important to have a course goal that highlights academic vigor, we reframed this course goal for our review. So instead of taking responsibility for their work, we ask that

students "develop agency in determining composition goals and tracking growth." Acknowledging that our perspectives and knowledge about languaging are limited and reframing this course goal to highlight student agency rather than instructor control, reinforces a student-centered approach. This affords students more control over what they want to gain from the course, defining their own labor, while including the instructor in a way that isn't so intrusive.

When we each conducted a close reading of the course goals, content, and format from a different methodological lens, we also noticed that some seemingly simple words carried drastically different meanings for each of us. We determined that our course goals contained several instances of subjective language that could reinforce White supremacy or ableist laboring standards. For instance, professionalism is a word that is often weaponized against marginalized scholars. Keith wrote in a Google Docs comment, "My concern here is just how vague the language is. If we were to suggest focusing on something concrete, like conventions and discourse communities, I believe it would be a step in the right direction. 'Professionalism' can serve as a White supremacist dog whistle so I think its best we avoid that kind of language and suggest a change." In a Zoom discussion, Cameron referred to reading she had done for her "Rhetorics of the Body" course about how "professional" dress standards are weaponized against marginalized people, and against Black women in particular. As Brittany Hull et al. remind us, "because minority bodies are always, already under scrutiny and subject to explanation and qualification, they are often conditioned to be aware of and responsive to the presumed standards of professionalism just to survive" (7). Invoking those standards of professionalism in the writing classroom implies that students' languaging practices will be under similar scrutiny.

These abstract words are also problematic because they contribute to a lack of transparency in labor expectations. The unclear and subjective application of standards of professionalism and propriety are often used to patronize students about work ethics and genre conventions, instead of beginning at a level of encouragement and understanding. We further contend that by telling students that their language must be professional, we are signaling that honest discussions of race are unwelcome in our classrooms, since, as Lockett et al. write, "race is political. It affects what people, places, and things mean, yet it is not 'polite' to talk about race in public—a cultural norm that affects 'professional' spaces" (304). If, as Keith argues, we move away from abstract language and strive for clearer, more concrete language, we can ensure all student labor and communication are valued.

In the Trenches: Care Work

Though we can't speak for the other groups, our group dynamic was always supportive and informative. We honored each other's expertise. We listened and learned from one another. And we encouraged each other to share our thoughts and ideas about revisions. We reviewed the curriculum and read our resources individually so when we had our weekly meeting it was a time of sharing ideas, discussing the course goals, and fostering growth. Through this back and forth, we fostered innovation in our curricular revisions by honoring both the student and the teacher. We wanted the curriculum to retain its flexibility, to allow teachers to approach the course goals in a way that suited their expertise and teaching philosophy, but we also wanted to honor the students' embodied labor. It is through this sort of *sweet spot* that we felt comfortable making the revisions we made.

However, a type of work that is often overlooked in the academy is care work, which is also an important anti racist practice. Care work is more than simply *caring*, as Amy Lynch-Biniek defines it. It is more than organizing or activism. It is the "un- or under-paid, under-recognized, and undervalued work of caring for self and others, physically, emotionally, or psychologically" (Kahn and Lynch-Biniek 325). This is the work that goes unpaid and unnoticed. It's a kind or thoughtful

gesture, like checking in on someone or bringing a friend some food. It's being a listener for a student that might not have anyone else to turn to. Typically, this work is equated to health care professionals, but teachers are *often* called on to do this type of labor. As a group, we treated each other with compassion and empathy. We all have experienced moments of betrayal as a byproduct of curricula decisions. Perhaps most importantly, we recognized when we should step away from our academic pursuits and labor for a moment. There came a moment when we needed time away from work to recharge.

As an example of coalitional care work, we want to take a moment and recognize Dr. Ludwig's care work during the review. There were moments where Dr. Ludwig listened and learned, but there were still opportunities for her to encourage, lead, and take on a position of leadership, but that spot wasn't solely reserved for her. For instance, shortly after the review started in earnest, the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. As we tried to make sense of this decision, Dr. Ludwig, the only tenured faculty in our group, knew that we weren't prepared to do the review work that week. Shortly after starting the meeting, she made the decision to cut the meeting short and allow us all the space we needed to emotionally heal. Through her support and mentorship, not only following the overturning of *Roe* but throughout the entire review, we became more confident in our ability to suggest meaningful revisions as graduate students. Though the spirit of review groups was meant to be egalitarian, Dr. Ludwig knew when to step in, mentor, and be that person in a leadership role when we needed it. It was through this work, through this care work, that we recognized how important that type of labor is. We also know this type of labor should be better celebrated.

The summer of 2022 was the start of a war on women's bodies in the US. It was an assault on women's rights by an alt-right, activist Supreme Court. Part of care work is recognizing, especially in unthinkable moments like the overturning of Roe, that work can wait and that mental health is important if we were to produce good work.

Conclusion

Once the review was completed, all four of the groups came together for one final Zoom meeting. It was here that we noticed the "interactional expertise", or the melding together of multiple perspectives, backgrounds, and belief systems toward a common goal (Wardle and Blake qtd. in Frazee and Burnett 301). Through the various expertise and backgrounds from graduate students and faculty, the committee was not only able to creatively and innovatively revise the curriculum based on their group's focus, but in this final meeting, groups were able to see common threads. All the different interpretations were inspiring, but, most importantly, it was deeply gratifying how similar, despite these different interpretations, revision suggestions were. Several groups took issue with the course goals that described "appropriate" work/genre conventions or course goals asking students to "take responsibility" for their work. This kind of language serves as dog whistles for white supremacy and represents the sort of obscure language, and values, we wanted to eliminate from the curriculum.

Comparing revisions was only one side of the coin. The other side of our innovative mission was to take the revisions from the committee and then synthesize them to the rest of the program. This meant continuing our two-part mission of faculty and student development. We knew that those not on the committee would have questions about how they would shift their pedagogy since they would now be required to teach, say, multimodality or anti-racism more explicitly. Many of the questions exhibited cautious optimism and excitement, but people were worried that these changes would come too quickly for them to adopt into their teaching. Largely, questions were directed at potential professional development opportunities with little pushback against the actual revisions.

Instructors knew these revisions were needed. That they were more inclusive and anti-racist, thus better for our students, but they just didn't know exactly how to implement the revised goals in an effective way.

Before fully pushing curricular revisions into the program haphazardly, the WPA team built a pilot professional development course in our university's learning management system. The team wanted instructors with experience teaching First-Year Composition to take the course, learn and work with anti-racist concepts, theories, ideas, and offer feedback about how the course was structured. They were incentivized with extra pay for their time. The pilot course was structured and sectioned around the new and revised anti-racist course goals. Each section offered corresponding readings and resources that would help instructors understand why the changes were made and how to best implement them in their course. This was a large onboarding process, taking most instructors between 8–10 hours to complete. Once instructors completed a section, they conversed over that section's material with other instructors in a discussion board and, finally, uploaded a short reflection on how they see themselves implementing in their own teaching what they learned from each section. Once the pilot course was completed, instructors had an opportunity to provide feedback to the WPA team. Curricular changes such as this require a coalition and dedication from all parties, so plenty of opportunities to fine tune and offer feedback are necessary.

To expand on Frazee and Burnett's two-part mission of faculty-centered development and student-centered development, we argue that antiracist curriculum innovation specifically requires diverse coalition-building, critical languaging, and an emphasis on care work. Our curriculum review process, we would argue, was successful because it focused on developing committee members' rhetorical knowledge as well as improving students' learning, but also because it featured a collection of scholars who came from different disciplines and specialties, were at different stages of their careers, and felt deeply invested in the program's effectiveness. Participants were critical of language and conscious of their own biases and privileges. Groups were also decentralized of power so those who were further in their careers, say tenured faculty, didn't immediately take on the role of leader. In fact, and speaking for our group, power was shared between graduate students and faculty. For radical change, like curricula revisions, to be successful, power must be decentralized and those who historically do not have a voice in these changes must have representation.

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Bailey McAlister

(De)Constructing Frameworks for Modern Rhetoric and Communication

Introduction

As timely experiences continue to reshape our worldviews, educators of Rhetoric and Communication have a new opportunity to review and revise our teaching practices to more practically address rhetorical situations that modern students face. Social phenomena in the early 2020s have drastically altered how we communicate, learn, and facilitate communities. Our sense of community largely defines how we navigate communication spaces, and possible reconstructions of Rhetoric pedagogy could effectively respond to recent shifts in students' learning strategies to help them develop strong voices in their fields. Academic intellectuals often employ efforts towards diversifying our curriculum and practices to not only ensure the inclusion and representation of every learner but also to develop and sustain environments where learners feel they have equitable access to academic tools and knowledge that help them build strong identities as professionals in their fields and educated members of society. The widespread success of these efforts has led to a natural upsurge in organizational structures that support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and an increased focus on how educators help support these initiatives.

But as with any period of increased social progress, many vehemently oppose where DEI initiatives are heading. In May of 2023, Senate Bill 266, which prohibits state college funding for DEI initiatives, was passed in the US state of Florida. This bill specifically contains support for "solving the state's economic, social, environmental, and legal problems"; student "competency in civic discourse"; "intellectual rigor" and "viewpoint diversity" in research; and affording students the "ability to think critically through the mastering of subjects concerned with human culture" (Florida Senate). Yet, it directly positions initiatives such as diverse and inclusive pedagogy, student social activism, and students' exploration of political structures as the opposite of these goals, seemingly overlooking that these are the very initiatives that generate student competency in societal discourse and quality, problem-solving research in interdisciplinary fields. It is clear that the term "DEI", like many terms today, has inadvertently become a polarizing phrase that oppressive entities falsely equate to anti-freedom. During periods when abstract terms mean drastically different things to different people, it is important for us as scholars of rhetoric and communication to define these concepts related to our work, especially concepts like diversity and inclusion that are foundational to our scholarship.

In this paper, I will discuss how deconstructing traditional pedagogical frameworks can help illuminate opportunities for reflection, recomposition, and reintegration of DEI principles based on new practices in learning and communication. As we move forward, we must consistently ask ourselves whether our practices support diverse perspectives, are authentically inclusive, and accurately represent the community of individuals we share these learning spaces with. Current departmental structures need not necessarily be completely overhauled, but careful reflection and evaluation of our practices will help us understand how to recompose new frameworks for studying rhetoric, writing, and communication. This essay will focus on underlying pedagogical approaches that warrant deeper reflection, highlighting methods of narrative learning that offer students new ways of engaging with rhetorical identity.

Narratives and Frameworks

As a participatory researcher with a background in academia and the wine industry, I have immersed myself in the revolutionary ideas, restructures, and educational practices that have developed in the wine community over the past few years. In analyzing these cultural shifts regarding communication and education in the industry, my sources have revealed intriguing new ways of deconstructing conventions and restructuring our community practices. In wine and many other industries, communicators and educators are experimenting with new methods of connecting with audiences and learners. In wine, the power of the story is becoming more and more prevalent in communication as audiences are drawn to the unique narratives behind the wines and winemakers they love. Narrative, in many ways, has become the fuel of communication in the industry. We use it to learn truths about people and share ours to connect with our communities.

In reflecting on our educational structures over the past few decades, scholars have discussed the role of narrative in writing pedagogy. James Baumlin of Missouri State University argues in favor of narrative writing and learning, stating that "creative nonfiction" benefits from the inclusion of our narratives not because we seek to confirm "The Truth" but because we seek to diversify our perspectives through community (22). Notable scholars in education, including Jim Corder and Peter Elbow, present views favoring varying levels of narrative expression in writing pedagogy, according to Baumlin. But recently, many contemporary communication strategies depend on narrative to establish frameworks and analyze rhetorical ethos. Many modern scholars argue that including people's stories—instructors, students, primary sources, etc.—in first-year writing and critical inquiry courses helps create a more authentic learning environment where valuable aspects of our identities hold important roles in our development as communicators.

Additionally, reflecting on our narratives can help us dissect our pedagogical practices to identify opportunities for reconstructing new and more advantageous frameworks for teaching rhetoric. Farrah Goff presents a prime example of possible de- and reconstructions in writing pedagogy in her article "Mental Illness Inside the College Classroom". She suggests that writing instructors explore deconstructing language surrounding mental divergence to be more accurately aware of the "valuable learning" strategies that mentally divergent students and teachers bring to the classroom community (Goff 15). Arguing against conventional frameworks that prioritize "sameness and order" and attempt to "stifle" divergences, Goff encourages us to facilitate alternative narratives that "demonstrate mental divergence not as a negative, but rather as an extremely typical part of the human experience" (15). She admits that "there is no perfect way to address the issues of mental illness in the classroom" and argues that our effort toward reflecting on inclusive teaching strategies contributes to the overall progress of writing pedagogy. Through this mindset, the process itself retains the most value, representing a narrative that shows one's commitment to inclusive education.

As I seek to explore methods of developing a more diverse and inclusive curriculum for my future courses, I utilize the theories of interdisciplinary scholars to demonstrate opportunities for creative restructuring of conventional rhetorical study. The following sections provide a deconstruction of rhetorical elements, offering alternative organizational structures for guiding students toward becoming rhetorical thinkers. In my commitment to practical and representational curricula, I explore questions surrounding the possibility of truly inclusive learning within current departmental structures. These arguments involve the addition of multicultural perspectives of communication and community engagement, interrogation of long-standing frameworks for persuasive argumentation, and application of new practices in response to students' evolving perceptions of time and relationships.

Ethos and Becoming Rhetorical

Modern communication calls for rhetorical strategy based less on memorization of stand-alone rhetorical elements and more on strategy rooted in building relationships. This foundational theory comes from Katrina Powell and Pamela Takayoshi's "Accepting the Roles Created for Us" in the Humanities. From their perspective, a rhetorician's relationship with an audience should be collaborative and reciprocal, though collaboration is often easier to achieve than reciprocity.

Relationships between participants and researchers can be collaborative when participants frame research questions, collect and interpret data, and respond to final written analyses, for example, but collaborative relationships are not always reciprocal relationships. Studies can be collaborative without being mutually beneficial.

Researchers can construct methodological frameworks in which knowledge is collaboratively developed by participants and researcher, but when the roles of participants are confined to the research project (and what they can give to the researcher in developing the project, the data, or the interpretations of the data), the research relationship may benefit only the researcher and, thus, not be reciprocal at all. Participant contributions might be understood in such a research relationship as meaningful in that they help the researcher "get the story right". Certainly, the more perspectives researchers can gather, the more complex a picture they will be able to draw; from a research standpoint, then, this is a valuable role for participants. But researchers interested in building reciprocal relationships might need to shift their thinking to include ways participants might benefit from their relationship with the researcher outside the confines of the research (Powell and Takayoshi 396).

Through this explanation, these researchers distinguish reciprocity as a mindset rather than merely an action. Community-engaged, collaborative research often involves gathering multiple primary sources for the most thorough understanding of the narrative. But the researcher's overarching purpose of their work—and the goal of their rhetoric—can be made more practical by prioritizing realistic benefits for both the researcher and their community of interest. This is an advantageous perspective to promote in early 2020s communication, as audiences are increasingly aware of biases and agendas behind persuasive messages. Collaborative relationships offer everyone the chance to have a voice in the overarching narrative of the process.

Moreover, Powell and Takayoshi illuminate a useful pedagogical strategy for composition and rhetoric. Their argument exhibits the idea of teaching students to think rhetorically about the communication they engage in inside and outside the classroom. In first-year courses, large and immediate advantages for research communities are perhaps more difficult to achieve, as revolutionary changes in a community take time and layers of research. But in teaching students to think rhetorically about the conversations they engage in and to prioritize reciprocity in their research goals, educators demonstrate the power of being a part of the narrative and plant seeds to help students grow into practical, community-engaged researchers. In this situation, our role is to guide students toward understanding their relationships with other voices in their fields and to build new relationships through composition research.

Composition educator Jodie Nicotra argues that reciprocity is most advantageous in our "multimedia world", as "becoming rhetorical" allows students to open their minds toward the potential influence their research could have in their field. In her book *Becoming Rhetorical*, Nicotra argues that this perspective "aims to give composition students the tools to become dynamic, powerful communicators who are attuned to the energy and spark of rhetoric and able to direct it skillfully" (xxiii). According to Nicotra, adopting rhetoric as a part of one's communicative identity

helps one effectively relate to evolving audiences, thus creating a strong foundation of ethos. Furthermore, this perspective can show that "composition is more than just writing" (Nicotra xxiii). From a rhetorical mindset, the available means of persuasion can take many forms, and strong ethos develops as the rhetorician engages with diverse methods of communication.

However, it is important to note that encouraging students to become rhetorical does not equate to teaching a mastery of rhetorical ethos. While it can be helpful to motivate students to improve their communication practices, it is important that students understand the value of their voice in its current stage, whatever that stage may be. In fact, composition scholar Krista Ratcliffe argues that humility, rather than the quest for mastery, helps facilitate the most authentic and reciprocal relationships between communicators, researchers, sources, and communities. Ratcliffe claims that modern rhetorical strategy calls for "listening to discourses not for intent but with intent – with the intent to understand not just the claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well" (192). Ethos, Ratcliffe argues, is a "fluid" part of our rhetorical identity strengthened by our humble engagement with other voices (192). The process of developing ethos displays its own narrative for valuable insight to be extracted from. In considering the entirety of the rhetorical situation, we are able to understand better where our audience is coming from, and thus, allowing us opportunities for more intimate relationships with others involved in the conversation.

Audience Relationships

Teaching students the idea of joining the conversation in rhetoric and composition pedagogy has long been successful in developing rhetorically-engaged researchers. This idea, fused with strategies of narrative learning, can help students build confidence in their writerly ethos regardless of what level of communication they feel they are able to demonstrate. The story behind one's process toward ethical development shows others a commitment to becoming rhetorical and a dedication to listening to others' stories. Stories have also become tools for modern audiences to gauge credibility and authenticity, as evidenced by many digital and social media interactions. For instance, visual artists can record videos of their artistic process and use TikTok to share this process with their community. When a final piece is completed, the audience better understands the time, effort, and passion that went into the piece from their own anecdotal experience. These kinds of practices in multimodal composition and communication generate a cultural perspective where ethos is co-created by both the rhetorician and the community. Allowing the audience a role in one's rhetorical development helps strengthen these communication relationships and increases one's chances of effectively relaying arguments.

Through this perspective, educators help students recognize their own power to shape the narrative and frameworks of their studies. Understanding different roles in the conversation, engaging with sources, and demonstrating respect for audiences' critical thinking all contribute to the narrative of one's ethos. This narrative continues when a rhetorician endeavors to compose a well-organized argument, a practice where conventional frameworks can also be de– and reconstructed for better application in modern communication. One valuable opportunity for reconstruction I have found is Kate Dzubinski's argument supporting "Dancing Over Dueling". In her article, she points out that English language conventions surrounding argumentative communication are often rooted in war-like conflict, with phrases like "counter attack," "win or lose," and "defending a position" metaphorically creating a framework of argument as a battle. A possible deconstruction of this overarching metaphor, Dzubinski argues, could illuminate new opportunities for rhetorical engagement and connection. She suggests a reconstruction that positions persuasive communication as a dance, with the rhetorician and the audience as performers who maintain give-and-take control over the flow of communication. Interrogating and reconstructing this framework can demonstrate

to first-year students how they can play with visualizing the conversation and taking on different rhetorical roles.

This is one example of a rhetorical framework that can be deconstructed and reconstructed to fit modern rhetorical situations better. More importantly, these kinds of practices let students know they have the freedom to choose how to build rhetorical frameworks to facilitate the narrative they aim to communicate. As we reflect on our composition practices and evaluate necessary updates, our role as educators is to relay the narratives of rhetorical study to students so that they can critically think about how different frameworks play out in modern rhetorical situations. Diversifying the options for developing rhetorical ethos and presenting persuasive arguments helps broaden opportunities for students with varying communication skills to showcase what unique insight their story brings to the conversation. In encouraging these practices, we not only help students understand the value of becoming rhetorical in an evolving multimodal world, but we also encourage students to diversify their own internal perspectives by breaking down these frameworks.

The Kairotic Situation

Our cultural experiences during the early 2020s culminate to create a unique space for revolutionary shifts in communication. Two decades into the digital revolution, we endured an international pandemic that drastically influenced public sentiments, social interactions, and the development of interpersonal relationships, resulting in an ongoing acceleration toward new, experimental ways of communicating. Daniel Keller, author of *Chasing Literacy,* defines our current time as an "age of acceleration" in which "literacies appear, change, merge with other literacies, and fade at a faster rate" than before (74). Our comprehension of texts and media relies on multimodal skills and an understanding of rapidly growing new forms of expression and communication. Keller particularly points out how modern literacy practices "increasingly tend toward the value of speed," arguing that speed has become a "defining feature" of modern communication (74). This revolutionary period in developing our society's communication practices comes with new affordances and extended access to valuable tools for building and sustaining relationships. But it also comes with many challenges, as Keller notes that "although more literacies give us more inroads to meet students [where they are], they also create more pressure for teachers to keep up with these developments" (40). As we follow the acceleration of our students' literacies and communication practices, we also grapple with significant shifts in our own methods of expressing ourselves.

Furthermore, this cultural shift towards speed prioritization has been juxtaposed with our new post-pandemic perception of time. Ruth Ogden, professor of psychology, argues that internal and social factors heavily influence our natural sense of time. During the past few years of pandemic living, we have experienced at least four phenomena that have altered our post-pandemic sense of time. First, Ogden presents "emotional arousal" as a common influence on time perception, as being in an impacting emotional state can cause us to view negative experiences as longer lasting than positive ones (3). Second, she argues that our ability to reflect on our experiences influences us to develop time frameworks, meaning that in times where "attentional allocation" is limited and "cognitive load" is high, our lack of reflective practices affects our internal frameworks (Ogden 4). "Neuronal desensitization" is a third main contributor to our perspectives of cultural frameworks, so enduring pandemic challenges have, in some ways, numbed us to certain pre-pandemic time signposts (Ogden 4). Lastly, Ogden notes that our internal frameworks of time generate natural predictions over future circumstances, and the pandemic's sustained unpredictability has reconstructed our perceptions to expect something different from time frameworks. In fact, Lily Rothman argues that because the pandemic exposed time as "a mere social construct," we have

seemingly gained more of a sense of control over time and are more conscious of how we spend our time post-pandemic.

Rothman believes this cultural shift in our time perceptions might be good, as we are increasingly aware of how time and space affect our relationships and identity expression. Rather than feeling abandoned by time in an age of acceleration, we can take control over our internal frameworks surrounding time itself. Pedagogically, this widespread shift in cultural perspective calls for educators to explore new "tools and dispositions" to help students "take well-calculated risks, work with partial information, and always remain open to new knowledge" during this revolutionary period (Strivens and Ward 332). In their chapter for *Emerald Group's Student Engagement Handbook*, researchers Janet Strivens and Rob Ward argue that learning is relative to the kairotic (or time when things are right for action) situation and everyone's experience. Therefore, educators' roles are to facilitate the most fruitful learning experiences for students so that they may have the opportunity to find enjoyment in establishing their voice in the conversation. Reflecting on and revising pedagogical frameworks can help one build these kinds of innovative learning experiences. However, as Strivens and Ward point out, "reflection, like student engagement, is an oft defined term which still ends up meaning different things to different people" (202). The reflection opportunities we provide students must coincide with composition goals, course objectives, and clear assessments.

In their chapter, Strivens and Ward highlight examples of reflection-based writing activities that demonstrate deep levels of critical thinking and suggest theoretical frameworks for assessing learning. Strivens and Ward's term for these strategies, "stop–and–think," actionizes the process of reflection and directly addresses Keller's "age of acceleration" by offering an alternative to modern normalized thought structures. The phrase comes from the extra effort it requires to engage in this kind of learning:

> The comment "You have to stop and think — it's hard!" was allegedly made by a child on his Instrumental Enrichment programme many years ago: for us it captures the essence of a truth many teachers have come to accept. There are learning strategies which have the effect of shifting the learner's focus of attention, refocusing on the "how" of learning rather than the "what". They are often experienced by the learner as effortful – needing a greater degree of concentration, a sharper focus of attention. They are however powerful in their effects, enabling the learner to generalize from immediate experience; to make new connections and see new insights within information already acquired; or to access different strategies to attack problems. (Strivens and Ward 332)

These authors describe the value of reflection-based learning and writing strategies; they capture students' attention and work with the effects of accelerated literacies and help students practice valuable learning methods for evolving rhetorical situations. As students navigate modern communication spaces, stop–and–think strategies help them notice elements of the rhetorical situation that might have been previously overlooked. These methods allow students to be more aware of the cultural frameworks of communication and how these perceptions work within the kairotic situation.

Strivens and Ward note two main dimensions of stop–and–think strategies: chronological and contextual. First, we ask where the activity places the learner chronologically by remembering the past, considering the present, or looking toward the future. Then, we ask whether the learning activity is done individually or with a group. Learning goals and assessments can be formed around these two parameters as different chronological and contextual activities will result in different types of student engagement needed. Moreover, pairing different aspects together can serve alternative purposes based on what kind of thoughts and feelings the experience generates. For instance, a teacher might use individual reflection on past learning processes as a means of gauging student

comprehension. In contrast, peer review activities that address parts of the writing processes might be used for facilitating student engagement. Strivens and Ward generally argue that these stop-and-think strategies give teachers the power to "detach attention from the immediacy of experience" and encourage students toward reflective thinking (333).

Conclusion

Goff, consistently throughout "Mental Illness Inside the College Classroom", emphasizes the importance of these kinds of reflective experiences, arguing that "valuable learning" occurs when students and teachers holistically embrace the mental and emotional elements of writing education. In my own exploration of my communication practices, emotional intelligence, and experience as a student, I have discussed my thoughts with insightful mental health professionals who have helped me use writing to express my sentiments. My current therapist always reminds me of a favorite mantra: "Life is a laboratory". This theory can be applied to de- and reconstructing social frameworks for more effective rhetorical practices with objectives of nurturing relationships and building community. The idea is especially timely in relation to our current circumstances for teaching communication, as this experimental environment calls for careful, continuous reflection on our rhetorical goals.

Taking these theories to practice in the early 2020s classroom involves adopting this mantra: life is a laboratory. As a teacher, I aim to facilitate a creative environment where students feel open to experimenting with rhetoric and language to learn about their communities and find their voices. The college composition classroom is ideal for students to explore new perspectives that help inform their communicative identities. A helpful first step in helping students diversify their perspectives is teaching them to seek out diverse sources in their research. I have already discussed how rhetorically listening to others' narratives helps strengthen ethos and broaden one's understanding of the rhetorical situation. But when it comes to deconstructing conventional communication frameworks, new perspectives are needed to help guide us toward rhetorical effectiveness. In searching for fresh research perspectives to help jumpstart one's work, a beneficial strategy is to intentionally look for sources that present different cultural perspectives from one's own experiences.

The ultimate goal of the rhetor, communicator, or writer is to explore these kinds of differences in order to draw connections between them that we can all benefit from. One of the main purposes of composition courses is to teach students to seek diverse perspectives and be able to synthesize and analyze these sources in regard to timely arguments. Going back to Senate Bill 266, if students are unable to access new perspectives or do not understand the role diversity plays in well-rounded academic research, then they will be unable to "model civic discourse that recognizes the importance of viewpoint diversity, intellectual rigor, and an evidence-based approach to history" as this law calls for (Florida Senate). While this law interprets DEI initiatives as non-fundamental practices that distract from quality education, the argument lacks understanding of the direct connection between diverse and inclusive curriculum and confident and educated students. In fact, the statement above is a new addition to this bill, replacing the objective to "nurture a greater awareness of and passion for public service and politics" (Florida Senate). In reality, both objectives go hand–in–hand, as authentic passion for public service and educated interest in politics are born from learning spaces that provide opportunities for learning new perspectives, including more voices in the conversation, and accurately representing every individual's story.

The concept of DEI principles cannot be simplified to make sense of these regressive interpretations. Diverse and inclusive pedagogy is not founded on performative actions, silencing voices, or limiting resources and knowledge. To thoroughly understand our roles as educators and to

provide exceptional learning spaces for our students, teachers have the ethical responsibility to support narratives that uplift DEI initiatives and deconstruct frameworks that keep students from accessing knowledge and reaching their potential. Through learning about the diverse perspectives present in the conversation, practicing one's participation in the conversation, asserting questions, and sharing power over the narrative, students gain the tools and insight to become strong, authoritative voices in their fields. More importantly, we learn how to explore and juxtapose different perspectives to discover new connections between us, helping create an engaged, intellectual community prepared for whatever the future of communication holds.

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The Duality of the Oppressed Being the Oppressor in *Crazy Rich Asians*

The Malaysian equivalent to the American term, melting pot, is the spiced fruit salad, *rojak*, which refers to a multicultural population. Theorist Gloria Anzaldúa coined the term *la mestiza* which refers to "a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (Anzaldúa 78) in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. If Anzaldúa's theory rings true, equality should already be within the grasp of both diverse countries; however, works of literature such as *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan has yet to achieve the ideals of *la mestiza*. According to her theory, the new *mestiza* or mixed, hybrid consciousness is a solution to combat White supremacy, and she petitions for diversification through literature by the oppressed when she claims:

> Throughout literature, art, *corridos*, and folktales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos or the Chicano farmworkers or *los Nicaragüenses* they won't turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances. They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead. (Anzaldúa 85)

Ideally, literature should act as a bridge between cultures. However, numerous works, even those written by the oppressed, still uphold White superiority in aspects such as skin color, upbringing and language as seen in Kwan's book. While *Crazy Rich Asians* is an accomplishment of literature that spotlights the Asian community, particularly in Southeast Asia, there remains much progress to elevate voices of the marginalized. In terms of highlighting diversity, Kwan's book is lacking because it focuses on whitewashed upbringings, light skin privilege and English as a language of power. These three factors are regarded with an air of superiority even within the marginalized community, which is a result of discrimination by past White oppressors. The oppressed have adopted the oppressor's perspective, which is passed down through generational trauma. Equality cannot be attained by the *mestiza* alone; a mindset reform in society is necessary, and that begins with the deconstruction of White supremacy.

The underlying issue within literature by the *mestiza* is the worship of whitewashed upbringings and lack of respect for one's roots. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa states:

> I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (80)

While the idea of being "cultureless" or "participating in the creation of yet another culture" sounds promising, the underlying implication that the oppressed has to step into the shoes of the oppressor is problematic. While the *mestiza* is considered the middle ground between the oppressed and the oppressor, they should neither be made responsible for educating the oppressor, nor let off the hook for their mistakes just because they also belong to the oppressed community. One major

mistake that *mestiza* in literature often get away with is the fact that they approve of the White perspective and look down on the marginalized perspective through their sentiments, education, lifestyle, upbringing and more. It is unfortunate to have the *mestiza* be given the platform to share the voices of people of color, but they instead turn their backs on the societally inferior perspective. In Kwan's work of fiction, the main protagonists are Nick Young and Rachel Chu, who are both whitewashed in different ways. Young is a Singaporean who grew up in England and is the lead male character of the narrative. He is depicted as a dreamy, pixie boy with a posh British accent and an abundance of inherited wealth from his family. Chu, the female lead, who is a Californian of Chinese descent, joins him on a trip to Singapore to meet his family. Here's an excerpt of Astrid Leong's thoughts on Chu as the former comments on Chu's nationality as a Chinese American:

> To be quite honest, I thought I might be slightly jealous of her at first, but I think she's great. She's not clingy, and she's so refreshingly … American. You do realize that everyone is talking about you and Rachel, right? Everyone is already taking bets on the wedding date. (Kwan 171)

The central narrative focuses on Chu, the young, pretty American with a whitewashed outlook on Asia. She is presented as a likeable character because unlike many others, she is not materialistic. She serves as the American contrast against the Asian characters where the underlying implication within this trope is that as the American, Chu has the freedom to love whomever she wants while others view marriage as a political or financial agenda. This implication glorifies the whitewashed Asian character and sets the others back.

Ironically, the American currency is stronger than that of many Southeast Asian currencies; thus, Chu's lack of concern for riches should be seen as reasonable as she is likely in a good financial standing, especially when she travels to Southeast Asia. The story follows the two lead characters on their visit to Southeast Asia through the lens of their whitewashed upbringing, highlighting their wealth through hyperbole and fetishizing Asian culture by portraying it as enticingly foreign. In Kwan's book, Chu discovers how rich the Young family is, and the book goes to lengths to dramatize their fortune: "Besides your father, you are the only Young left in the line. You are the heir apparent, whether you choose to believe it or not. What's more, your grandmother adores you. And everyone knows your grandmother controls both the Shang and Yang fortunes" (Kwan 124).

The book perpetuates the stereotype of rich Asians by only showing the extraordinary lives of multimillionaires even through side characters; take Astrid Leong for instance:

> she was born into the upper echelon of Asian wealth—a secretive, rarefied circle of families virtually unknown to outsiders who possessed immeasurably vast fortunes. For starters, her father hailed from the Penang Leongs, a venerable Straits Chinese family that held a monopoly over the palm oil industry. But adding even more oomph, her mother was the eldest daughter of Sir James Young and the even more imperial Shang Su Yi. Astrid's aunt Catherine had married a minor Thai prince … (Kwan 76)

While the book opens the door to multiple Asian-centric storylines, the birth of other books and shows like *Sarong Party Girls* by Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan and *Bling Empire*, dubbed as the Asian Kardashians, further perpetuates the stereotype of wealthy Asians. There is little to no mention of Kwan's book being satire, but with these hyperbolic examples, one would hope it might possibly be satire. Stereotypes like "rich Asians" and fetishization of Asian culture as foreign still persist within literature by the traditionally marginalized community of *mestiza*, which affirms the whitewashed perspective. The whitewashed *mestiza* has now become the root of the issue, or as the Malay saying goes, *duri dalam daging* or "thorn in the flesh". This is true of the *mestiza* that hypocritically worships the White perspective and emblems of whiteness.

The duality that many people of color possess by having lighter skin does not deem them worthy of being a bridge between oppressed and oppressor. Although they are *mestiza* with dual

awareness, given their experience of being marginalized and privileged at the same time, the problem lies within the idea that lighter skin is a privilege. The supposed privilege is the mentality that *mestiza* continue to popularize within literature. Viewing White people as the main oppressor stems from the history of colonialism, but that is short-sighted because racism is still rampant in multicultural countries; the *mestiza* is accountable for their actions as well. Anzaldúa depicts White people as the perpetrators of racial discrimination in the phrase: "The dominant White culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance" (86). Her proposed solution is the *mestiza*: "many feel that Whites should help their own people rid themselves of race hatred and fear first. I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator" (85). The "mediator" refers to the *mestiza*, or in this case specifically, one who owns the privilege of lighter skin but the disadvantage of being oppressed. However, equality is still a far cry even with the presence of "mediators".

Even among Southeast Asians, there exist hierarchies of privileges not unlike the Indian caste system. Who comes to mind when reference is made to the term "Asians", particularly in America? The term often refers to Asians with lighter complexions. Ethnicities such as Indians are disregarded. Fairer-skinned Asians are the *mestiza* because they experience a duality: privilege and oppression. The main characters in *Crazy Rich Asians* consist of light-skinned people who ethnically identify as Chinese whereas very few minor characters are Indian, Sikh, Malay and other darker-skinned ethnicities even though the population of Malaysia and Singapore proves to be much more diverse. *Crazy Rich Asians* may be a phenomenal milestone for the only major film to have Asian lead characters since *The Joy Luck Club* in 1993, but there is still a lack of representation. What's more is the fact that the main characters come from an upper-class and highly educated background, limiting the perspective to a select few within the population. A problematic scene in Kwan's book depicts Sikh Malaysians as security guards, a stereotypical lower-class job for Sikhs during the British reign over Malaysia: "before Rachel could answer, an Indian guard with a fierce looking beard, wearing a crisp olive-green uniform and a bulky turban, appeared at the gates … The guard peered into the car and said in perfect Queen's English, 'Miss Rachel Chu?' … 'That was a Gurkha! They are the deadliest soldiers in the world'" (133). The passage exaggerates the Sikhs' demeanors, which are further developed for comedic effect in the film, and the characters with lighter skin express fear or unfamiliarity towards them. This casts the Sikhs, who have darker skin, as odd, scary and foreign. Additionally, the book wrongly identifies these turbaned guards as Gurkhas (Kwan 134), a term used to refer to Nepalese recruits, as if they are one and the same as Sikhs. In an attempt to educate, the book instead makes an attribution to stereotypes formed by White colonialists. The "divide and conquer" strategy that forced people of color into jobs according to ethnicity was first implemented by White colonialists and persists as scars in the form of stereotypes in instances of discrimination within literature today. Making fun of turbans and associating them with malice is not a new phenomenon in literature as J.K. Rowling paints in *The Sorcerer's Stone* when Professor Quirrell turns out to be the cowardly villain's sidekick (Rowling 225).

To reiterate, difference in skin color still remains a factor of discrimination even amidst a diverse population of *mestiza*, and this mentality is translated into popularized literature. "The answer to the problem between the White race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages" (80) claims Anzaldúa. Languages are a double-edged sword. While language has the ability to divide, it also has the power to unite. In Kwan's book, those who are raised to speak English as their primary language are seen as well-educated as opposed to others who speak primarily in their mother tongue, be it Malay, Hindi, Mandarin, Cantonese, or Hokkien. Historically speaking, only the wealthy had access to be educated in English. On the one hand, English opens up avenues since it is a global language, spoken in many countries. On the other hand, the language of English is seen as an emblem of power and prestige due to its affiliation with White colonialists in the past. The national language of

Malaysia, Malay or *Bahasa Melayu*, and other mother tongue languages are perceived to narrow one's access to a more global means of communication and resource of knowledge. Unfortunately, these languages have turned into a tool of more recent oppressors, namely current politicians, as they are used to suppress and limit one's knowledge, producing the sentiment of "deep sense of racial shame" and "language inadequacy" that Anzaldúa coins in a passage (83). To take an optimistic view of Kwan's book, the fictional piece is successful in its effort to incorporate languages like Malay and Hokkien to depict Manglish or Singlish colloquialisms into its dialog such as "alamak" (Kwan 22) and "giam siap" (Kwan 19), respectively. Kwan weaves multiple languages naturally into dialog and amplifies the beauty of multilingualism by saving the translations for footnotes.

While the book commemorates the inclusion of languages that rarely surface in mainstream bestsellers, the book fails to highlight more Indian dialects that are prominent in Malaysia and Singapore. There is a footnote on page 14 that appears to be rather condescending to non-English names: "Since these wives' names are all impressively long, unpronounceable to non-Thai speakers, and rather irrelevant to this story, they have been left out". The fact that Kwan chooses to leave out names is such a missed opportunity to celebrate the diversity of identities in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Kwan's book portrays microaggression accurately when the Young family is shunned from a hotel due to a racist manager who assumes that they didn't speak English. The microaggression that comes in the form of praise such as "wow your English is so good" is encapsulated between the lines perfectly. Once the characters speak in English, they are given reluctant respect from the manager, symbolizing the power of language.   Trevor Noah, he writer, comedian and former host of *The Daily Show*, was born to a White father and a black mother. He is an yet another ideal example of a *mestiza*. discusses the duality of language in his memoir, *Born A Crime*, which is a great example of literature by a *mestiza*:

> Other colored people hated me because of my whiteness. Even though I identified as being black, I had a white father. I went to an English private school. I'd learned to get along with white people at church. I could speak perfect English, and I barely spoke Afrikaans, the language colored people were supposed to speak. They would mock my accent, like I was putting on airs. 'Dink jy, jy is grênd?' 'You think you're high class?'—uppity people would say in America. (152)

Noah acknowledges the duality of speaking the oppressor's language in his upbringing and how he is regarded with respect by some and mocked by others. On the same token, *Crazy Rich Asians* depicts the use of English by *mestiza*, denoting its duality to fight against and yet, contribute to inequality. To contextualize the discussion, languages within literature may function as a medium to unite or divide the oppressor and the oppressed. Anzaldúa is correct in saying that literature has the power to encapsulate the beauty of multilingualism, but there are nuances and flaws within language that need to be taken note of.

As Anzaldúa claims, "to rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves. We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts" (88). She highlights the importance of acknowledging the oppressed and the oppressor as well as their influence within the community. To conclude, literature written by *mestiza* is still impacted by white superiority in terms of whitewashed mentality, skin color and language but as Anzaldúa implied, contempt is futile and progress in terms of mindset is needed to combat racism. Literature should still be regarded as flawed although it has the potential to diversify education and combat White supremacy. While Anzaldúa certainly brought about hope in many aspects, various obstacles still need to be resolved before implementing literature as she suggested. The *mestiza* should not be made responsible for taking down White supremacy because the oppressed should not be responsible for the oppressor's past mistakes. Yet, the *mestiza* should also be held accountable for their wrongdoings that perpetuate

inequality. The duality of the oppressed being the oppressor still stands true within literature. To combat the disparity between traditionally oppressed cultures caused by past oppressors, there needs to be a surge of effort and a mindset reform to heal from the damage that has been caused. Books like *Crazy Rich Asians* have so much potential to speak for multicultural countries such as Malaysia and Singapore instead of perpetuating stereotypes and causing more damage. So much more could've been done to capture the beauty of the country realistically through fiction. Pushing the narrative matters, but more importantly, the narrative needs to be analyzed with the precision of a sensitivity editor to acknowledge its flaws. As Ronny Chieng, Malaysian actor in *Crazy Rich Asians* and a host at *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* says: "[That's what] this beautiful country is about. It's about using the freedom we have to help other people who don't have that many freedoms" (*Ronny Chieng: Asian Comedian Destroys America!*). To reiterate, the privileged, including the *mestiza,* should share their platforms with those who are oppressed in order to deconstruct White supremacy in America. Together, the *mestiza* has the ability to bridge connections between oppressed and oppressor with the right mindset and resources.

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Maria L. Plochocki

Help Ourselves First?
The Role of Adjunct Faculty in Reviving and Restoring the Humanities

T he intertwined "crises" of the academic job market, especially in the humanities; the future of these disciplines, with what some see as their lack of cohesive identity undermining this further; and exploitation of adjunct faculty are undeniable, even if the statistics, other facts, and even nature of their interrelationship are sometimes disputed. Over a decade ago, Michael Bérubé, a long-time advocate for adjunct-faculty issues, echoed the commonly heard accusation that graduate programmes in the humanities knowingly admit students who are very unlikely to find the full-time academic employment they're being trained for, while allowing them to continue their studies in order to exploit them as teaching and research assistants and adjunct faculty. He also reframed the problem in a more theoretical manner by saying that "when we look at the public reputation of the humanities[, … and] the academic job market for humanists, we can't avoid the conclusion that the value of the work we do, and the way we theorize value, simply isn't valued by very many people, on campus or off" – a situation which, in the assessment of some cited here, goes back much longer. In 2011, Renata Kobetts Miller emphasised the ethical dimension: "We owe it both to our students and to our part-time, contingent labor force … to provide as many opportunities for full-time, non contingent employment as possible" within the humanities (29). In his 2019 article, "The University is a Ticking Time Bomb," Aaron Hanlon, one of many calling the treatment of and reliance on adjunct faculty "unsustainable" (thus emphasizing stakes in, and consequences of, the situation for both adjunct faculty and the institutions relying on them) calls on readers to "fundamentally reconceptualize the battle against adjunctification." More relevant for the purposes of this article is the perception of adjunct faculty as unable or unwilling to understand, much less resist, what's being done to them, first, by their graduate programmes, and then by their employers. They are also thought of as not being capable of securing "real" academic (or any other) employment, and being victims of other forces beyond anyone's control, or even comprehension. They are the proverbial canaries in the mine whose demise prophesies that of other professions (the last view was articulated by Polina Kroik in her 2019 opinion piece).

The above undoubtedly serves to cement the "two faculty" view of academia, whereby full-time faculty may both distance themselves from adjuncts and blame them for ills such as declining academic standards, student preparation, and retention. In response, like many others, Hanlon points out the (eventually) inextricable fate of all faculty:

> adjunctification weakens every institution that relies on it … not because contingent faculty members themselves are weak, but because the conditions under which they work … prevent them from building the future of knowledge. … Without committing to a professoriate with a future, tenured faculty members and administrators are guaranteeing the obsolescence of their own institutions and the eventual erasure of their own careers and legacies.

To prevent this "weakening" and "obsolescence," he also calls for matching hiring/staffing of courses with existing needs. For example, contrary to the common practice of hiring adjuncts to teach general-education or other required/popular courses, he, like Bérubé and Ruth, recommends staffing these with full-time faculty so as to demonstrate institutional commitment to these subjects and promote their sustainability and that of the departments offering them (see also Miller 29). Mark

Bauerlein, in "The Hardest Course in the Humanities?", goes even further, drawing a connection between faculty and institutional commitment to required or general education courses and reinforced academic standards. Still others rush to defend adjunct faculty, whether as victims of the system or by asserting their value and contributions, however defined. This argument, however, still serves to draw the same proverbial battle lines and overlook a potentially more generative connection, for present and future purposes: what if adjunct faculty could reinvigorate and redefine the humanities, guiding both (themselves and these academic disciplines, even if subject to some disagreement[i]) into a new realm where, instead of their value being questioned, with no defence being conclusive or adequate, both are given the respect and prominence that they deserve, on their own terms?

Whether, and to what extent, any of the proposed can be accomplished is a matter of conjecture, especially given more recent developments (widening austerity measures, COVID-19 and its fallout, and political and politicalised attacks even on programmes with robust enrolments and other support) serving to expose the fragile core of not only humanities and its professors, but academia and higher education itself. Nevertheless (to borrow yet another cliché), times of unrest and instability also present opportunities, and the prospect of undoing two evils which plague our civilisation in our own times and threaten to do so even more into the future is worth exploring. To this end, this article is not yet another call for solutions like alt-ac training, more and better marketing by humanities departments, restructuring curricula, or even redefining and keeping the value of the humanities prominent. These are certainly worthwhile and thus have and continue to receive plenty of discussion. But new, persistent, and shapeshifting problems won't yield to standard, previously attempted solutions or calls to action; these serve not only to make the issues seem more entrenched and resistant to change than they already seem, but also to obscure some very real benefits of and tools for changing the system, for both adjunct faculty and the humanities and humanists – all of which calls for the skills outlined below, but also much more.

For example, in the humanities, the expertise and real-world experience adjuncts can bring to the workplace may not be as obvious or linear as in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) disciplines – but *less* obvious connections and relationships are what's needed now, as the experts cited below and many others will attest. As John Schwartz, whose career has spanned several decades in the technology industry, says when advising current and soon-to-be jobseekers, "In a shifting economy, one powerful hack is to think laterally, identifying overlooked sectors, and roles within them that align with interests. This may require looking beyond the obvious". This is a skill and habit of mind long associated with humanists, which makes Schwartz's advice very relevant to adjuncts in these disciplines. In a similar vein, Sylvester Johnson, Founding Director of the Center for Humanities and Assistant Vice Provost for the Humanities at Virginia Tech, foresees the need for a "breadth of curiosity and analysis" and "an expansive range of learning, which has been a historic feature of humanities education," even as he also concedes the devaluation of the humanities in recent decades (qtd. in Groves). As well, rather than the real-world experience serving as a training ground for the classroom, straddling both worlds would be more of a possibility, with faculty spending time both in the classroom and other workplaces and these informing one another. By the same token, rather than adjuncts simply responding to institutional needs and mandates, they could have more say in the courses they teach, which would reflect and build on their expertise—professional, scholarly, and other. The feasibility, much less exact methodology, of this endeavour is also uncertain, but, as noted above, the exigency of the moment, paradoxically, makes it perfect for a re-examination of the situation, identifying skills and capacities we can draw on, and saving ourselves, our disciplines, and our institutions. Johnson also predicts this is part of the "steep demand for greater leadership from humanists in the public arena as well as private sector" (qtd. in Groves).

The (even) bigger picture Schwartz draws, however, is even more unique and of interest here: "Some trends quite nearly hit us over the head, though for deeply human reasons we often choose to ignore or underestimate them" – presumably one of the "uncomfortable truths" he articulates elsewhere in his article. Understanding "human nature" has long been considered the province of humanists and, of course, artists and social scientists; those of us versed in these disciplines and their accumulated wisdom, in addition to teaching them to others and thus immortalising them, should also press them into service for ourselves. One method of doing so may be not only recognising and acting on "uncomfortable truths" like the academic, especially adjunct, job market, but seeing through them and actually changing the situation. Doing so will free us of the dilemma of choosing between the "unsustainable" working conditions in academia adjuncts are often cautioned about too late (no guarantee of continued appointment, much less a living wage, benefits, and/ or any sort of parity with full-time faculty) and seeking other employment, which may be less satisfying, even if more lucrative and secure in the short term. Another payoff of the humanistic mindset may be this ability to see the big picture (or a different one from everyone else's), looking beyond the obvious, whether relating to explanations or solutions.

As related skills, Schwartz lists "experience and pattern recognition," which "matter, even in an era of exponential change," such as we were in even before COVID-19. The accumulated wisdom of the ages, represented most obviously by history but also other humanistic disciplines, makes this possible, even absent direct experience; seen as a larger, more abstract pattern, it can also enable adjunct faculty to determine their own destiny, as well as the future of the humanities. Such immersion in experience, even if vicarious, and ability to recognise patterns and recontextualise this recognition can serve to undo the present- and future-orientation which have long characterized our collective mindset, at the expense of dismissing the past. Though looking to the future seems essential, certainly more advisable than being mired in the past, George Santayana's oft-repeated warning ("Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it") rings truer than ever. More importantly than merely risking repeating the past, ignorance of it makes change more difficult because we may forget that other systems, other ways, were and remain possible. Robbing people of their history, such as by obscuring it or destroying their artefacts or other evidence, serves to disempower them, taking away pride, precedents and role models, and collective memory. In this vein, today's graduate students studying humanities disciplines are being warned about the dismal job market they're entering in comparison to, at most, the "good old days" of plentiful tenure-track jobs and institutional support inaccurately presented as a counterexample. However, they are not provided with alternative prospects for empowerment, much less ideas about restoring the standing of the disciplines they have dedicated years of their lives to studying and promoting.

Schwartz draws on his own experience to counter this mentality across industries, asserting that, even though technology and the pace of change "can create the impression that as workers we're now at the mercy of forces well beyond our control[, … c]hange is nothing new." Though his article is another sort of call to action, outlining concrete steps to take in order to remain "relevant" and, of course, employed or otherwise in charge of one's professional destiny, it is particularly applicable to adjunct faculty and the larger academic job market. However, these steps must also be transcended and built on by remembering that, indeed, change is the only constant, and that, from some perspectives, there never were any "good old days" in academia, adjunct faculty and graduate students can envision a different future for themselves and the humanities, eventually bringing same to fruition.

Thus, though the subject may seem overly discussed, not to mention depressing, the multifaceted connection between the increasing reliance on adjunct faculty, especially in humanities disciplines, and the declining respect for and relevance of these disciplines must also be understood and reframed but, ultimately, resisted and reformed. The skills humanists, including adjunct faculty,

are expected to master and tasked with passing along will prove a vital tool in debunking the "folk wisdom" depicting adjunct faculty as hapless, delusional victims and/or underappreciated servant-leaders in denial of their own obsolescence and that of their disciplines. Like other human artefacts, hypotheses and warnings like those below engage with the issues to be tackled but, ultimately, don't provide a complete answer or solution. For example, one voice among many, Philip W. Magness, thus sums up the problem:

> On its surface this uneven distribution [of relying on adjuncts] across academic disciplines portends an acute affliction to the humanities core of the traditional liberal education model, particularly as it relates to fields with highly saturated job markets. … A more pressing and simultaneous concern for the liberal arts model may also derive from the rapid growth of graduate degree output in the humanities. (58)

Though clearly depicting adjunct faculty as more sinned against than sinners, Magness nevertheless corelates their presence with declining standards, both within the graduate programmes they complete and where they go on to teach. Hanlon articulates another connection, often used in blaming and dismissing the concerns of adjunct faculty: "Even as obscene tales of adjunct woe lay bare the cruelty of adjunctification, the percentage of contingent faculty members continues to rise," which implies that adjunct faculty either don't have or see other options.

Bauerlein interconnects the increasing reliance on adjunct faculty with the decline of the humanities, in terms of both enrolment and esteem, in yet another way, also ultimately offering a working model: "When enrollments are down, majors are down, funding and jobs are down, adjuncts are up, and departments are being closed, abstract debates over which new theory or interdisciplinary vision is on the rise don't much count." This view has two key implications. First, hiring more adjunct, as opposed to full-time, faculty, shows a lack of financial support for the humanities, but also a lack of stability and longer-term planning. Since adjunct faculty are expected neither to grant any long-term commitment to their employer nor expect any in return, their presence makes the subjects and courses they teach appear temporary and, every sense of the word, contingent, as well (also echoing Hanlon's argument re: the overall unsustainability of the system). So, while adjunct faculty are not to blame for the state of the humanities, their employment signals less support from the institution and, presumably, public, which may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with the humanities viewed as less worthy of support *because* they don't receive it (as Bérubé also outlines in his article). Second, while professors likely desire to teach and publish in their areas of specialisation, the true bottom line is the preferences of students and other "stakeholders," like parents, even legislators, supposedly prioritised by administrators, which translates into "pressure to make … courses more 'relevant' and less rigorous" (emphasis added). However, if the humanities' "recovery and survival must start from the base," which he defines as undergraduate students, it must be noted that they will gravitate toward rigorous courses rather than those designed to be more "relevant" through the inclusion of multicultural texts and intersectional approaches. His example of this, the "hardest course in the humanities" after which his piece is titled, is an interdisciplinary humanities offering at the University of Oklahoma, which is team-taught by three full-time faculty, one of them also an administrator. This proves a point he does *not* explicitly state: supporting the humanities – whether a more traditional course, or a more contemporary or "relevant" offering – requires institutional and other commitment, like the time and effort of full-time faculty in course design, preparation, and delivery. The current model, whereby adjunct faculty are often hired at the last minute and either must prepare a course in a very short period of time or teach a predesigned one, as is often the case with general-education offerings, does not make this possible, to say the least – but the training we have undergone can perhaps guide us through this morass.

A related development, not to be overlooked, both imperiling the future of the humanities and offering them potential for survival, is the increasing financial and other investments in STEM, in both education and the workforce. The humanities' potential to humanise the race, save us from ourselves, promote ethics and empathy, and achieve similar ends has been used as an argument to save/ restore support, including creating more full-time faculty posts. For example, Miller warns that "we run the risk of becoming a society dominated by these [STEM] fields and uninformed by the moral, ethical, and humanitarian considerations that subjects such as literature, philosophy, and history provide" (29) if we do not allow the latter to salvage both themselves and, apparently, the future of humanity in the process. Johnson likewise tasks the humanities and their practitioners with abandoning the "easy recourse to reductionist claims that humanities education 'should not solve problems'" and, instead, "supporting well-being and human thriving" (qtd. in Groves). On a more practical note, Schwartz reminds his audience, "For all the emphasis on STEM right now, not everyone is cut out for a technical career. … The economy requires a diversity of skill sets [including "soft skills," such as communication and critical thinking that humanists are known for] and will continue to do so." Arguments like these, about the utilitarian value of these skills, such as the connection between the study of music and success in seemingly unrelated professions recognized by Wolff, or in efforts to cultivate imagination and confidence in business students ("Zicklin"), are predicated on "redeeming" or otherwise asserting the *instrumental* value of the humanities. They are also often initiatives developed by full-time faculty and administrators, with adjuncts playing, at most, a supporting role by invitation, thereby only benefitting by currying institutional favour, making themselves more "valuable."

The above instrumental and externally determined value of adjunct faculty themselves is a more innocuous instantiation of the "labor of love" for our disciplines and students, which many of us are expected to and do bring to our work. Much of the presumed "labor of love" includes spending countless unpaid hours preparing lessons, tutoring students, providing feedback on student work, and corresponding or referring students to support services, and much more. That adjunct faculty are willing to do this work (or do so as a condition of reappointment) makes them an excellent value to institutions of higher learning, especially in the short term. While various methods of making visible and challenging this unpaid labour have been attempted, like the initiative by the Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York of having adjunct faculty record hours they spend marking student work (Ahmad) or doing this in public areas of academic buildings ("Grade-In"), this onerous feature of the system seems particularly entrenched. Our love for what we do, and our students and (sometimes) employers, and whatever value(s) we bring may, in effect, be undermining our own interests. Another – perhaps the most substantial – challenge may therefore be retaining this love, being motivated by and also served by it at the same time.

Thus, what is needed is for these disciplines, and those of us studying and teaching them, to be valued, respected, and sustained on their own terms, using the skills, habits of mind, and other strengths we have built to do so. Rather than thinking of yet more ways to engage students and make the pandemic and its fallout easier on them, we need to be more efficient and productive (not only to reduce our unpaid labor but also, again, serve students and others better); ingratiate ourselves with our superiors, whether by being congenial or "serving" the department and institution; even recruit colleagues to various labor unions, committees, and task forces. But why don't we serve ourselves first? All the skills, habits of mind (and others), and capabilities we've built can and should help us, and the disciplines we serve, first and foremost. After all, even if our publication records are far shorter than those of full-time faculty, our student evaluations less glowing, our time and energy more limited, our claim to the expertise and skill set, the very epistemology we've built, is more valid for precisely this reason—we've developed, fought for, and defended it. What, and where, will the humanities be without their practitioners? Again, what concrete forms this will take remains to be

resolved, but promising starts would be greater control over curriculum, such as being able to design courses we teach, choose learning materials, and receive the same intellectual-property credit as full-time faculty; better material working conditions, including pay, workload, and job security; and, perhaps most importantly, the time and support needed to contribute to these disciplines more, whether composing creative works or researching scholarly ones.

In closing, I hope that the above has not been overly *Wizard of Oz*-like, promising what does not seem to be delivered and showing the audience how that which they claim to need and want has been inside them all along and only needs to be symbolically rendered in order to be capitalised on. Though we often gladly empower others, especially our students, but also full-time faculty, administrators, and others who benefit from our work, skills, and experience, we must think of ourselves first, not only if we are to survive and have anything to show for our efforts, but to salvage and reclaim the bodies of knowledge to which we have contributed and continue to embrace.

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[i] Among many making the point re: the humanities' being slippery in their definition are Sylvester Johnson, cited in Groves, and van Lieu.

Sinister Designs:
Uncle Tom's Cabin Reconsidered

> The ways in which artists – and the society that bred them – transferred internal conflicts to a 'blank darkness,' to conveniently bound and violently silence black bodies, is a major theme in American literature. The rights of man, for example, an organizing principle upon which the nation was founded, was inevitably yoked to Africanism. Its history, its origin is permanently allied with another seductive concept: the hierarchy of race.
> Toni Morrison
> from *Playing in the Dark* (1992)

Over the last fifty years, much of the scholarship around American Renaissance literature has examined how the major writers of that era, among them Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, sought to reconcile the deep divisions in antebellum American society by revivifying the sense of shared purpose that motivated earlier generations of European settlers to the New World. Renaissance enthusiast Sacvan Bercovitch locates the source of this "American consensus" in the "sacred mission" of the original Puritans of New England and correctly observes that it involved a "radical troping of Christian tradition" intended to galvanize an unruly, militant, and politically diverse group behind their Puritan leaders' proto-capitalist economic design (*Rites of Assent* 33). This ideological maneuver was underlain by a deep sense of anxiety among the clergy over the threat of social leveling posed by sectarian groups who throughout the seventeenth century "developed ideas that seemed to challenge not just hierarchical order but private property as well" (Ingersoll 49).[i] Thus, it is no surprise that the Renaissance authors mentioned above, whose own fears of social leveling manifested in varying degrees of obstinacy towards abolition, looked to their Puritan ancestors' conservative framework as a model for their writing. The elements of the original Puritan covenant were reconstructed in characters who reflect their authors' desire for a political compromise that would avoid the dissolution of the union even if this meant extending the institution of chattel slavery. For example, Hester Prynne's recovery of the scarlet "A" at the end of *The Scarlet Letter* is seen by Bercovitch as a form of consent to evil, a voluntary act of self-denial in the present that anticipates some ambiguous version of communal progress in the future (*The Office of The Scarlet Letter* xxvii). Other scholars, such as Jonathan Arac, concur with Bercovitch's analysis and more explicitly connect this symbolic evil to Hawthorne's notoriously conciliatory stance on slavery (248).

Frequently passed over by this strain of critical analysis is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which upon its publication in 1852 exceeded many of the writings of Stowe's contemporaries in both popularity and political impact. Part of the reason for the novel's marginalization is its perceived status as low art, mere protest writing lacking the sort of psychological depth that warrants scholarly exegesis. Even after the critical reputation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was improved in the mid-1980s, beginning approximately with Jane Tompkins's fresh treatment of the novel in her influential book *Sensational Designs*, it was still thought to be incapable

of the latent political machinations at play in the Gothic and Dark Romantic works that surrounded it. After all, there was nothing ambiguous about Stowe's virtuous position on slavery. It is a mistake, however, to exempt *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from serious reconsideration of its own ideological manipulations on account of the social good that it achieved. This essay will argue that in fact it is owing to the obviousness of Stowe's stance on slavery, and more specifically to its roots in her enthusiasm for the unique antinomianism of American puritanism[ii], that a closer examination of the underlying ideological work of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is needed. Such an examination reveals that the strong antinomian impulse undergirding Stowe's opposition to legal slavery simply does not inspire the same enthusiasm for the abolition of racial hierarchy. Indeed, the close reading offered below aims to demonstrate Stowe's resistance to a radical reorganization of antebellum society while explaining her support for an *anti*-revolutionary political compromise that would allow the continuation of exploitative free markets. Finally, this essay will employ a Marxist critical framework to demonstrate how Stowe's mystification of the material conditions of life under slavery implies some of the same anxieties about the prospect of social leveling that characterize many of the more explicitly conservative works of her time.

Idyllic Oppressions

For Stowe, American culture was inextricably linked to the puritan errand. Her personal literary tastes reflected this belief. According to biographer David Reynolds, Stowe was bored by "musty theological tracts" and much preferred the sorts of stories that spoke to the divine origin of the American project. In response to Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, for example, she is said to have remarked, "What wonderful stories those! ... Stories, too, about my own country. Stories that made me feel the very ground I trod on to be consecrated by some special dealing of God's providence" (5). More than just vague notions of divine consecration and basic Christian morality, though, it was the American puritan tradition of "radical independence and rebellion against authority," originating in the puritan separatist's clean break from the Church of England around 1606 (leading to the eventual creation of the Plymouth Settlement in 1620), that charged Stowe's activism (6). It is no coincidence that in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a small group of Quakers provide refuge and safe passage to George and Eliza Harris and nurse their would-be captor, Tom Loker, back to life. Stowe undoubtedly sympathized with the Quakers, who upon arriving to Boston in 1656 experienced violent repression by Puritan authorities for their belief in human divinity and their resulting rejection of Church law (Park 69). Yet, it is erroneous to presume from Stowe's sympathy with the Quaker cause an equal measure of sympathy with the victims of slavery. On the contrary, Stowe's antinomian streak manifests throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a zealous rejection of external authority, specifically of the system of laws bracing the slave economy, with little actual regard for the personhood of her black victims or their positionality vis-à-vis their white oppressors. Her anodyne depictions of the northern plantation system, in her view epitomized by Mr. Shelby's estate, is perhaps the most salient example of this tendency:

> Whoever visits some estates there, and witnesses the good-humored indulgence of some masters and mistresses, and the affectionate loyalty of some slaves, might be tempted to dream the oft-fabled poetic legend of a patriarchal institution, and all that; but over and above the scene there broods a portentous shadow – the shadow of *law*. So long as the law considers all these human beings, with beating hearts and living affections, only as so many things belonging to a master, – so long as the failure, or misfortune, or imprudence, or death of the kindest owner, may cause them any day to exchange a life of kind protection and indulgence for one of hopeless misery and toil, – so long it is impossible to make anything beautiful or desirable in the best regulated administration of slavery. (50–51)

Stowe compels the reader to acquiesce, even if momentarily, to the "good-humored indulgence" of northern slaveowners and to reserve judgment for what she earlier describes as the "quiet and gradual nature" of the "agricultural pursuits" characterizing certain "mild forms" of slavery in the border states (50). It is clearly not the existence of a system of coerced labor based on racial difference that so appalls Stowe. Rather, it is the codification of such a system by *law*, and the "misery and toil" thereby permitted under less "reasonable" administrations of the institution, that offends the antinomian sensibilities of the author. Indeed, Stowe regards the "kindly" plantation of Mr. Shelby, one in which "there had never been a lack of anything which might contribute to the physical comfort of the negroes on his estate" (51), as a blueprint for the sort of benevolent patriarchy that might eventually replace the forced labor and violent excesses authorized by legal slavery. This much is proven when the mouthpiece for Stowe's vision, the pious George Shelby, attempts to free his newly inherited slaves after acquiring his deceased father's plantation. They clamor to "[tender] back their free papers" and declare, seemingly in unison, "We don't want to be no freer than we are. We's allers had all we wanted. We don't want to leave de ole place" (616). To which George confidently replies, as if anticipating their resistance, "there'll be no need for you to leave me. The place wants as many hands to work as it did before … But, you are now free men and free women. I shall pay you wages for your work, such as we shall agree on" (616). Of course, he qualifies their offer of employment with the admonition that he "[expects them] to be good, and willing to learn" (616). Thus, through this local act of abolition, George synthesizes Stowe's entire ideological project: he replaces the true source of the author's protest, legal coercion to labor, with a system of voluntary wage labor, while leaving totally untouched the infantilizing racial hierarchy of the plantation system. Given the deliberate nature of Stowe's attempt here to harmonize a broad and divergent range of factions—staunch abolitionists, moderate sympathizers, plantation owners concerned about the fate of their workforce, and, in the background, the northern industrialists advocating for wage competition—it is certainly curious that the author's complicity in the same consensus-forming design employed by her more avowedly conservative contemporaries has gone unnoticed.

Violent Commodities

Stowe's strategy described in the preceding section is buttressed by a subtler, though equally malignant, form of ideological coercion, one rooted specifically in the author's representations of racial violence on the plantation. Indeed, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is preserved in the popular, and to a significant extent even the critical, imagination as a novel *about* the violence of chattel slavery. One contemporary theorist, in an otherwise lucid essay about Stowe's feminism, casually instructs readers that Stowe "[affords them] a glimpse of the realities of economic trafficking in human life" and allows them to "see families and women violated mercilessly and brutally" (Lant 54). But the notion of bearing witness implied by terms like "glimpse" and "see" is immediately controverted by the reader's actual experience of Stowe's scenes of violence. One certainly *recalls* that Tom is murdered by the sadistic Legree, *knows* that Dodo is pounced upon by Henrique, and *registers* the abuses endured by Topsy under her former masters, but all of this amounts to a mere indexing of violent events. If the italicized terms imply a sense of distance in the reader's perception of violence in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is because Stowe's descriptions of physical brutality are by design vague and almost entirely referential, the stuff nearly of children's literature. (Tellingly, most contemporary campaigns to ban *Uncle Tom's Cabin* cite its use of offensive language, stereotyped drawings of black characters, and overwhelmingly religious characters, seldom mentioning Stowe's depictions of racial violence.) Consider Tom's prolonged death scene in which his tormentor, Legree, "strik[es] [him] a heavy blow across the cheek … following up the infliction by a shower of blows," "giv[es] Tom a violent kick

with his heavy boot" (509), "spurn[s] him with his foot" (554), "belabor[s] him over his head and shoulders" (558), and finally "[smites him] to the ground" (583). The blunted effect of passive verbs like "give," "smite," "spurn," and "belabor" enables only a *sense* that a violent encounter is taking place and, through this process of idealization, estranges the reader from the bloodlust and savagery that was so common on the plantation as to seem quotidian.

Stowe's mealy-mouthedness in this regard is best illustrated by comparison. Take Colson Whitehead's description of the whipping of a black student in the segregated Jim Crow-era reformatory at the center of his most recent novel, *The Nickel Boys*: "The roar began: an even gale. Elmwood's chair vibrated with energy. He couldn't figure out what it was – some sort of machine – but it was loud enough to cover Black Mike's screams and the smack of the strap on his body" (66). In stark contrast to Stowe's methods of obfuscation, Whitehead's deliberate use of onomatopoeia, the word "smack" approximating the sound of leather on Black Mike's body, reduces the space between act and representation, allowing greater proximity to (though by no means authentic intimacy with) the victim's suffering. Moments later, describing in detail the "beating room" where the whippings take place, the narrator observes, "[It] had a bloody mattress and a naked pillow that was covered instead by the overlapping stains from all the mouths that had bit into it … Splatter on the wall where the fan had whipped up blood in its gusting" (67). Generational violence is not represented notionally as in the case of Tom's *apparent* bludgeoning. Rather, it is visible in the tangible layers of bite marks perpetually thickened by the succession of victims who enter the filthy torture chamber inside of The Nickel Academy. Nor is the "whipping" and "splattering" of blood an ancillary detail. In *The Nickel Boys*, blood permanently stains the scene of violence, while in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* it appears only in order to be wiped away by the victim's hand and just as quickly erased from the reader's consciousness.

Perhaps most significantly, Whitehead orients the reader to the temporal and spatial location of violence. His masterfully detailed scene setting—the guise of night ("they came at one a.m."), the isolation of the work shed-turned-whipping room, the stench of "urine and other things that had soaked into the concrete" (64–65)—reveals the material workings of systemic violence and affectively anticipates this violence before it even takes place in the narrative present. The vague expanses and discreet locales where violence occurs in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, quite literally either "the field" or "the room," generate the opposite effect, that of displacing violence into an inaccessible kind of netherworld and abstracting it from its material base.

What takes place in every description of physical violence in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, without exception, is the "commodification" of brutality in the very sense of the term intended by Marx. A brief digression into Marxist labor theory is in order. For Marx, the subjugation of any class by another under capitalism depends largely on the ability of the latter to impose upon the former a system of commodity exchange – that is, to assign to the product of one's labor a value based not on its use, and having nothing to do with the social relations this labor entails, but relating entirely to the product's arbitrary relationship to other products. When returned to the gaze of the producer on the exchange market, the commodity becomes "imperceptible by the senses" to the degree that its true material origin in the "relation between men" assumes the "fantastic form of a relation between things" ("The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" 668–69). In this way, "the process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him" (674). The Marxist literary critic is concerned with the same process of mystification in the production of ideas, the ways in which historically determined concepts and relations are assigned universal and transcendent characteristics, thereby obfuscating the material conditions of the human experience they purport to depict and ultimately reaffirming the ruling class ideology. The discerning Marxist critic no doubt recognizes how Stowe's deliberate movement from the particular to the general during the extended passages describing Tom's death follows the same path as the mystical commodity described above.

Immediately after Legree "smot[es] his victim to the ground," Stowe interrupts the narrative with a spurious diatribe decrying the universal nature of violence.

> Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear. What brother-man and brother-Christian must suffer, cannot be told us, even in our secret chamber, it so harrows the soul. And yet, oh my country! these things are done under the shadow of thy laws! O, Christ! thy church sees them, almost in silence! (583)

In addition to mostly absenting the degree of violence constituting the fatal encounter, Stowe's rapid transition from the apparent death blow to the representative categories of "scenes" and "things" dissolves the particular, which is in part to say the racial, character of Legree's brutality into an ambiguous relation with indistinct and immutable notions of "blood and cruelty." Such a crude reification of a historically specific and racially determined brand of violence inevitably draws comparison to what Marx refers to as the "mist-enveloped regions of the religious world" ("Fetishism of Commodities" 669). It is no wonder, then, that Stowe offers up the eternal solvent of religious conversion in place of a radical reconsideration of black positionality. The most salient scenes of violence in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* essentially reimagine the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Appalled by Henrique's treatment of his child servant Dodo, for example, the ethereal and Christ-like Eva implores her cousin to "love poor Dodo, and be kind to him, for [her own] sake!" His response, "I could love anything for your sake, dear Cousin" (396), mawkishly recalls the Biblical invocation to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us" (Ephesians 5:2). Similarly, Tom's absolution of his torturers as he lay dying immediately conjures Christ's oft-echoed plea to "forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The aesthetic effect of subsuming racial violence within the Judeo-Christian salvation narrative is to render it as seemingly natural to human experience as the biblical concepts of sin and redemption were to the largely evangelical population of antebellum America. The political effect is the eschewal of true consciousness of the material conditions of life under slavery in favor of a trip to the altar and the promise of resolution or recompense in the afterlife.

Afterthoughts

Every so often, usually occasioned by an arbitrary anniversary, most recently Stowe's 210th birthday and before that the sesquicentennial of the novel's publication, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is revisited in popular media and recommended to new audiences. By now, its reputation has lapsed into a sort of banal aggrandizement characterized by a clichéd extolling of its virtuous intent and effusive praise for the author's courage in the face of immense political opposition (and usually attended by the unverifiable anecdote about Stowe's visit to the Lincoln White House). As a testament to the novel's ideological influence more particularly, major publications as politically divergent as *National Review* and *The New Yorker* agree that whatever shortcomings the book displays, by this it is usually meant Stowe's caricatured and stereotyped depictions of blacks, represent the entirely good faith efforts of a noble white woman writing against the grain to liberate an oppressed people in the spirit of the original American project (Mclaughlin, par. 2; Gordon-Reed, par. 18). It appears, then, that even today, nearly 170 years after its publication, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continues to fulfill its ideological mission, arguably more so than any other product of the American Renaissance. For, insofar as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is measured only by its ostensible abolitionist aims, its handling of the author's underlying anxieties about a *true* reconsideration of black positionality vis-à-vis the white patriarchy persists, and what Toni Morrison refers to in the epigraph to this essay as the "seductive concept" of the "hierarchy of race" so common to American literature is strengthened – quietly, insidiously – with every new reading of the book.

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[i] An example of this anxiety is John Winthrop's *A Modell of Christian Charity*, arguably the first theorization of the Puritan compact, the opening refrain of which channels the author's fear of social leveling into a justification of social stratification based entirely on divine providence: "God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence, hath soe disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poore, some high and eminent in power and dignities; others mean and in submission" (33).

[ii] Throughout this essay, a critical distinction is drawn between the concepts of "puritanism" and "Puritanism," the difference referring mostly to the degree of reform-mindedness inherent to each. The former is generally applied to the original settlers of the Plymouth Plantation, often referred to as "the Pilgrims," who as true separatists "renounced all connection with the Church of England" and opposed religious legalism. The latter refers to the later immigrants to New England, such as Winthrop, who sought to establish a purified branch of the Church of England in the New World, one fitted with the tools necessary to forcefully punish dissenters (Park 61-65). It is roughly the difference between Ann Hutchinson and her oppressors.

Ahu Yolaç, Stephen Mallory, and Julia E. Kiernan

Leveling Up:
Building Better Game Designers through Diverse Multidisciplinary Design Practice

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the critical pedagogy surrounding game design and game development programs, and how approaches to art and design have significant cultural and critical pedagogical and curricular implications. We offer intentional revisions to our game design curriculum, how these revisions impacted the program, and their alignment with the developing climate of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at our home institution. As teacher-researchers, we position our curricular iterations in the broader framework of developing observational research, similar to Jorge Lucero, who aligns teaching with creative practice and research that informs curricular design. While our goal ultimately centers around the development of curriculum "that critiques and resists the reproduction of inequalities in light of the ongoing privatization and de-politicization of mainstream education" (Dittmar and Annas 2), our approach parallels design-based research (DBR) through the implementation of an intervention on an existing system (Barab and Squire; Sandoval; The Design-Based Research Collective). This paper acknowledges the need to bring DEI interventions into learning spaces by embedding critical pedagogy that "actively transform[s] knowledge rather than simply consume[ing] it" (Giroux 7). Our curricular revisions offer a structured pathway for colleagues in other institutions to develop a diverse and inclusive curriculum within the disciplines of game design and game development. Therefore, our pedagogical philosophies are heavily rooted in critical pedagogy as established by scholars like bell hooks and Paulo Friere. Our inclusive curriculum involves a multicultural approach where students' positionality, lived experience, and knowledge are valued and implemented into the pedagogical discourse. As scholars, educators, and practitioners, we believe in inclusive teaching because it pushes back against discrete, historic approaches to multicultural education and the lack of diversity within the current game industry. In tandem to our pedagogical efforts, we introduce students to texts and media produced by diverse individuals. In an effort to expose our students to a variety of voices in game design and game studies, we invite guest lecturers, speakers, and reviewers in an intentional way that aligns with our vision. However, we believe that while we can employ a critical pedagogical approach, we are also unable to authentically represent positionalities different from our own. Therefore, we have invited and continue to invite scholars like Kishonna Gray and Monica Evans, whose research at the borders of race and queer studies aligns with our program redesign. We view all of these interventions, including our focus on multicultural and multidisciplinary awareness, implementation, and impact, as invaluable for our students and the educational goals and pedagogy we employ.

Over the last forty years, digital games have continued to explode in popularity, which has impacted the growth of game adjacent programs such as game studies, game design, and game art across the United States. Despite this prominence, diversity and equity in game development spaces continues to lag (IGDA). This struggle is nothing new and has been formalized in scholarship as the hegemony of play, a method "to critique the way in which complex layers of technological,

commercial and cultural power structures have dominated the development of the digital game industry" (Fron et al. 309). The need for game programs to address these ongoing concerns around inclusivity, diversity, and the overall toxic culture of the game industry is indicative of this paper's attention to our programmatic redesign.

Depending on where in the United States game design is taught, it can have wildly different outcomes. Game design, as a discipline, has no standard curriculum or shared commitment and understanding of how curricula should address issues of diversity and inclusion. Game design programs have existed, or currently exist, either at for-profit, industry-facing institutions, or are housed in public universities that tend to frame game design within the context of broadly accepted academic disciplines. Many of these career-focused programs, like those found at The Guildhall @ SMU, FullSail Real World Education, and Digipen, reinforce and amplify stereotypical, hegemonic structures (Fron, et al, 2009), which further emphasizes a need for DEI within curriculum. Our program intentionally deviates from the existing status quo and joins programs like the University of Texas at Dallas whose Game Design and Development Program is closely intertwined with their Critical Media Studies Program, providing a focused grounding in critical media studies. While Lawrence Technological University (LTU) is a developing institution, with a growing national presence, we consider regional institutions who teach game design and development better comparisons. One such program, the Games, Animation, and Simulation Program at Eastern Michigan University[i] features over eighty credit hours on student technical skill building, with approximately forty credit hours on general education. While it is certainly possible, if not probable, that students will receive the sort of critical education we believe is necessary to being a thoughtful game designer, it has been our experience that students are either siloed away from (or self-silo away from) this sort of broad, critical interrogation. That is, while their required history or English class may provide a broader understanding of queer, critical, or patriarchal forces, students often fail to make the connection between their general education coursework and their technical and design coursework. Similarly, game design at Miami University [ii] is a part of their College of Creative Arts and brings a focus on both game design and business into their program. While this program does provide access to more critically focused, theory-based courses, they are an optional path through the curriculum and not integral to the undergraduate program. The current iteration of our program differs from those summarized in its intentional embrace of a DEI-focused curriculum leveraging multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intentional design practices. This paper describes our design-informed critical approach to pedagogy, which is framed within reflective, iterative design practice that encourages and demands feedback, revision, and iteration.

In the remainder of this paper, we review the student-facing acknowledgement of DEI-focused principles and course content, paying attention to critical play, diverse representation, and systems thinking. This approach follows a similar mindset to DBR, positioning our revision and redesign as a cyclical process where iterations are not limited by a specific number. As educators, we must look to the past to better understand what and who we and our students are, so that we can more wisely build a future "a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future" (Freire 84). We argue that the process of curricular revising and redesigning is just as important as the result, and this stance is parallel to how we look at our program and its redesign.

How We Found our Way

Ahu Yolaç and Stephen Mallory were hired by LTU in the Summer of 2021 as tenure-track faculty of the College of Architecture and Design (CoAD). Coming from overlapping fields, with Yolaç , from the areas of multidisciplinary design and education with a focus on game studies, and Mallory, from game design and game development with a focus on game studies, provided a complementary skill set to create a stronger curriculum. The first semester of work was centered on revising the Bachelor of Arts in Game Design, which was previously positioned as a Game Art Program. Our goal was to elevate student outcomes through revisions of associated coursework with a focus on academic rigor. The resulting redesign took approximately nine months, with generous support from CoAD administration who gave sufficient space and agency to explore the boundaries of the process. All new students entering the program from fall of 2022 on follow the redesigned program plan, as described in this essay. The new curriculum marks a sharp change of direction from the previous, nearly decade-old curriculum.

In our second year as co-coordinators, we identified a gap in our curriculum based on our home institutions shift toward DEI. We decided that, when possible, students in our program should engage in coursework that critically examines DEI in the game industry; it is important for students to understand how industry practices, particularly those that uphold cisheteropatriarchcal ideologies—a system of power that positions the cis-straight white male experience as superior and normative in expressions of gender and sexuality (Harris; Smith)—impact learning and professional expectations. Enter our third author, Julia Kiernan, who comes from the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Her research examines new media studies in popular culture, focusing on trauma studies, race studies, feminist studies, and dis/ability studies. Dr. Kiernan revised two required courses from the College of Arts and Sciences (CoAS), which sit outside CoAD, but are considered integral for the Game Design program. These revisions focused on issues of DEI within game design and the larger gaming industry, which was an intentional curriculum update to broaden students' intellectual foundation.

Researcher Vignettes

Below we offer short narratives that situate our own teaching moments as resources that helped us collaboratively understand the need to reinforce DEI within our coursework. It is important to acknowledge our positionalities as scholars, educators, and citizens when entering and shaping the space of critical pedagogy: Yolaç is a cisgender heterosexual (cishet), Turkish, immigrant woman; Kiernan is a cishet, first-generation immigrant woman; and Mallory is a cishet, American, white man. Our identities might represent diverse, but sometimes normative, ideologies at first glance; however, our goal is to acknowledge the implications of our identities and use our tools, privileges, lived experiences, and ideologies to enhance our understanding of critical pedagogies and reflect them back onto our teaching practices. These narratives help shape our perspectives and commitments to iterative pedagogical practices, which inform our ongoing commitment to DEI.

<u>Dr. Mallory's Narrative</u>

During the Fall Semester of 2022, the class *History of Game Design* had been in full swing for nearly a month. In that time, the class had experienced what were fairly standard history-focused lectures. The class was made up of predominantly male students, where fourteen out of twenty-six students were either male or male presenting; of that number, eleven were white or white presenting;

only seven students were black Detroiters or African Americans. The gender and racial demographic splits were not surprising.

In the course, students had been exploring the very earliest age of digital video games, when basic computers programmed with punched cards and hacked oscilloscopes with crude dials and knobs appropriated from more serious research served game devices. This particular class covered the dawn of the digital video game console industry in the 1970s, and—as expected—the field at the time was dominated by white, male voices. Soon-to-be industry giants like Atari were beginning to assert themselves, and the lecture about this topic had a bit of a cultural curveball. While the long arc of history reveals a particular hegemony dominating the digital game industry, where white and Asian men created games for themselves in a positive feedback-loop to the exclusion of others (Fron et al), the lecture in question prominently featured Gerald Lawson, an African American electrical engineer. In 1976, he designed and developed the hardware for the Fairchild Channel F, which is the first cartridge-based video game console, influencing the industry for almost three decades. He was an important developer and engineer, yet his story in the arc of game history is often a footnote, if mentioned at all.

When his image popped up on the main screen, one student gave a yell of surprise and affirmation—Gerald looked like him, an African American designer and developer. This is an important story about elevating and giving voice to silenced narratives that already exist in these disciplines, elevating these voices, and illustrating the broad diversity that these disciplines and industries are founded upon means addressing and embracing DEI. Our DEI-focused curriculum acknowledges that diverse voices are often silenced to maintain a specific cultural status quo in game design and game development. We intentionally make sure that we review and elevate silenced voices and build more cohesive, coherent, and inclusive stories that show how stereotypes often exist to reinforce specific assumptions and cultural norms, which is a crucial step into changing the industry. This culture shift starts with recognizing that the industry was built by diverse individuals and that these silenced narratives create a warped perception on who has made and who consumes these games.

Dr. Yolaç 's 's Narrative

Following the first year of curricular changes that were implemented in the Game Design program, there was a recruitment event held on the LTU campus where professors met prospective students. The event had representatives from every college and every program. Naturally, Dr. Yolaç was recruiting for and talking about game design alongside the associate dean of CoAD. A young, Black woman attending, asked the associate dean if there were any other 'girl game designers' in the program that she was about to attend. Historically speaking, this was a very accurate question and a valid concern for a woman entering any technologically adjacent degree program–it is commonplace that in both industry and higher education most professionals are white men. The associate dean brought the student to Dr. Yolaç and introduced her as "a girl game designer, who is from Turkey." They then started to chat and quickly became acquainted with other game design students. This is an important story on visibility and what programs teach and communicate through who is put into the leadership roles, what they care about and how they think with DEI in mind. Our new DEI-focused curriculum acknowledged the exclusivity associated within both academia and game design; we continually make sure that recruitment strategies and program leaders from diverse backgrounds exist in all our program spaces, which is a crucial step in changing both academia and the industry. It is important to note that this culture shift is only possible if we invite more diverse individuals into our

programs, making sure to set them up for success. Without such intentional shifts, we cannot make 'a girl'–or a Black, or an Indigenous, or a queer–designer's existence in game studies programs normative.

<u>Dr. Kiernan's Narrative</u>

It was the first year of redesign for the humanities, creative writing course that all game design students were required to take. Previously, the course outcomes had oscillated, depending on the instructor of record, most of whom were adjunct faculty, and, as such, the course did not have clear alignment with the game design program. While the course existed to assist the program, how it connected was vague and unclear. Over the summer, Kiernan began working with Yolaç and Mallory in efforts to not only align the course with her own DEI research, but to make revisions that aligned the course with the rest of the game design program. In doing so, the working title of the course changed from the standard *Creative Writing* to *Narrative Theory and Design*; with this change also came attention to critical play, diverse representation, and systems thinking. In the first year of this 'new' course, students were expected to design game narratives (e.g. stories, settings, characters, plots, etc.) that were accessible and meaningful to an unknown player, as a way to thoughtfully engage with ideas of audience awareness and representation. In the past, students simply created narratives they liked, which meant these stories reflected their hegemonic positioning as (predominantly) white, cishet men. Now, students were moving outside their comfort zones, creating characters that were accessible to a broader audience. The results were fascinating: cats wielding squirt guns, botanists with Mongolian ancestry, racoon protagonists, and dystopian teddy bears. These, however, are small victories. Not all narratives offered such diverse characters; nonetheless, the conversation had begun and students, upon being invited to design outside their lived experiences, began experimenting and playing with diversified characters and interactive narrative development in areas they had previously not considered (e.g. cultural rhetorics of play, queer and feminist narrative theory, hypersexuality, racial injustice, etc.).

How Scholarship Informed Curricular Change

In efforts to thoughtfully embrace an inclusive, diverse curriculum that leverages multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intentional design practices we drew upon three areas of scholarship: critical play, diverse representation, and systems thinking. Here, we summarize how these theoretical frameworks shaped the reimagining of the LTU game design program.
We began with an integration of critical play because games are ultimately more than entertaining diversions, they are tools for social change. According to Flanagan:

> Games ultimately create cognitive and epistemological environments that position the player or participants with the experiences previously described in meaningful ways. So what does it mean to "play critically"? Critical play means to create or occupy play environments and activities that represent one or more questions about aspects of human life. (6)

In our program, "the aspects of human life" are what we focus on through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intentional approaches to video games, practices, and cultures. Coursework teaches students that games provide messages and that games teach. However, for games to teach, "the learner needs to learn not only how to understand and produce meanings in a particular semiotic domain that are recognizable to those affiliated with the domain, but, in addition, how to think about

the domain at a 'meta' level as a complex system of interrelated parts" (Gee, "What Video Games" 23). Gee's stance aligns with Flanagan who situates meaning-making through representation of human aspects, by creating or occupying play environments and activities (6). Informed by the work of these and other scholars, our program uses a holistic lens. We encourage students to realize that a games' meaning is connected to players, player experiences, and player identities. Moreover, in order to be inclusive and successful designers, students must interact with games from a critical perspective as well as understanding the importance of offering diverse contexts within gameplay and game content.

Our curriculum centralizes an understanding of diverse representations and their implications across different contexts, environments, and experiences. As designers, makers, and players students are encouraged to consider diverse points of views, such as the ways that games and the gaming industry have a tendency towards violence. We strive to teach students that an understanding of violence within gaming and game studies is inherently tied to intersectionality (Collins and Bilge; Weldon; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall; Crenshaw), race (Gray and Leonard; Gray), feminist media studies (Fenton; Watkins and Emerson; Payne; Keller and Ryan), queer media studies (Anthropy; Shaw; Ruberg; Phillips; Griffin; Ahn, Himberg, and Young; Malkowski and Russworm), disability studies (Powers, Nguyen and Frieden; Crooks and Magnet; Gibbons; Brown and Anderson; Hart), and neurodiversity (Motti and Evmenova; Li, Belter, Platt-Young, and Lukosch; Zolyomi and Schmalz). Across coursework we encourage our students to refuse and challenge the inherent violence within many games via questioning existing power structures and oppressive, heteronormative dictations of how to approach games.

Through taking this approach our program shows students how it is possible to generate thoughtful, impactful, and inclusive experiences and conversations within the industry. For example, two recent courses, *Narrative Theory & Design* and *Games & Culture*, foreground industry inclusivity evident in recent publications (Gray and Leonard; Rubery; Gray; Phillips; etc.). In these classes, students are invited to consider the ways mainstream games continue to "underrepresent or stereotype women and people of color to online spaces where racism, sexism, and homophobia are the norm, [where] numerous aspects of gaming reify straight, white, cisgender young men as "gamers" and exclude everyone else" (Cote 193). In our classes, students are guided towards the creation of inclusive narratives, with developed characters that are accessible to a wide range of audiences/players. As a result, students are developing protagonists, antagonists, and non-player characters (NPCs) that are openly neurodiverse, LGBTQIA+, and members of underrepresented racial and ethnic communities. When students develop such characters, however, they must also spend time thoughtfully explaining the ethics behind their choices as well as how their choices are reflective of broader societal demographics and why this recognition is important within the discipline of game design and the larger gaming industry. We have also implemented similar discussions around playtesting, students are instructed to be cognizant of diverse users, cultures, and practices. In classes like *Level Design* (and other visual storytelling and worldbuilding-focused courses) we make sure to invite discussions around cultural representation and appropriation including how aesthetics, architectural movements, and choices should be thoughtful and intentional.

In these ways, an intention-driven, systems-thinking approach serves as the backbone of our curriculum (Sellers; Meadows; Ingold; Norman; Balsamo). Systems-thinking encourages a non-linear, holistic way of thinking that learners leverage to ideate and design with an emphasis on iteration, which positions students to re-evaluate data and realize new patterns of need while also addressing the unintended consequences of their designs. A "systems view" is a way of looking at ourselves, at the environments we live in, at the systems that surround us, and those we are part of. It is "a holistic

and expansionist way of viewing the world" (Banathy); the connection between systems-thinking and critical play is very important within our program. It is invaluable for students to understand games as complex, large systems where each agent and their connection create a coherent whole (Akcaoglu and Green; Squire; Gee, "What Video Games"). Systems-thinking in tandem with critical pedagogy (Mejía; Ingram; Alcorn; Bernier) informs and complements our teaching, allowing us to prepare students to acknowledge games as multidisciplinary systems with dynamic, interconnected parts that influence and embody as they are created. Across many of our courses, we use systems-thinking to support ethical concerns related to critical thinking and experiential learning. We recognize that theoretical, ethical inquiry is a central part of a game design education; for students especially, systems-thinking provides tools to contextualize human culture, experience, and perception as an object of study.

A systems-thinking approach in game design that is multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intentional is contingent upon students connecting ideologies of critical play and diverse representation within their own creative practices. For instance, while students often have an understanding of what it means to be sensitive to issues around diversity and inclusion, when we came to the program we noted a divorce between student sensitivities and their design practices. Students came to us with the assumption that design was apolitical. Prior to our redesign, they had spent little time engaging in or learning about critical design practices and how the consequences (intentional or unintentional) of their designs extended far beyond their works. Consequently, one of our main goals was weaving critical game design practices (Flanagan; Gee, "Video Games"; Kafai et al.; Shaw) and ideologies of representation (Gray and Leonard; Ruberg; Gray; Phillips) into our curriculum and overall pedagogical approaches. As we were planning course content, we structured key elements such as lectures, projects, workshops, and critiques around critical play, design practices, and diverse representation. Prior to these shifts, students were used to playing games aimlessly without a critical eye towards the design decisions or the overall player experience impacted by these decisions. We implemented higher level materials to be reviewed in our courses such as books, academic articles, blog posts, and videos. These materials have elevated the in-class discussions we are having with the students, giving more direction for analyzing gameplay experiences as designers and not just as players/consumers.

To aid us further in instilling criticality in design practice, we have begun building a library of materials. These materials include books like Flanagan's *Critical Play*, Shaw's *Gaming at the Edge*, Philips' *Gamer Trouble*, Gray and Leonard's *Woke Gaming*, Schirer's *We the Gamers*, Warhol and Lanser's *Narrative Theory Unbound*; digital games like *This War of Mine* (2014), *Papers, Please* (2013), *Kerbal Space Program* (2015), *Control* (2019); and a growing list of analog games ranging from classics like *Monopoly* (1935) and *Chess*, tabletop roleplaying games in a variety of genres, and problematic games like *Cards Against Humanity* (2011). This library serves as a foundational list of materials that we want students to be exposed to during their time at LTU. While some of these materials are already included in our course schedules, we encourage adjunct professors and instructors to implement these and more in their coursework. We also pay attention to building close relationships with our students, encouraging them to share work outside of the classroom, through personal communication or shared platforms like Discord. This allows us to continue giving feedback through informal channels and conversations while still impacting student work so that they can form an identity as critical designers.

Game Design at LTU

Institutional Context

Lawrence Technological University, founded as the Lawrence of Technology in 1932, is a small, private, STEM-focused undergraduate institution in the Metro Detroit area in Michigan. LTU was established to educate students in engineering and scientific disciplines related to the automotive industry. In 1989, LTU added the College of Architecture and Design, College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Business and Information Technology. As a university serving Detroit, a city that has experienced exploitation due to free-market ideology (Benz), LTU recognizes its obligation to the Detroit area community by equipping students with skills to design and engineer a sustainable future and make positive impacts in their local communities and regional industries.

The game design program is housed in CoAD, which is the second largest college at our institution and home to programs ranging from architecture to product design to graphic design. Moreover, shortly after our hire, in the spring of 2022 our college brought on a new associate dean. One of her key responsibilities is to emphasize DEI initiatives. CoAD and LTU have developed several types of educational programs to help recruit diverse students by providing them with more exposure to design–creating alternative pathways into higher education and offering scholarship support, which include K-12 exploratory workshops, dual enrollment programs, and early middle college programs. LTU has also developed an early-middle college agreement in the Detroit Public School Community District, which serves students who are 95% minority (African American and Hispanic). These programs are indicative of CoAD's growing partnerships with area high schools. LTU intends for this trend to continue with additional support to engage more students from disadvantaged school districts.

Game design is a Bachelor of Fine Art degree, currently enrolling upwards of thirty students per year, with the majority of new students being white men, but also seeing an increase in enrollment amongst women and underrepresented minorities. This original program was designed and developed before the university implemented a DEI office; as such, it was conceived and implemented without our current concerns around inclusivity. The limits of this outdated curricular framework, in light of its lack of understanding in diversity and inclusion, had become particularly acute as of 2020. Following the pandemic, positions at game studios have become more competitive because of various economic conditions, individuals could find employment remotely rather than relocating (Mencher). This means that students graduating the previous program encountered a harder time getting a job or pursuing advanced degrees. Our program redesign addressed both the limitations of the previous program and placed a greater emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Previous Program

The pre-2019 program presented a curriculum that was problematic since it was grounded in cishet, white male assumptions, and absent were pedagogies framed by critical inclusive inquiry, inquiry, aligning with the ideologies around games and the game industry of its time. While the program was originally designed as a game art program, housed in a design school, it presented a breadth of game-related art, design, and development classes. The coursework was not associated with a larger, university-driven fine arts program; as a result, it could not rely upon an established culture of artistic practice or have a large enough faculty pool to provide the breadth of curriculum to develop student artistic skills. Students simply were not given enough studio-time, nor enough skilled faculty, to develop their practice in a guided, meaningful way. As a result, the program was not giving students the chance to spend any time working in between independent problem solving and guided problem solving with peers and/or instructors (Vygotsky 86). Instead, the program relied on something more akin to Jean Piaget and his idea that when students are presented with a new

situation or task that they do not understand their discomfort intrinsically motivates them to learn how to complete their task (Blake 60). The assumption was that students would be self-directed and discover their own way through the program, enhancing their skills as needed in an intrinsic manner.

Due to issues of scope, the program was flipping the ideal; teachers were adopting the role of content providers and not the role of facilitators (Mason and Rominszowski 447), and very little scaffolding and connection between courses was designed or maintained. This situation created what Mayer identifies as "fragmented knowledge or inert knowledge" where meaningful learning does not happen. Mayer distinguished meaningful learning by "good transfer performance as well as good retention performance" (20). In the case of the old program, students were not given enough time to concentrate, nor were they given the tools to create their own content which contributed further to the fragmented knowledge issues. Upon graduation, LTU students were competing with students coming out of game design programs that empowered them to spend outside hours working on their own projects, building their own skills beyond the classroom (O'Donnell 142).

The old program had an idealized version of game development that was disconnected from reality, assuming generalists still dominated game development. However, game studios are filled with specialists, because "unless you are multitalented and your project is tiny, you can't do it alone" (Schell 423). While there are examples of lone developers creating impressive games (Pope; Fox), these are exceptions in an industry filled with teams that release thousands of games annually. Students need to be prepared to work in a specialized form of "creative collaborative work practice" (O'Donnell 30) that is both distinctly secretive and enjoys reveling in its uniqueness, generating a mythology around the labor of game design and development that "is only made more pervasive by popular culture depictions in movies" (O'Donnell 40). The courses in the old program did not take into consideration that "learning is stronger when it matters, when the abstract is made concrete and personal," (Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel 11). The program was set up around a romanticized and outdated ideal where a game creator was also a designer, programmer, animator, and artist. This sort of designer no longer exists across large swaths of the digital game industry and was subsequently preventing students from taking any sort of meaningful time in any one area, which limited their capacity for expertise and overlooked the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion within learning spaces and the design process.

The program also missed the shift occurring in game development technology in terms of DEI; the program did not pay heed to the student body in terms of demographics nor the impact of excluding DEI within the content they were creating. There were no active efforts to diversify the student body or implement critical pedagogical tactics like, highlighting silenced, diverse voices in gaming history, introducing diverse designer experiences, or critical approaches to game content that have important social implications.

Revised Program

During the first iteration of our intervention, we focused on four main factors: design context, industry needs and gaps, student demographics, and inclusive design practices. First, we reviewed the current design context. We spent time learning about the history of LTU, the program, and its positionality in relation to other programs in the region and in the country. This allowed us to see the strengths and weaknesses of the existing program and the tools that we had available. Second, we leveraged observed industry needs and gaps. We researched different areas outside of the game industry where our students' skills could be applied and how refinement of these needed skills was previously overlooked in coursework. Third, as teacher-researchers, we observed the existing student

demographics, reflected on what types of students to invite through curriculum redesign, and sought to improve student outcomes. Finally, as designer-researchers, a significant portion of our work is informed by DBR and ever evolving theories around game design. We have made sure that our students are exposed to and learn how to conduct methodological research during the design process. Students explore perspectives, experiences, and practices from many resources that aren't limited to their own lived experiences. This means that students are moving beyond their own embodied situations, creating meaningful, inclusive experiences for a variety of audiences. And, in doing so, they are redesigning the future of game culture.

As collaborators, we leveraged the strengths that we identified with an eye toward DEI, multidisciplinarity, and openness. During this process, we focused on three main areas: critical design practices including DEI, entry-level employment post-graduation, and career sustainability. These three areas represent a shift toward our instantiated goals as educators. Moreover, while we were redesigning and ultimately implementing a DEI-aligned curriculum, we were unaware of the concurrent establishment of an institutional DEI office; when it launched, we found that we had a vital source of support and perspective for further DEI-focused revisions to our program. Moreover, we are all involved in faculty-facing DEI initiatives, such as a reading and discussion group centered on the text *Antiracism and Universal Design in Learning*. By working closely with the office of DEI, we are leveraging necessary socio-cultural information to ensure our coursework continues to be inclusive and meaningful.

To support the mission of creating a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable design program, we made conscious decisions to include selected texts from across the game studies canon as well as digital games that represented not just technical achievements, but emphasize diversity, inclusion, and equity. In the *History of Game Design* course, papers such as "The Hegemony of Play," excerpts from Carly Courcek's *Coin-Operated Americans*, and excerpts from Adrienne Shaw's *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* bring specific contexts to broader engagement. In the upper-level elective course *Games & Culture*, students are introduced to cultural studies in order to understand not only how cultural practices relate to wider systems of power, but how these systems exist and operate in game design. Kishonna Gray and David Leonard's *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Social Injustice* emphasizes how cisheteropatriarchal hegemony is enacted throughout the industry. This class is run as a seminar in order to foreground students' lived experiences and foster an appreciation of difference; topics include decolonization, LGBTQIA+ narratives, religion, dis/ability, neurodiversity, etc. Other courses use texts like *Critical Play* by Mary Flanagan, which looks at the design process from a critical perspective, and *Design Justice* by Sasha Costanza-Chock, which discusses intentional design practices. Finally, we pay attention to who we represent in our classes as exemplary. We provide examples from diverse designers, discussions on who makes the games, and who they are made for–in addition to critical storytelling through games like *This War of Mine*, *Papers Please*, *The Cave*, and *Never Alone*. We make sure that other forms of texts such as watching gameplays, reading blogs posts, and reviewing similar publicly available media produced by diverse content creators is included.

Moreover, we chose to intentionally design the core focus of our program around level design in order to create a unique, idiosyncratic programmatic experience. For instance, we looked at the industry trends and entry level job definitions to identify that level design is a popular entry level job and leads to mid and senior level positions in both level and game design. We also leveraged LTU programs and expertise we had as core faculty, attuning our program to research and teaching across the rest of the university. Finally, with the support of our college and institutional initiatives, we

introduced three multidisciplinary DEI-informed concentrations to further differentiate our students among their competitors.

Digital Environments

Students learn and practice creating digital spaces. They take classes from the architecture and interior design programs in which they learn more about creating digital spaces that are immersive, interesting, and meaningful through classes like architectural visualization, diverse human behavior in built environments, and environmental psychology.

Digital Objects

Students focus on content creation for digital environments expressed through digital asset design and production. This concentration shares many classes with the product design program where students learn about proportion, human body, and ergonomics as they relate to diverse body types and skin tones, production, and materials. This concentration shares qualities with digital environments with a focus on objects that players interact within a digital space, inviting students to be mindful of diverse users' lived experiences.

Digital Interfaces

In collaboration with the graphic design program, students learn about visual communication, user interfaces, and user experience for game design, giving them a firm understanding of and developing skills for multimodal texts mediated by screens. This concentration is unique in that it shares a focus on multi-dimensional visualization, interface flow and structure, and accessibility through digital screens. Having these concentrations is not only significant for job opportunities, but also for diversifying the student body and designing for diverse populations.

Ongoing Outcomes

Early on in our work revising and reimagining the game design program we noticed not just a lack of criticality, which the new program addresses, but a lack of making. Game design, like all design practices, is an iterative one. That is, students must engage in a creative loop where they make, critique, revise, and make again until their projects reach the level of proficiency required not just to excel in the course, but to potentially land gainful employment or graduate level academic program acceptance. The game design program had (and has) a student-led group, known as "Infinite Machine," that serves as a social fulcrum for the program. Students get together to watch Anime, cosplay, and play games, but the lack of making and peer-critique was stark. The student outcomes in their advanced studio work reflected this lack of a creative feedback-loop. Students struggled to utilize basic design research tasks and were hesitant to not only engage in meaningful critique as both practice and utility, but struggled to implement even the most basic of game-related materials because their content did not meet their imagined standards of perfection.

In an effort to give students a safe space to begin this creative loop, we created a learning space called the "GameLab". The intention for this space was to provide students an opportunity to present their personal work for critique by faculty without the pressure of a grade. This was an attempt to work around the paradox of failure; as described by Jesper Juul, embracing "this basic

trick of learning and improvement is that we have to accept the painful answer (this is my fault, and a failure of me [not] being who I want to be) in order to be motivated to become who we want to be" (67). While Juul is discussing specifically the use of games in educational contexts, where game success is assumed to be associated with academic success, the same implication exists when making games. Students need a space where they can exhibit their work and receive critical and constructive feedback that exists outside of the academic loop. This space also allows for the extension of learning goals beyond the classroom, providing students the opportunity to receive critique that serves to improve their work beyond the constraints of the time and grade associated with coursework.

At the time of writing, the first cohort into the reimagined curriculum is entering their second semester and have initiated the creation of a new student-focused, production and critique driven collaborative group based on the Student Game Developers Alliance (SGDA)[iii]. The SGDA works closely with the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) creating an international, collaborative, supportive community of like-minded students and industry professionals focused on being better game designers, artists, and developers. While this program is in its infancy, the new cohort's understanding of game design and development has led to a fundamental shift in perception as to what it means to be a game designer and developer, realizing that critique, practice, and embracing the critical nature of the process around their work has also led to increased student engagement. Thus far, student outcomes have already improved in terms of physical outcomes and student engagement; this first cohort of students are receiving publishing deals for projects they have developed as assignments.

Course-informed DEI outcomes include improving students' understanding of the ways that cisheteropatriarchal ideologies permeate both the digital games students create and play as well as students' understanding of the manifestation of these ideologies across the larger gaming industry. Our focus on these two outcomes is multifaceted. At a very practical level, one aim is to prepare students for toxic work environments and "crunch culture"—working under the pressure of deadlines, which often expects 100-hour work weeks—that are known to be prevalent across AAA-game development teams. But, at a deeper level we have sought to attune students to a socially informed understanding of ethics and representation within both games and the larger industry.

For instance, in the two humanities courses students take, there is some overlap in learning objectives. The *Narrative Design* course introduces students to ideas of representation, requiring students to "use theoretical texts to reflect upon how cultural identity shapes narrative experiences, including an understanding of the cultural and historical contexts of narratives". In fulfilling this learning outcome, students are reminded that they need to do more than simply create an interactive narrative—they need to create a narrative that *matters*. In other words, as students work towards the completion of course projects they must think hard about how they design characters and why certain settings (and characters) are accessible to some audiences but alienating and even offensive to others. This single learning outcome branches out in the senior level, *Games & Culture* class where students are expected to: "understand and identify concepts in the field of cultural studies and how these concepts can be applied to game studies"; "identify sociological and cultural trends in the development and use of games"; "understand games as both products and producers of culture"; "understand the impact of games on audiences including the social and cultural implications of games and their representations"; and "explore the processes of cultural value within games— including issues of gender, race, sexuality, class, labor, and neurodiversity—and the ways by which games contain, demonstrate, and/or encourage action in relation to these concepts". These are difficult topics and, perhaps, not learning outcomes one would associate with game design; however,

because our program has been revised to support a sea change in representation, students are invited to grapple with these social issues. Moreover, despite groans of displeasure associated with course readings, the discussions that extend out of these readings have been nuanced, thoughtful, and invigorating.

As garnered from course feedback (formal and informal), students are receptive and appreciative of the addition of DEI-framed coursework; moreover, these courses help students make connections between the many injustices present in their daily lives that are replicated within gaming spaces (either consciously or unconsciously). Before these curricular revisions coursework did not expect students to engage in these types of conversations and, as a result, the previous version of the program could not help but maintain cisheterpatriarchal ideologies. These revisions have both invited and guided these sometimes difficult conversations and also cultivated safe spaces for these conversations to take place—spaces that welcome the voices and experiences of BIPOC students, LGBTQIA+ students, female students, and international students.

Final Reflection

In this paper, we have shared the ways our program has been redesigned and updated to allow for student-facing acknowledgement of DEI-focused principles and course content via a DBR approach that is iterative and scaffolded. We have worked to emphasize how the results of our efforts are not simply informed by the process of revising and redesigning, but also critical practice. Using critical play, diverse representation, and systems-thinking as frameworks we have offered one example of what a diverse curriculum in game design can look like; however, we stress that what is normative to our program, at this moment, will continue to change as we learn more about our students, our community, and how our students impact the industry. As teacher-researchers, we strongly encourage iterative reflection and evaluation of student needs, particularly in regard to curriculum expectations, but also broader social expectations of diversity, equity, and inclusivity–such practices lend to the pedagogical and curricular sustainability of any program.

Change is always a messy, but rewarding process. Using our own work as an example, we have showcased how an understanding of game design programs as complex, interconnected systems can be intentionally designed to give students agency and cultural awareness. Students in our program engage in discipline-focused design principles, methodologies, and design practices, but also learn to engage in questions of diversity and inclusivity across course content. Our revisions have invited students to situate their design practices as a way to create a more impactful and dynamic future for all audiences. In these ways, we have curated our program to encourage diverse, inclusive understandings and experiences: "It is experience, rather than understanding, that influences behavior" (McLuhan 288–289). Our intention is that, throughout the program and upon graduation, our students will strive to create new interactive technologies and narratives that will positively influence new players and participants, reframe industry practices, and create more inclusive and accessible spaces.

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Kelly Evans

Review

Marginalized Women and Work in 20th- and 21st-Century British and American Literature and Media, edited by Hediye Özkan, Lexington Books, 2023

Unlocking the Voices: An Overview of Marginalized Women in Work

In *Marginalized Women and Work in 20th and 21st Century British and American Literature and Media,* editor Hediye Ozkan has curated a comprehensive examination of the intersecting dynamics of gender, race, class, and labor as experienced by marginalized women in the British and American workforce. The book is divided into four parts, each focusing on a different aspect of marginalized women's work experiences. This compilation of works offers a compelling journey through diverse genres and mediums, providing a nuanced exploration of employment dynamics within both literary and visual spheres, with a particular focus on the experiences of marginalized women. Through a blend of insightful essays and creative works spanning drama, poetry, television, and popular culture, the collection delves deep into the multifaceted issues surrounding labor conditions, intersectionality, exploitation, and the often-overlooked struggles faced by marginalized women in the workforce. It goes beyond surface-level analysis to examine how these portrayals shape and perpetuate stereotypes, challenging conventional narratives and prompting a critical reevaluation of societal norms. This anthology explores themes such as achievement, empowerment, and the complex interplay between work and identity formation. By dissecting the ways in which literature and popular culture have historically reinforced gendered norms and biases, the compilation offers fresh insights that enrich our understanding of the intricate relationship between work, identity, and cultural belonging for marginalized women.

Balancing Acts: Motherhood, Employment, and the Quest for Resistance

This section delves into the complex relationship between motherhood, employment, and resistance among marginalized women. Highlighting the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, the essays in this part offer profound insights into the dual burden of work and caregiving responsibilities borne by women. Namrata Dey Roy's chapter, "Package Labeled Colored", and Lynn Deboeck's exploration of invisible labor, both illuminate the multifaceted challenges endured by women of color within the modern workforce. Dey Roy's incisive analysis of Ann Petry's renowned literary work, *The Street*, engenders a nuanced and penetrating exploration of the intricate interplay among ethnicity, sexuality, and employment. Concurrently, Deboeck's discourse on partnership dynamics and resistance mechanisms adeptly underscores the pervasive undervaluation of women's labor.

Quoting Deboeck's observation that "women and work have been in a love-hate relationship for decades, and their representation in that struggle has been exhibited in particular ways in dramatic literature" (27), this scholarship reveals hidden truths within literary works, elucidating the enduring challenges faced by women historically and today. Additionally, Dey Roy's examination of *The Street* highlights the intersectionality of race, gender, and labor as a pivotal axis shaping power dynamics and influencing the experiences of marginalized individuals. Dey Roy

suggests that while Petry's narrative focuses on a black working mother in the mid-twentieth century, it also portrays a diverse array of female characters, collectively representing marginalized women and their struggles during that era (14).

Furthermore, the scholarly insights furnished by Dey Roy and Deboeck resonate as a clarion call for concerted action aimed at redressing the enduring inequalities endured by women of color within contemporary labor markets. Their erudite analyses underscore the imperative of embracing intersectional paradigms to comprehensively apprehend and ameliorate workplace discrimination, thereby advocating for the formulation and implementation of inclusive policies and practices that foreground the experiential realities of marginalized women. By contextualizing historical struggles within the contemporary milieu, *Marginalized Women and Work* emerges as a seminal text offering invaluable lessons germane to the pursuit of equity and justice within the modern workplace landscape of the twenty-first century.

Verses of Struggle: The Poetry of Labor and Identity

The edited collection's second part focuses on the poetic exploration of women's work and identity. Jill Goad, Samantha Allan, and Alicia Ye Sul Oh have contributed significantly to this section with their insightful analyses of poetic representations depicting working women. Through the lens of poetry, contributors like Jill Goad examine the symbolic and literal representations of labor. Goad's analysis of Natasha Trethewey's *Domestic Work* focuses on "the indignities faced by Black women workers" (50), highlighting the power of poetry to challenge conventional narratives and bring the nuanced experiences of working women to the fore. Meanwhile, Allan's exploration of docupoetry and Oh's study of Gwendolyn Brooks's black female domestic workers provide valuable insights into the mnemonic labor and self-care practices of marginalized women.

Goad's analysis brings to light Trethewey's portrayal of Turnbough's factory employment, highlighting a notable instance where Turnbough works alongside white women, albeit in an environment marked by racial inequality perpetuated by white male superiors (50). Trethewey's narrative underscores the indignities faced by black female workers, exemplified by the discriminatory practice of subjecting them to searches for stolen items, a task not imposed on their white counterparts (51). The hierarchical power dynamics enforced by the white male boss not only diminish the dignity of black female workers but also illustrates a broader societal disregard for their voices and agency. As Goad observes, "Turnbough's factory jobs marks the first time in Domestic Work she is shown working side by side with white women, a sign of slow progress, but any small semblance of racial equality is undone by the way she and other Black women are treated by white male bosses" (50–51). Trethewey further emphasizes the discriminatory practices faced by Black women workers, noting how Turnbough recounts, "how only the Black women workers were made to stay behind after each shift to have their searched for stolen items by the boss" (51). Moreover, Goad, Allan, and Oh collectively offer profound analyses that deepen our understanding of poetic representations of working women, revealing the multifaceted dimensions of their experiences. Goad's examination of Trethewey's work challenges prevailing narratives, while Allan and Oh shed light on overlooked aspects of mnemonic labor and self-care practices among marginalized women. Their collective insights underscore the transformative potential of poetry in illuminating the complexities of women's work and resilience amid adversity.

Drawing from *A History of US Public Libraries*, Allan further elucidates the historical marginalization of women within professional spheres, particularly within library settings. Despite outnumbering men in these institutions, women were often relegated to subordinate roles with limited administrative responsibilities and compensation, indicative of entrenched gender biases. Allan cites, "in libraries, women greatly outnumbered men, holding a large proportion of

administrative positions but with little administrative responsibility" (qtd Brady and Abbott 61). This unequal treatment perpetuated a system where women, especially women of color, were confined to roles that subordinated their professional aspirations to the needs of white households, thereby hindering their mobility and agency. Oh's analysis delves into the inherent paradoxes of domestic work, particularly for women of color whose social identities have long been tethered to domesticity. By contextualizing domestic work within the legacy of slavery, Oh highlights the enduring impact of racial and class divisions on women's labor experiences.

Through Brooks's poetry, Oh illustrates the systemic discrimination and degradation faced by Black women in domestic service roles, underscoring the persistent struggles against marginalization and oppression.

Crossing Boundaries: Immigrant Women's Labor in Urban Landscapes

Exploring the experiences of immigrant women in metropolitan areas, this section provides a critical examination of cultural and economic barriers. Margaret E. Salifu and M. Anjum Khan embark on an insightful exploration of the experiences of immigrant women within the workforce, delving into the literary realms of resilience and adaptation as depicted in Paule Marshall's *The Fisher King* and in the narrative journey of Nazneen Ahmed. Salifu's analysis of Ulene Payne in Marshall's work unveils a narrative rich in diligence, resourcefulness, and strength, echoing the endurance exhibited by historical figures such as Bam-Bam and Da-Duh, and their confrontation with intersecting systems of oppression, notably race, gender, and class within the United States (96). The historical resonance of Ulene's experiences is poignantly juxtaposed with the distant yet haunting memories of intense exploitation endured by enslaved African Caribbean women and men, as evoked in Salifu's observation that "the period when enslaved African Caribbean women (and men) toiled and suffered intense exploitation on sugarcane plantations was distant enough for Da-Duh to talk lightheartedly of the cane fields when the author first visited Barbados" (96).

In alignment with Salifu's contention, it is evident that intersectional scholarship underscores the intricate intertwining of race, gender, and class as oppressive systems for women. Notably, the heightened oppression experienced by black women underscores the multidimensional and interconnected nature of these systems, as astutely observed by black feminists (97). Moreover, Salifu and Khan offer compelling narratives that illuminate the resilience and adaptation inherent in the immigrant women's experience within the workforce. Salifu's analysis of Ulene Payne poignantly portrays the multifaceted challenges faced by immigrant women as they navigate cultural and economic barriers, while Khan's exploration of Nazneen Ahmed's journey underscores the complexities of identity and belonging in unfamiliar terrain. Through their discerning analyses, Salifu and Khan advocate for the recognition and acknowledgment of the invaluable contributions made by immigrant women to the fabric of American society. The perpetuation of various forms of oppression, operating simultaneously and complexly, particularly concerning black womanhood in the United States, is brought to light by Salifu's scholarly inquiry (97). Drawing from the work of distinguished sociologist Philip Kasinitz, the historical context of segregated housing for African Americans and West Indians in the early twentieth century underscores the enduring legacy of discrimination and systemic inequalities (42). This legacy is further perpetuated through covert mechanisms of segregation and discrimination, impeding black families' access to property well into the
twenty-first century.

Khan's exploration of Nazneen's transformative journey as an immigrant Muslim Bangladeshi woman sheds light on the dynamics of empowerment through work, juxtaposed with the backdrop of patriarchal expectations and gendered roles. The dismissive attitude exhibited by

Nazneen's husband, Chanu, towards her epitomizes the pervasive disregard for human decency and marital equity prevalent in certain societal constructs (110). Khan astutely observes the societal expectations of unconditional wifely submission and servitude, perpetuated by entrenched gender norms and patriarchal ideals (110). Nazneen's journey towards empowerment and independence signifies a pivotal moment of agency and self-realization, as she deftly navigates the constraints imposed upon her, transcending the confines of her husband's dominion. The newfound empowerment attained by Nazneen is underscored by her ability to assert her agency and voice, indicative of the emancipatory potential inherent in economic autonomy (117). Khan's elucidation of Nazneen's journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of economic empowerment, affording her the agency to challenge and redefine societal expectations, ultimately fostering her personal growth and emancipation from oppressive structures.

Through the Lens: Visual Narratives of Women at Work

The final part of the book addresses how visual media shapes perceptions of labor and identity. Nodżak's analysis of American primetime drama highlights the commodification of the female body and its impact on the portrayal of working women. This section calls for a more nuanced and inclusive representation of women in media, challenging stereotypes and advocating for diversity in visual narratives. Emilia Nodżak, Hatice Bay, and Peter Piatkowski explore the visual representation of working women in various media forms. Nodżak's analysis of corporeal representations in American primetime drama, Bay's examination of racial uplift in the Netflix series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madame C. J. Walker*, and Piatkowski's discussion of the politics of gendered work in *Roseanne,* offer valuable insights into the ways in which visual media shapes perceptions of labor and identity. Each of these authors provide valuable insights into the visual representation of working women across different media platforms. Nodżak's analysis of corporeal representations in American primetime drama sheds light on the ways in which the female body is portrayed and commodified in popular culture, highlighting the intersections of gender, power, and identity. Likewise, Bay's examination of racial uplift in the *Self Made*, offers a critical perspective on the representation of black women's labor and entrepreneurship, challenging dominant narratives and celebrating the agency of marginalized voices.

Furthermore, Piatkowski's discussion of the politics of gendered work in *Roseanne* underscores the importance of critically interrogating representations of working-class women on television, revealing the complexities of class, gender, and social mobility in American society. Together, these chapters deepen our understanding of how visual media shapes perceptions of labor and identity, highlighting the need for more nuanced and inclusive representations of women in the media landscape. Nodżake highlights that "although representation, underrepresentation, and misrepresentation of women in various mass media have been the focus of numerous studies, the analyses of the portrayal of working women in primetime TV dramas tended to overlook the intricate connections between their occupational identity and corporeality" (123). By neglecting to explore how working women's occupational roles intersect with their corporeal presence, analyses of primetime TV dramas may inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes, limit the depth of characterizations, and undermine the authenticity of the narrative portrayal. Understanding the complex relationship between a woman's job and her embodiment is crucial for capturing the richness and diversity of women's experiences in the workforce and for challenging conventional narratives that often reduce women to simplistic tropes or archetypes. In essence, Nodżake's observation serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of taking a holistic approach to media analysis, one that recognizes and interrogates the multifaceted dimensions of women's representation, including their occupational identities and embodied realities, within the dynamic landscape of primetime television dramas.

According to certain theorists, like Joan Acker, the framework of the working individual's body, sexuality, role in procreation, and engagement in paid labor is implicitly constructed around a male archetype. Building upon Acker's concept of workplace masculinization, Cynthia Cockburn further extends this paradigm to encompass individuals with disabilities, highlighting their marginalization within a workplace culture designed by and for able-bodied individuals. Cockburn contends that since the prevailing model is based on that of the white, physically fit male, the bodies of disabled women are often perceived as inherently weaker and less capable, perpetuating systemic inequities within the workplace.

Bay focuses on the preface of "Working Women in American Literature, 1865-1950," where Miriam S. Gogol offers a compelling overview of the socio-cultural landscape surrounding women's labor during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Focusing primarily on the realistic and naturalistic literary movements of the period, Gogol highlights the limited occupational choices available to women in the United States during this era. She delineates a narrative wherein women workers were predominantly relegated to roles as servants, factory workers, seamstresses, teachers, and prostitutes, occupations characterized by a conspicuous absence of authority and public power (qtd in Bay 143). Despite the rich, detailed, and comprehensive fictional portrayals of life provided by realist and naturalist writers of the time, Gogol observes a disconcerting trend wherein working women are often depicted as mere caricatures, stereotypes, or ephemeral entities within literary narratives (qtd in Bay 143). This tendency towards reductionism serves to obscure the multifaceted realities of women's labor experiences, rendering their struggles and triumphs in the workplace as peripheral or inconsequential within the broader literary landscape. Moreover, Gogol's analysis extends beyond the realm of literature to explore the portrayal of working women in popular culture, particularly within the burgeoning medium of film during the 1920s. Such representations not only perpetuate harmful stereotypes but also contribute to the erasure of working women's agency and complexity within the cultural imagination. Overall, Gogol's preface offers a thought-provoking exploration of the portrayal of working women across different literary and cultural mediums during a pivotal period in American history. By shedding light on the discrepancies between fictional representations and lived realities, she invites readers to critically interrogate the ways in which women's labor has been depicted and understood within the broader societal discourse.

Beyond the Margins: Reflections and Future Directions for Marginalized Women's Work

While *Marginalized Women and Work* paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted experiences of women across decades and continents, its exploration invites further investigation in several critical areas. The collection's strength lies in the way it weaves together a rich tapestry of perspectives, yet it also presents an opportunity for expansion, especially in embracing a wider scope of intersectionality. The experiences of LGBTQ+ women, disabled women, and women from marginalized religious communities remain underexplored, suggesting a broader spectrum of voices waiting to be heard. Incorporating these perspectives would not only enrich the anthology's narrative but also reflect the complex, layered realities of all marginalized women. Furthermore, the anthology could extend its relevance by delving into contemporary issues that shape the landscape of women's work today. The gig economy, reproductive labor, and the impact of globalization represent significant facets of modern employment, each carrying its own set of challenges and opportunities for marginalized women. A nuanced examination of these topics would provide readers with a more comprehensive understanding of the current and future state of women's work, bridging historical struggles with present-day dynamics. The collection's commitment to amplifying marginalized voices through an interdisciplinary approach is commendable, positioning it as essential

reading for scholars and students alike. However, as we look to the future, it becomes clear that the journey of understanding and advocating for marginalized women in the workforce is far from complete. The evolving nature of work, influenced by technological advancements, societal shifts, and global interconnectedness, calls for ongoing analysis and dialogue. By building on this foundation and expanding its scope to include a broader array of experiences and contemporary issues, we can continue to uncover the nuanced realities of marginalized women's work, ensuring that no voice is left unheard in the quest for equity and justice.

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Faten M. Hafez
Review
Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric. Graywolf Press*, 2014.

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* recounts the ongoing narrative of racial aggression in the daily life of African Americans. She addresses the issue of race narrated in streams of internal monologues. The title suggests a lyric that takes at its heart the citizen as a member of society, but the content presents a critical reflection on racial discourse as it challenges the meaning of citizenship and how it becomes fluid when the everyday acts of racism cast a racial identification to African Americans. While this book resonates particularly with African American readers, its themes are relevant to a diverse range of readers, including scholars, educators, social justice activists or anyone interested in exploring the complexities of racial dynamics in contemporary society. It is divided into seven parts, and is successful in charting out issues of race, trauma, and stereotyping. These issues are discussed through a relentless interrogation of a hidden racial discourse, which invites a deep interest in the way it unfolds in real life.

The abiding reality of skin color is found in the opening story of Part I, where a twelve-year-old is granted the privilege of residing on the periphery of the white race when her classmate feels more comfortable cheating from her since she is "an almost white person" (5). This story foreshadows a content of a book that does not intend to tread gently on the issue of race but confronts it head on through a racial lens. Using a calm and lucid tone, Rankine pinpoints conversations and attitudes that reduce a person to his/her own race. She expands on the division that fractures the African American identity and the complex battle between "the historical self" and the 'self self'" (14). Certainly, the story of the twelve-year-old helps the reader see how the organic structure of the latter is threatened by the violence of the former.

Rankine understands the American positioning of African Americans and how it causes a fracture in the solid African self. She highlights the dilemma of establishing the self in relation to ethnicity and how it prevents a person from being a citizen fully vested in the same rights. By focusing on the fact that even verbal slippage annihilates notions of sameness and equality and destroys simple relations like a friendship between whites and African Americans: "What did you say? Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject to any transgression of your historical self" (14), she shows how this kind of rhetoric as a microaggression that does not just signify a social dynamic inimical to communal unity but brings into light a whole new understanding of the self in a world profoundly constructed by stereotypes.

In Part II, Rankine focuses on the historical polarization of blackness and whiteness when placed in narratives of compatibility and belonging. This polarization is intended to underline the positioning of black American bodies by the mass of white Americans. A perfect example is the bias of sports institutions and how it impacts the accomplishments of great athletes like Serena Williams. Rankine suggests that Williams lost the 2004 and 2009 US Open championships not because of the referees' decisions, but because she was the black body who played on the courts of the white masses who deemed her as not belonging "on their court, in their world" (26). What is interesting is that she relates this historical polarization to canonical US literature and brings Zora Neal Hurston's experience in *How It Feels to be Colored Me* and making a stark connection between Hurston's consciousness of skin color and Williams's situation on US tennis courts. She appropriates Williams's black body when placed in a historical white space to Hurston's color awareness, which

emerges only when she is placed against a white backdrop: "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (25). By making this correlation, Rankine highlights the power of the white mass and their ability to shape and reshape the knowledge production of skin color.

The condition of being addressable and how it intertwines with what makes language hurtful is a major topic in Part III. Rankine borrows Judith Butler's discussion of the language act in reference to the self to prove how it factors into the hypervisibility of African Americans: "I didn't know you were black!" (44), "You are late, you nappy-headed ho" (41), "I didn't know black women could get cancer" (45). Butler's theory of a socially constructed identity being subject to "the address of another" (49) aligns well with Rankine's argument about racial language and how it diminishes a person's essence while it heightens the visibility of their race. The label "nappy-headed ho" was once used by Don Imus, a radio show host, while referring to the Rutgers University's women's basketball team, which stirred a wide public outrage. Although he claimed that it was said in jest, it was contested by many including Michael Awkward who, in the book *Burying Don Imus: Anatomy of a Scapegoat*, denoted it as a failing attempt at humor. There is the possibility that racial rhetoric keeps the addressee in a racial lens, and Rankine exposes the harmful distancing strategies of black subjectivity when it detaches the African identity from a normal social consciousness. Rankine's book, in this manner, exposes certain expressions that limit African Americans in a stereotypical addressability by language that involves clichéd denomination.

Rankine engages consistently in an interrogation of individuals' implicit acts of racism and questions their imports through diverse incidents. This is most obvious in Parts IV and V where she questions both the explicit and implicit racial responses in humans' everyday interaction: "Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard?" (63). This astonished tone indicates a shock at the normalcy of the responses. It unveils the racial mechanism of a culture oblivious to its own insensitivity to skin color: "You wait at the bar of the restaurant for a friend, and a man, wanting to make a conversation … takes out his phone to show you a picture of his wife. You say … that she is beautiful. She is, he says, beautiful and black, like you" (78). Rankine makes it clear that these responses are comfortably spoken as they come out remarkably ordinary though their polite undertone harbors a prejudiced connotation. Similar incidents are referenced throughout the book, and she makes a persuasive case that these subtle forms of racism maintain a color-blind attitude defiant to any form of critiquing or censorship.

There are certain aspects in the book that might be challenging to readers: one is the fragmented structure, which disrupts the conventional flow of narrative as the author presents snippets of experiences and emotions that are often disjointed and abrupt. As readers navigate through these fragmented passages, they may find themselves grappling with the disjointed nature of the racialized experiences instead of encountering a linear and cohesive storyline. Further, her use of second-person narration, which distances readers from the racial experience, can sometimes hinder immersion in the narrative and detract from a sense of immediacy and connection. By employing the pronoun "you," which distances readers from the event and the "you's" perspective, which points to the fracture of the self, as I will discuss later, Rankine invites readers to inhabit the experiences of others, blurring the boundaries between the personal and the universal. This narrative choice can also create a sense of detachment, as readers may struggle to fully immerse themselves in the emotional turmoil of racial aggression.

However, the book contains an innovative blend of poetry, prose, and visual imagery; some bear direct connection to the incident narrated, others stand independently in their free-floating imports. In fact, the relation between an image and a narrated incident depends entirely on the readers' ability to imagine how internally or outwardly they correspond. In Part VI, Rankine uses an image from Hulton Archive titled Public Lynching, which dates back to August 30, 1930 and portrays a white crowd gathering at a public lynching site. The image is placed at the end of a section

dedicated to Trayvon Martin: "In Memory of Trayvon Martin." It tells a metaphorical story about her brothers who have not been to prison but are imprisoned. She realizes that they are all caught hanging in the traditional lynching form and using her unique poetic language she intensifies the sense of powerlessness as they silent silence, "the rope inside us, the tree inside us, its roots our limbs, a throat sliced through and when we open our mouth to speak, blossoms, o blossoms, no place coming out, brother, dear brother, that kind of blue" (90). Rankine's use of a 1930 incident alongside Trayvon Martin's murder by a community watchman, which took place on February 26, 2012, asserts an ongoing narrative of racial violence and a stubborn permanency of social injustice.

Similarly, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American Minneapolis resident, was pinned on the ground by police while handcuffed pleading for his life. A police officer placed his knee between Floyd's head and neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. He died shortly thereafter. His tragedy reverberates around the world and a sweeping indignation took over the nation. A resentment to racial violence made its way to every written and spoken word. It transformed into a social unrest similar to the aftermath of the police beating of Rodney King that setoff the Los Angeles riots starting on April 29, 1992, and, which Rankine mentions to pinpoint the repetitive pattern of injustice and racism: "Though the moment had occurred and occurred again with the deaths, beatings, and imprisonment of other random, unarmed black men, Rodney King's beating somehow cut off the air supply in the US body politic by virtue of the excessive, blatant barrage of racism and compromised justice that followed on the heels of his beating" (117). This excessive barrage of discrimination is what causes a chaos that spread from the southern part of the city to the Downtown Civic Center area, and the mayor had to declare a state of emergency. The persistence of these incidents along with the public response will keep Rankine's book at the center of many racial discourses. Her treatment of racial injustice will always reiterate the systemic criminalization of African Americans and the continued brutality of police officers.

In the final part, Rankine seems to be touching upon the previously discussed points. She does this by retelling them through different incidents but in the same racial narrative. She circles back into the fracture of the self and points out two identities or two "yous" in which one is marked by worthlessness and nonexistence while the other is the normal "you." She delineates how much the "I" can stretch, "Don't say I if it means so little" (143) and affirms that it lives in a body injured and will forever aches. She once more discusses the lack of acceptance/belonging in a society and names it the worst injury of all. More importantly, she restates the distrust in the criminal justice system and recalls the killing of Trayvon Martin to question if the repetition of his name in the "car radio a dozen times each half hour" (151) would mean anything.

In retrospect, Rankine states: "Yes, and this is how you are a citizen: Come on. Let it go. Move on" (151). What she is suggesting is that this kind of citizenship attributes a different type of personhood to African Americans, and this explains why African Americans are not viewed by whites as citizens equal, compatible, and belonging. The many interrogations that she offers in the widely diverse incidents are left unanswered to signal a rigid permanency of systemic intolerance. Rankine's book will be a welcome lyric for those who seek to challenge the institutionalization of racism because it recognizes front and center the racial and social dynamics that prompt the American positioning of the black body.

Finally, the book sparks important conversations about race and belonging in America. it is highly recommended for readers who are interested in exploring these themes or who appreciate innovative and experimental forms of literature. It is also worthwhile for educators and students who may find it valuable for its insights into contemporary issues and its potential to stimulate meaningful discussions.

Ibtisam M. Abujad

Hearing Bells

I would hear bells as I walked the paths on the university campus,
resonances cutting the cold winter air
My students told me it was the pipe organ from the church next door
its melodic waves lapping at the shores of my Muslim ears
covered in layers of Pashmina
like a hat, but tighter, molding to my head
protecting me from the cold shoulders and the frostbite of unfamiliarity
I wondered how hard the church bells would need to work
to penetrate the three walls of interwoven threads
I assumed that they were exhausted by the time that they reached me
Either out of pity or human empathy, they struggled to enter,
knowing that I longed for the fajr Athans that would ride the not-yet-morning winds
and hop onto the clouds, finding in their small delays echoing music
I would wake, not like everyone else who would hurriedly brave the cold water to make wudoo and
vigorously bow onto mats frozen overnight,
but I would open my eyes in anticipation of the harmony,
initiated in the human vocal cords of sleepy muathins,
fueled by the skies and the rain drops that would help it pour out in all directions,
into apartments and between the loving embraces of wives and husbands,
and around small hands cradling mothers' nourishing bodies
surrounding heavy blankets placed carefully under bad backs and expanding bellies,
that carried vegetable cases of baby tomatoes and bundles of small dreams,
flooding lit rooms and those that have exhausted their oil,
ruffling the feathers of the cooing friends
who would come to my window after having their slumber interrupted and tell me their stories,
calling in their gurgling languages
Not needing for translators, I would acknowledge the calls, their invitations,
not anticipating that a time would come when I would find myself listening hard
for the now lost echoes under Milwaukee moons,
an interpreter of harmonies, melodies from sounds
Athans silenced, not like the bells,
confined within building walls on divergent streets
Oh how I wished that they would be freed into courtyards for me to swing on their vines
to ride with them on perfumed winds,
before I would need to topple out again
onto the hard concrete pavements once more

Katia Arco

"The Blue Boots"

I looked straight at him, imagining the key in his gut. It was a rusty, bronze piece in the middle of his stomach, churning in a soup of acid, antelope, and other adrenaline-pumped prey; the one key that opened my closet door, adjacent to the conservatory room where the unclad woman with the blue rain boots lived. She was a professional dancer who danced with her own shadow to the rhythm of Over the Rainbow. Her hair, a silky raven-black mane, fell along her full-figured body; her skin smooth, porcelain-like. Her appearance made sense, because according to the other tenants of the house, the dancer woman had walked straight out of a tiny porcelain music box with blossoming flowers painted along its surface.

In total, we were four tenants. And we all lived in a huge Victorian house. The porcelain dancing woman had been the first one to arrive. The other three tenants, including myself, had, also, something strange that made us want to hide. Each one of us couldn't explain what had caused the metamorphosis. But it didn't matter. Life was pleasant in the veld, lions surrounded us, acacias and baobabs slowly sprouted out of the earth and soon, ordinary life had been replaced with Mensa-like conundrums.

Henna, for instance, a forty-five-year-old tattoo artist (and the third tenant to arrive), whose skin was a tapestry of black and white ink, had once gotten stuck inside one of the baobabs without having stepped into it. It took us one month to figure out her extraction by splitting the baobab trunk open with one of the tools that Joachim, the swimmer and wood carver, had made.

Joachim, the second tenant to arrive on the veld, woke up one day to find that his skin had begun to show a thin scaly coating and an itch permeating the whole of his body. At first, he thought it was just a bad case of psoriasis, but when he noticed the slits appearing along the sides of his neck, he understood that soon he would need to retire to the ocean full time. Meanwhile, sleeping in a man-sized fish tank at night and carving wooden tools during the day while looking like a shimmering half fish, half man, would have to suffice.

Henna and Joachim knew where they were heading. I, on the other hand (the fourth tenant), didn't have a clue as to what I was or where I belonged or what I was becoming. We were alike, in some way, and it was comforting, but ultimately, I felt alone, even within the small community of strange creatures. You see, if you were to observe me, you would notice the cerulean transparency of my skin. At times you would even say to yourself, "she's disappearing." And that was true. And that was my wish. I wanted my own banishment from the tediousness of daily living. But the porcelain dancer became a light in those dark, uncertain moments where I felt lost.

I couldn't go a day without observing her through the tiny hole in my closet. Her sensuous movements, the grace in her smile, the fire that seemed to engender her dance made me feel inadequate. Yet, I wondered how I would feel to be her—free, even though she remained locked in room number four, not ever once stepping outside to know the sun or the air or the lions that surrounded us, protecting the bastion in which we lived. There were questions as to how the tiny, thumb-sized, and lifeless, porcelain ballerina had disengaged from the jewelry box and suddenly grown five feet and three inches, but no one was curious enough to think deeper into the unusual situation. The tenants just shrugged their shoulders and simply continued to worry about their own dilemmas.

They spoke about her and about the music box, and everyone was content in not ever seeing the dancing woman, because no one ever cared to know. When something doesn't fit the ordinary way of thinking about things, or when the time comes to have to employ some kind of self-reflection and contemplation, the mind protects itself by ignoring what is obvious. And the obvious: a woman's lilting voice, a song played one hundred and fifty times a day, seven days a week, never stepping out of the conservatory room—not to eat, not to drink not to shop. So, they brush it off as, "oh, she's just a hermit who's obsessed with *Over the Rainbow*," or "I think I saw her once before, but I can't remember," or "leave her alone, I'm sure she gets out sometimes, we just never come across her." Well, I do. And I wanted the key. No—I needed the key to my closet, to my secret, to the dancing woman no one had ever seen before.

I thought very carefully about how I would pull the key out of him. I mean, he was a lion after all, with a mane that made his head seem larger than the sun, larger than anything I'd ever seen. Enormous and fierce, his eyes glistened, begging me to open his mouth and pull the key out. But why trust me, the one everyone looked at strangely, the one who was an alien to all who weren't blue? Wasn't he afraid of my fluorescence? Wasn't he disgusted with my blueness? But there he stood looking at me as if saying, "lady, please ... get this thing out of me before I burn my insides." And I said, "but what of the zoo you have inside, wouldn't that be more troublesome than the tiny key? Can't you digest it and shit it out? I mean, I'd rather not, with those canines and the jaw that could crush a thousand zebras into bits of bones."

I was desperate to meet the dancing woman with the blue rain boots, but I could wait just a little bit more. I'd been waiting for centuries—well, not centuries, it felt like centuries—to meet anyone as strange as me, someone who understood what it was to be blue, or invisible. It'd been a terrible misfortune to find out that I was not white, brown or black or even yellow. My mother was white, my father was brown, my siblings were white, but I was turning blue.

My own transformation began one day as I was looking at myself in the mirror. I noticed a strange gray cast appearing along my skin. At first, it seemed like a bruise-like color spread along my hands, feet and limbs; then, my torso, my neck and finally my face. I was blue in a matter of hours. But it wasn't my skin that turned blue, but my blood; there was something in my blood that made me glow. And, well, people just couldn't recognize me anymore, especially at night when I glowed this tinge of cerulean light. So, I disappeared, not because I became invisible—I wish it were that easy. On the contrary, I became too visible and I had to go into hiding, not just during the day, but at night, because when I got anxious I lit up like a firefly.

At first, I thought I was dreaming, but as the days went on without waking up to not being blue, I realized the truth of my dilemma. So, I went home to tell my mother after not having seen her or spoken to her in three years. I was that anxious to know and for someone to tell me, "It's alright, you'll go back to being white, or brown or yellow. It's just hormonal. You'll grow out of it." It didn't matter the color. I just didn't want to be blue.

But when I showed her, she gasped, dropped her crochet project, and with eyeglasses sliding down her nose, she said, "You didn't put on sunblock, Dear. You never put on sunblock. I've said to you so many times that it takes nothing to put on some sunscreen, but you never listen to me!"

"I do use sunblock, Mom, when I go outside. But I didn't go outside at all!"

"You did go outside and laid in the sun, Dear. And it's obvious that you didn't use sunblock," she said more calmly and returned to her knitting. "You just forgot, that's all."

"Mom! I didn't forget to put on sunblock because I didn't go outside. I haven't been outside during the last three weeks!"

"Change your tone. Your father used that tone with me and I don't appreciate you talking to me that way. Either you are lying to me or you don't remember laying out in the sun. Sometimes,

Dear, we can have memory lapses or losses for no apparent reason. Maybe, you were drunk and don't remember. Maybe you had an episode."

"An episode?"

"Yes, Dear, like the one you had when you ran away from home and didn't remember where you'd been."

"I was thirteen! And I did remember where I was! You just don't like the fact that I went to papa and that his new girlfriend was there. You wanted to be believe that I was lying, because you didn't want to know the truth. You like to put your head in the sand, like you're doing now."

"Don't talk to me about that woman!" she said, as she looked up at me again. "She's brought a lot of pain into this family. And your father … after how he treated you … I just couldn't see why you would run to him."

She paused and took her glasses off and placed a half-completed doily on the table next to her. She stood up and stared at me for about fifteen seconds. "Dear, there's a bluish tone to your skin. Have you been drinking? Are you ill?

"No!" I cried, suddenly remembering why I hadn't tried contacting her in three years.

I decided, then, to move out of the busy town I lived in and into the old Victorian house out in the field, with the grasslands and the lions, and the strange people who inhabited it. I thought it would be a perfect place to hide and still be able to be myself. No one would ever notice. No one would ever find me or care, not even my mother, not even the teacher who'd swear I would get into the best dancing school. I was just blue and homely, and the dancer was stunning. The woman in the conservatory room kept my blue blood pumping, making sure I could still glow. She was my oxygen, and though she remained away, I could sense her heartbeat. But I needed that key.

He roared. I stepped back. I was desperate. He was desperate. The lion grew, I shrunk. Was this a cruel trick, one of those moments in life where no matter the choice made the outcome is the same? If I stuck my hand in there, would he bite? Would he chew my head off? Would I be turned into bits and pieces? I wasn't so sure, because his eyes seemed gentle, human-like and it felt natural to step into him, as his mouth, now the size of 30 man-made doors, opened—a sort of portal or threshold demarcating the surreal life I knew from the world within the lion. So, I did. I stepped onto his tongue and after three rounds of slipping, falling and standing up, I was able to keep steady along the fleshy, carpet-like surface.

I took out a tiny flashlight from my pocket, but quickly realized I didn't need it, because I glowed blue. Without warning, I slipped through his epiglottis and trachea and fell into a soft, spongy tunnel—which I guessed was his esophagus—until I came across a pile of bones at the shore of a large body of bubbling water. I used one of the bones that looked like a pirogue I'd once seen while traveling through a swamp, climbed into it and started to navigate the acid waters of his gut. I recognized the stomach immediately by the change in temperature and the violent contractions and tremors that suddenly came when I was pushed into it. And there was the key, floating, sizzling in the soup of acid and antelope and zebra. I thought about how I could fish out the key without turning into a pile of bones myself. I knew that pulling it out was going to be difficult, but I had to try.

The environment was hot and humid, and the juices grew and spurt large bubbles of acid that would hit me every couple of minutes, leaving stains (or holes) of fluorescence along my body. Pieces of skin detached, melted, burned into the acid pool like sections of an old painting falling off. A Dalí image in the making: me disappearing, dissolving into the greater whole of the feline's gut.

Slowly, I was being stripped off my skin and the pain resembled those moments in the past when papa would take my hand and place it on the stove burner, because I hadn't memorized the multiplication tables. I screamed, of course. But I never cried. The tears had always been elsewhere, in some recondite place, sealed shut, preventing me from feeling alive. But this time I was inside of

the lion's stomach; a powerful environment to find yourself in, and no place to be in if you're thinking of living a full life. I was in physical pain, but somehow, I became acutely aware of my tattered, hideous appearance and the pain no longer seemed important.

I began to think. I began to remember. I began to travel through those darker moments aware now of the times when I could have said "no," or "yes." But mostly, "no, no, no, no," and establish boundaries around my own life, a periphery to announce my identity, preventing others from seeing me as someone I wasn't, or from taking my body when I just wanted to give a gift wrapped in cellophane with the red bow, because that was all that I could give at that moment.

Are humans capable of understanding limits? Are people able to perceive exhaustion in others, and say, "I understand how you feel, let us do this or that or the other tomorrow," without engaging the rules of rhetoric to influence what has been decided already by instinct?

A shapeshifter cannot maintain her own form. She waits, helplessly, for the desires of others to chisel who they will become for that particular moment, for that particular person, for that particular lifetime. It's impossible to win this way. I didn't want to be malleable to the urges of others anymore. I wanted to be me, whoever that person was. I wanted to be strong in who I was because it was my responsibility to do so.

And I could have said, "yes, yes, yes, yes," to the idiosyncrasies that I needed to express, scream to the world that I was in fact blue. I could have said "yes" to dancing, without caring of how others would see me, because now I know that for each and one of us there is a purpose to being, to breathing and even to being blue and fluorescent; and "yes" to my desire to embrace the dancing woman. She was my air and I was suffocating within a world of axioms and theories, melting in a pot of acid. The dark heaviness in my chest that had always weighed me down, fell into the juice. I was nothing, yet the bronze key sizzling in the soup acid seemed intact. The entry to my future shone like a lamppost in the middle of a dark alley, and I stuck my hand in there and pulled the key out.

I was gone. The blueness vanished. Flesh eaten. I was light. But it was dark. A ghost. A thing. Just a pair of wings? Because I flew, or floated or rose out of the tiny spec of lion. And the key? Yes. I held it and soon felt her blood rush through me. Nothing I knew, but the blue boots on my feet.