

SYMPOSIUM

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SYMPOSIUM

A JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND INQUIRY

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Symposium

Great Books Curriculum of Wright College
A Journal of Research and Inquiry
Dedicated To the Best That Has Been Thought and Said

VOLUME 10

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GREAT BOOKS CURRICULUM

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Antoine Lavoisier	Flannery O'Connor	Epic of Son Jara
D.H. Lawrence	One Thousand and One Nights	Sophocles
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Titus Livy	Ovid	Edmund Spenser
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John Locke	Blaise Pascal	Lawrence Sterne
Federico Garcia Lorca	Octavio Paz	Wallace Stevens
Audre Lorde	Francesco Petrarch	Robert Louis Stevenson
Lucan	Petronius	Claude Levi Strauss
Lucretius	Pindar	Sun Tzu
Luo Guanzhong	Luigi Pirandello	Epic of Sundiata
Martin Luther	Max Planck	Italo Svevo
Niccolo Machiavelli	Plato	Jonathan Swift
Mahabharata	Plautus	Tacitus
Naguib Mahfouz	Plutarch	Rabindrarath Tagore
Magna Carta	Li Po	Talmud
Maimonides	Henri Poincare	R. H. Tawney
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Thomas Mann	Popul Vuh	Terence
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Lao Tze	Walt Whitman	Wu Ch'eng En
Upanishads	Oscar Wilde	W. B. Yeats
U. S. Constitution	Tennessee Williams	Zhu XiH
Lope de Vega	Edmund Wilson	

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

I am sincerely honored to present the 10th edition of the *Great Books Symposium Journal (GBSJ)*, a publication now more than twenty-years strong. Our journal has served as a long-standing staple of academia across City Colleges for a simple reason. Bruce Gans, founder of Wright's Great Books Program, believed that community college students can engage with the great texts, encouraging them to write about "the best that has been thought and said." Such a seemingly audacious belief is not unwarranted, as the exceptional essays of this year's edition demonstrate our students' nuanced perspectives, contributing to the Great Books discourse and broadening our perspectives on the classics. The *GBSJ*, perhaps the only scholarly journal entirely composed and edited by students and published by a two-year institution, annually publishes student inquiry that bleeds passion, ingenuity, and devotion. I hope that the dedication shown in these student essays serves not only to inspire other students to submit their essays for future publications, but also for our readers to find a sense of belonging within the Great Books community.

There is a long-held perception that community colleges often *lack* community. Yet, Great Books can create the foundation for a thriving community. Those who delve into the Great Books may find their yearnings for connection satisfied. George Whitman, the late owner of the famous Paris bookstore Shakespeare and Company, embodies such a sentiment: "Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky are more real to me than my next-door neighbors, and even stranger to me is the fact that even before I was born Dostoyevsky wrote the story of my life in a book called *The Idiot*." You, dear reader, like me, this bookseller, or any other Great Books reader, will find that literature holds the power to foster a unique community, one formed through a love of learning. These connections make the Great Books culture valuable.

This year, students engaged with the diverse narratives of Sophocles, Geoffrey Chaucer, Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Burke, Mary Shelley, and even the contemporary fictional character Hannibal Lecter, a catalogue that encompasses the past twenty-five centuries. These essays serve as living-proof that Great Books have the ability to revitalize communities and to imbue education with passionate excitement. I encourage you to read through each essay to bear witness to the quality of both the essays and these great works. This year, in addition to excellent contributors, we were very fortunate to have an excellent editorial board of fourteen students, as compared to last year's board of one student. This substantial involvement speaks to the vitality of the Great Books. Accordingly, we now have a magnificent team responsible for the betterment of our publication: Luciano has worked diligently to port the software for the journal to InDesign, Jessica Gramajo has designed a creative catalogue of usable covers for next year's edition, and Sergio Romero guided compelling discussions that emphasized the importance of interpreting the many

different translations of Great Books written in other languages. I admire these students' dedication, intellectualism, and charisma, attributes which I also encountered in students in Wright College's honors literature courses and Great Books Student Society club. I am inspired by and dedicate this journal to the wonderful student contributors and editorial board—thank you for helping me grow personally and intellectually.

Furthermore, The *Great Books Symposium Journal* is only possible because of our exceptional faculty editorial panel. First and foremost, thank you to the goodly faculty advisor and editor, Dr. Michael Petersen. His impact on the Great Books program and journal is undeniable. His guidance, understanding, and wisdom have made an immense impact on me and this edition of the journal; thank you for everything. Thank you to the other great professors at Wilbur Wright College, Austin Community College in Texas, Binghamton University in New York, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Oakton Community College, and the University of California San Diego—we appreciate all your hard work. Thank you to the Wilbur Wright College administration; you are essential to each *Great Books Symposium Journal* publication. I am excited about the future of the journal and Great Books Student Society community—there is so much more brilliance to come.

One last comment: I want to encourage each one of you to truly engage with Great Books. Immerse yourself, wrestle with the ideas at hand, let them make an impact on you. The renown poet, John Keats, who died at only 25, recognized that the “excellence of every Art is its intensity.” Readers, please be bold and unapologetic in who you are, and put every effort into what you do. You, like the Great Books, may hold the ability to better those around you, so take a chance and share your voice!

With Love and Gratitude,

Gretta Komperda

Spring 2024 Editor-in-Chief, *Great Books Symposium Journal*

Undisputed Heroine, Holy Criminal, or Useless Martyr: Interpreting Antigone's Disobedience in Sophocles' *Antigone*

MARCY FRAZIER

Sophocles' *Antigone* invites our admiration, and justifiably, for even her self-professed criminality can seem sanctioned by the gods. Antigone refuses to play it safe by rejecting the "proper" place given to women within the deep recesses of the *oikos* to which Athenian men relegated women circa 440 B.C.E. Determined to perform burial rites for her brother Polyneices, this courageous female risks it all – and in a public forum, no less. Indeed, even the entreaties of her fiancé, Haemon, hand firmly on the pulse of the *demos* in the streets, and the seer, Tiresias, cannot excuse Antigone's defiance of male authority. These two men push back on the harsh punishment meted out to her precisely because she disobeys in the name of higher values.

Scholars have noted how adherence to these higher values and resistance to male authority have resulted in politically inflected interpretations of the play. Many published articles cast Antigone as "an icon and battleground of feminist theory" (Goldhill 309). Others insist that Antigone is an icon of civil disobedience. Sheila Murnaghan, translator of the 2023 Norton edition of *Antigone*, recognizes a relatively recent shift in reception, explaining, "Most modern readers see her [Antigone] as the undisputed heroine of the play; her defiance of Creon is often identified with the modern concept of civil disobedience, according to which it is ethically justified, even required, to disobey unjust laws" (xvii). Decades earlier, with fresh images of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement clearly on her mind, Susan Wiltshire detects a similar connection, for "it is Antigone who is most often seen as the archetypal practitioner of civil disobedience" (29). Although admirers certainly have a point, that is, Antigone's valiant attempts at challenging unjust laws *do* capture our imagination and invite intriguing comparisons to protestors past and present, this female figure operating at the height of Greek tragic drama ultimately fails as a practitioner of civil disobedience. Sophocles renders her an ineffectual activist by underscoring her ongoing isolation from others, her ambiguous status within the Theban community, and her other-worldly, death-driven autonomy. Antigone's nature and fate greatly differ from those of political figures who embraced and eagerly became one with their communities in combating injustice, and who recognized the value of a public-facing position that could ignite, sustain and enshrine change.

In order to evaluate various perspectives on the nature of Antigone's disobedience, one must first establish ground rules for the contested term *civil disobedience*, which the *OED* defines as an orchestrated group effort directed against established authority: "Rebellion of the populace against a governing power," and, in later use, the "refusal to obey the laws, commands, etc., of a government or authority as part of an organized, non-violent political protest or campaign" ("Civil Disobedience"). Writing in the 1970s, a period of tremendous civil disobedience within the U.S., Wiltshire argues against easy equivalencies by first laying out more specific criteria by which to judge Antigone's refusal to conform. The practitioner of civil disobedience believes 1.) "there is a higher law than the laws of the land," and 2.) one should obey the laws of the land if "he sees himself as an integral part of society and has a basic belief in the social order"; but 3.) when the two sets of laws come in conflict with one another, the practitioner sees it as their duty "to obey the higher law and deliberately disobey the law of the land" (29). The authority to which Antigone appeals, and her determination to obey the unwritten laws established by the gods over the written laws insisted upon by her uncle Creon, suggest she meets these criteria.

However, Wiltshire's three additional characteristics of civil disobedience appear less certain in the case of Antigone's actions: 4.) the objective of the act(s) of civil disobedience is to induce social and/or political change via public protest; 5.) the perpetrator is willing to suffer the consequences, even punishment, for breaking the state's laws; and, finally, 6.) this punishment may, in some cases, produce positive results by helping "educate others to the existing evil and [...] cause others to join in the process" (29). Antigone readily accepts her punishment for transgressing the laws of the land. She refrains from using violence against Creon or others and, much to the chagrin of those who hope for a prolonged resistance, appears to embrace the prospect of death. Her cause or motivation for transgression appears more difficult to ascertain, as does the likelihood that her efforts will, at least in the immediate future, "help educate others" (29). Johan Tralau writes that Antigone is "inconsistent in her attachment to the bonds of *philia*, of the community of the 'one womb' that she wishes to protect" (377). The play does not suggest that her convictions serve to fuel others' actions or warn the *demos* of the evil effects of state policies. Antigone is not present to hear Creon's chilling pronouncement as an apparent prelude to tyrannical rule that "[w]hatever leader / the city appoints has to be obeyed / in matters big or small, just or unjust" (ll. 669-71). Although Antigone's very public refusal to abide by Creon's edict could be construed by modern readers as one piece within a wider protest against the inflexibility of male authority, one can hardly argue that her fervor extends beyond immediate family.

An earlier public exchange between the king and his niece provides a fleeting instructional space, an opportunity for teaching quickly dashed by Antigone's turn away from the potential power of a terrestrial kinship and toward an unfathomable and potentially fear-inducing unknown. Within the stichomythic parrying that places

the two momentarily on a similar plane, Creon's ironic "The good and the bad don't have equality" is met by Antigone's tantalizing but evasive "Who knows? They might in the underworld" (ll. 520-21). In shifting the argument away from a common human connection and toward the unknown in which she prefers to settle, at least in her own mind, Antigone forsakes the womb and drives her project underground where the prospect of organizing to battle a common evil, or even understanding that evil, is less likely. Sophocles dramatizes a palpable tension between the individual and the collective, but he makes it difficult for the audience to pledge its complete allegiance to someone whose status is never clearly defined and whose values, while apparently admirable, become less so when accompanied by the desire to embrace a condition for which there can be no unifying thought or language.

As if to neutralize any hopes of civic unrest in the form of organized, meaningful action directed against the state, Sophocles intensifies and extends Antigone's physical, mental, and rhetorical isolation from family and onlookers. Creon's biting words and his denial of her humanity in his refusal to name her ("You there, turning your head toward the ground, / do you admit you did it? Or deny it?") are met with Antigone's open admission: "Oh, I did it. I would not deny it" (ll. 441-43). Just after Creon offers the Chorus a rambling summary of the "outrages" committed by Antigone and Ismene in "planning this thing" (ll. 482, 490), Antigone asks dispassionately, "Anything you want besides killing me?" (l. 497). The modern reader naturally applauds these instances of youth's eloquent and punchy challenge to authority's long-winded and irrational squelching of dissent. Antigone's admission, unaccompanied by any signs of contrition, willingness to right her wrong, or desire to model behavior out of a wish for others' approval, amazes and confounds onlookers. Athenian audiences might have been struck by Antigone's audacity, her unabashed testing of the age, sex, and power-based hierarchy fundamental to their orderly society, and they might have perceived her challenging demeanor and tone as threatening rather than reassuring or inspiring. Long before civil disobedience acquired a positive cast, Sophocles portrays an Antigone who falsely believes she can go it alone. Or perhaps she lives only in the moment, testing the unwritten, fine line between *heroism* and *hubris*.

In foregrounding the potential for solidarity in the figure of Ismene and dramatizing Antigone's rejection of her sister's offers of help, Sophocles creates a further isolated and even unsympathetic Antigone. *Solidarity*, which the *OED* defines as the "fact or quality on the part of communities, etc., of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, especially in interests, sympathies, or aspirations," must be achieved to some degree, even if not perfectly, so practitioners work toward their objective of inducing change beyond personal circumstance ("Solidarity," 1. a.). Wiltshire describes Antigone as having "no hope, perhaps *no desire for help* from any source" (30, my emphasis). Antigone's first words to Ismene suggest a promising start, an acknowledgment of a strong sororal bond borne of adversity and haunted

by a common, if unnatural, family history: “Ismene, my sister, my second self! / Is there any evil born from Oedipus / that Zeus won’t make us both live through?” (ll. 1-3). Ismene’s clear-sighted and well-meaning perspective (“[W]e are women, / not suited by nature to fight against men”) and her plans to “ask the dead for their forgiveness / on the grounds that I am under constraint” appear to antagonize her sister (ll. 61-62, 65-66). Antigone responds not with placating words or attempts at winning Ismene to her cause (actions a diligent practitioner of civil disobedience might attempt in the name of a broader objective); instead, she immediately rejects Ismene’s balanced approach. Her abrupt response – “I won’t ask you to get involved” – serves as a prelude to her wholesale rejection of not only her sister’s perspective but also her very existence when Antigone later claims to be the last of her line (l. 69). Interactions with Ismene offer no evidence that Antigone’s ill-conceived and self-undermining disobedience will serve family or state in any meaningful way.

As if verbal distancing were not enough to drive an irrevocable wedge between the sisters, Sophocles exacerbates the situation by revealing the death-drive aspect of Antigone’s autonomy and the Chorus’s corresponding callousness. Tralau notes, “the tragedy itself shows the self-destructive nature of Antigone’s ‘laws’” (377). The Chorus casts few sympathetic glances in Antigone’s direction even as she begins her death walk, assessing her actions with the aloofness and harsh judgment characteristic of Theban elders. They offer no reassurance in response to Antigone’s moving catalogue of missed opportunities, and she, in turn, imagines herself marrying a river in Hades, thereby offering an unviable version of the sacred, life-affirming and life-giving institution. The only guarantee of the continued survival of the family unit is emphasized as such: “No chance for me to be a bride, / no wedding song. / I will marry Acheron” (ll. 814-16). Antigone has chosen her fate; the Chorus suggests martyrdom might offer consolation, an ironic possibility since death will prevent her from enjoying the fruits of any such legacy: “But what about the praise and fame / that follow you to death’s dark cave?” (ll. 817-18). Separated from this group that offers no solace, yet still arrested by their judgment and its tone, she calls out the Chorus while reminding them of the distinction between their place and hers: “You are mocking me! / Can’t you wait till I’m gone, / you richest men of the city?” (ll. 839-41). Antigone bemoans her separation: “You I can call as witnesses: / how alone I am, with no grieving friends [...] / in a horrible state, / neither living nor dead, / with no right to settle / either here or there” (ll. 845-46, 849-52). Antigone speaks in vain to her “platform,” a group of elderly men not particularly amenable to persuasion, and her call to action can have no hope at removing them from the comfort of their entrenched beliefs. Furthermore, she speaks of “a horrible state” they simply cannot comprehend, let alone learn from, as they assess her from their privileged position. Echoing Creon’s thought that Antigone has transgressed her appointed “station,” the Chorus retorts: “Stepping past the limits of daring, / you stumbled, child, on the altar / of justice. Now you pay a penalty / passed down from your father” (ll. 853-56). The very family that would buoy up the civil disobedience project instead haunts, distorts

and belittles the cause. Antigone “stumbles” in thinking she can escape her role within the family and the broader fabric of humanity. Occupying a purgatory of sorts, she finds comfort in neither the world of the living nor that of the dead. Hovering in a perpetual state of unsettlement between clearly identifiable realms, Antigone has few if any opportunities to spread the word, assemble like-minded individuals, and bolster her cause.

Sophocles further underscores the folly of Antigone’s attempts at complete independence from human-centered responsibility by allowing her one last chance at autonomy from those who would assess, judge, and sentence her: she reinvents herself as Niobe. This granddaughter of Zeus is doomed to suffer the consequences of eternal petrification because she dared boast of her fertility to a goddess: “I’ve heard about / our Phrygian guest, / daughter of Tantalus, / and her sad, sad death / beside Mount Sipylus” (ll. 823-27). Antigone recognizes a sister, another “second self” perhaps, envisioning a substitute for the sister she has foresworn. She observes their likeness (“Put to sleep by destiny, / *I am just like her*” [ll. 832-33, my emphasis]), and she reads her own story in the erosion of the stony monument: “Encircled by a rocky growth / as if by a clinging vine, / she's worn away by rain and snow / and soaks the ridges with her tears” (828-31). Shocked by Antigone’s audacious, overly reductionist self-comparison to Niobe’s figure, the Chorus immediately checks what they view as Antigone’s hubristic declaration by insisting on difference – Antigone is not like Niobe because she cannot claim a divine birth. In correcting Antigone’s attempts at a divinely attributed impunity, the Chorus condemns her and distances her even further from an imagined kinship that could bolster her case and cause.

As if to emphasize Antigone’s fatal inability or unwillingness to form solidarity with family or friends, Sophocles holds up Haemon as a more competent critic of Creon’s stubborn refusal to commute his niece’s harsh sentence. Antigone’s fiancé quite naturally models the flexibility of “trees that bend [to] keep their branches safe,” performing a masterful sequence of rhetorical moves intended to sway his father (l. 713). With the deftness of a seasoned politician fully aware of his constituents’ concerns, Haemon chooses his words carefully, harnessing the power of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* to make his case. When flattery and appeals to father-son bonds fail, Haemon reminds Creon, “Where you’re concerned, it is my role to see / how people react and whether they fault you. / [...] I pick up what is secretly whispered” (ll. 688-89, 692). A son sensitive to the murmurings of the *polis* (and therefore more aware of the potential disruptions in civic order), Haemon can more precisely gauge what must be done than the father who refuses to bend. Antigone’s disobedience appears less civil by contrast, or perhaps more self-oriented rather than *polis*-centered. She tells Creon that, although other Thebans may approve of her actions, “fear [...] make[s] them hold their tongues,” and they “just keep their mouths shut” (ll. 505, 509). Beyond pointing out what is secretly thought, Antigone appears to have little interest in vocalizing others’ concerns or harnessing their latent energy to incite change.

If she appears to fall short as a true practitioner of civil disobedience (as is evident in her lack of interest in inducing socio-political change and her lack of concern that her demise will produce positive change for a broader group), what then is Antigone? Do we simply echo the Chorus's "There's something holy in your devotion" and admire the sentiment, if not the final result? (l. 872). Or is Antigone nothing more than an ineffectual fanatic, a useless martyr? Does she matter, given her ostracism (or exorcism?) from the scene a full four hundred lines before Creon is left onstage and her speaking less than half the number of lines he utters? Scholars have attempted to provide answers to these questions. Bonnie Honig notes widely varying interpretations of Antigone's significance: this "holy criminal" hovers at either end of a vast spectrum, "undecidably a great political hero or a self-absorbed suicide incapable of caring for close kin," situated as she is "half in and half out of the polis form and marked by that liminality" (326). And, according to Jennifer Wallace, Antigone transgresses written laws while being a young woman in a man's world, and her resulting status – inhabiting otherness, betweenness, homelessness, or the "a-polis" that means having no city and a status lower than that even of a slave – compromises her ability to enact civil disobedience that might ignite real, lasting change (12). In insisting "[s]he has lost the right to settle here above," Creon simultaneously strips her of the multiple roles--sister, niece, woman, *polis* dweller – that make her human (l. 890). In doing so, he denies her the agency civil disobedience requires, and he relegates her to a liminality that deprives her of cohesiveness or solidarity.

In addition to critical scholarship on *Antigone*, recent decisions in theater performance and production can help answer questions surrounding the nature of Antigone's disobedience. The February 2024 Chicago Court Theater performance of *Antigone* asked that we place Antigone firmly within the pantheon of (female) figures who, with equal fervor, protested unjust laws during recent historical movements. An audible mix of overlapping voices emphasizes the communal forces accompanying civic unrest. As Chris Jones, reviewer for the *Chicago Tribune*, writes, "We hear a recording of the director's own relatives discussing a woman refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Texas in the 1940s" ("*Antigone*"). The Court Theater director's use of this recording generates the context of politically inflected disobedience, even before the first lines of Sophocles' play are spoken. Ismene appears as a flowerchild, an advocate of peace, love, and harmony, who ultimately returns to the stage in the play's final moments. In placing her within the counterculture of the 1960s, the Court Theater's representation of Antigone's sister might just quench the audience's desire for a more optimistic end fueled by hopes that the surviving sibling will live on to influence others. Ismene is presented as the true practitioner of civil disobedience who could build on Antigone's legacy by using a more even-handed and future-focused approach than her sister. In any case, reminders of the communal imperative of civil disobedience, whether communicated by family-based historical footage or by glimpses of protests in the 1960s, invite us to consider intriguing similarities (and, in doing so, inadvertently reveal dramatic differences) between historical actors like Rosa Parks and dramatic figures like Antigone and Ismene.

Undisputed Heroine, Holy Criminal, or Useless Martyr: Interpreting Antigone's Disobedience in Sophocles' Antigone

Antigone's fate communicates the patriarchal state's frantic attempts to control disobedience perceived as a serious threat to the status quo. In the midst of persuading Creon to bend a bit and change his mind, Haemon becomes the most convincing champion of his bride-to-be: "The city grieves to see that girl facing / a shameful death she hardly deserves, / when she performed the most glorious acts" (ll. 693-95). He goes on to ask Creon: "Shouldn't golden honor be her reward?" (l. 699). Creon answers by insisting that "rebels" should not be "honored" (l. 730). Sophocles partially answers Haemon's question by allowing Antigone to choose her method of death against the wishes of her uncle to finally contain her; suicide by hanging becomes her final autonomous act, but only within the stony tomb the state has constructed to contain her influence. Antigone's sentencing – originally death-by-stoning, switched by Creon to isolated death-by-starvation – serves its purpose for complacent Athenians who desire to see any perceived threats to democracy dutifully punished and kept out-of-sight. Nevertheless, although this measure checks her miasma, it ultimately, ironically, guarantees her a lasting fame. For Athenian audiences, far from deserving honor for her "glorious acts," Antigone lives on as the embodiment of a warning: to refuse the solidarity that binds citizens to each other, to reject one's terrestrial community, and to prioritize death over life poses a threat as dire as that of tyranny to the health and cohesiveness of a thriving *polis*.

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Catholic Views of Sin and Salvation in Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*

SERGIO ROMERO

The Protestant Reformation, symbolically initiated by the German priest Martin Luther (1483-1546) in Wittenberg in 1517, assailed the bases of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It fundamentally divided the continent, ending the previously ubiquitous presence of the Catholic Church, which then had to compete with the new Protestant churches. Among the rising Protestant sects, Lutheranism, founded by Luther, and Calvinism, founded by the French Scholastic John Calvin (1509-1564), became prominent. Luther's and Calvin's ideas, while differing, stood united in defying the authority of the Pope in Rome by following the Protestant principles of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide* ("through faith alone, by Scripture alone") and the universal priesthood of all believers (Wilhelm). England in the sixteenth, a kingdom recently converted from Catholicism to the Protestant faith, was also greatly influenced by the ideas of Luther and Calvin. These increasingly influential Protestant ideas struggled to establish their dominance in societal and scholarly backgrounds over the Catholic views that preceded them. English author Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592) explores the Christian themes of sin and salvation without explicitly endorsing a specific denomination. Although the context in which *Doctor Faustus* was written may suggest that the play is a markedly Protestant and anti-Catholic work, the presence of distinctly Catholic views of sin and salvation challenges this notion and frames the play as more complex in its theological ideas.

The lack of endorsement of a specific denomination through which to analyze these theological concepts in *Doctor Faustus* has led authors to approach the play from primarily Protestant perspectives. For example, Clifford Davidson argues that the play has strong Lutheran origins, stating that it depicts Luther's idea that faith alone can "keep the strength of the devil from dominating man's life" (514). Furthermore, Davidson argues that Faustus' condition as a teacher at the University of Wittenberg establishes a direct association between him and prominent reformers like Luther and fellow Wittenberg theologian and scholar Philip Melancthon (1497-1560). Meanwhile, Pauline Honderich argues that the play is fundamentally Calvinist in its theology and conception of God, describing, for example, the presence in the play of the Calvinist doctrine in which grace is ascribed by God and man has free will only while doing evil (10). The theological analyses of *Doctor Faustus* have mainly focused on showing how the play exhibits Protestant conceptions and messages. Such a disproportion of works written from a Protestant perspective has led some in the

academic community to see the play as a distinct product of the Reformation, a work that displays doctrines that are not aligned with and which criticize Catholicism. This essay will seek to contribute to the debate surrounding the play's religious messages by addressing the work from a Catholic perspective. It will aim to show how the play and its characters depict Catholic views of sin and salvation and specifically how its doctrine of justification affects Faustus' destiny. By undertaking this analysis from a Catholic perspective, the intent is to show that the play displays a mixture of religious conceptions and should not be seen as a work that expressly endorses one specific Christian denomination.

Before analyzing the play's representations of sin and salvation, it is important to distinguish how Catholic and Protestant doctrines differ in their interpretation of both theological concepts. Protestantism's conception of sin, while not uniform throughout all branches, generally conceives all sin as mortal, disregarding thus a hierarchy of sins (Beaumont). Additionally, Calvinist doctrine determined that since the Fall, man has been perverted and has lost his free will except when sinning (Honderich 4). In contrast, the Catholic conception of sin discerns the gravity of various sins based on the Scriptures. It creates a hierarchy that divides venial and mortal sins, the former of which can be ascribed forgiveness from God (Beaumont). These different conceptions of sin become important when examining Faustus' punishment, as each view differently determines the possibility of Faustus' redemption from his sins, as well as his capacity to be declared justified by God.

Salvation is another concept that differs considerably between both denominations, especially regarding faith's role in its justification. Justification is part of the process of salvation and "denotes the transforming of the sinner from the state of unrighteousness to the state of holiness and sonship of God" (Pohle). Historically, salvation has been a point of contention, as these denominations describe it as achievable through different means. The Protestant perspective on the matter is based on the doctrine of *sola fide*, which declares that faith alone is used by God to assign righteousness and justification to man. Justification in Protestantism is as such granted to man, as he is "acquitted" and "declared righteous by God" (Lane 17). Conversely, Catholic beliefs in this regard can be best summarized by the passage, "that of works a man is justified, and not of faith only" (James 2:24¹). In this view, to be justified means to "become a righteous person through the inner working of the Holy Spirit" (46). As St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) outlined in *On the Spirit and the Letter*, "by the law comes the knowledge of sin, by faith the obtaining of grace against sin, by grace the healing of the soul from the defect of sin, by the healing of the soul comes the freedom of the will, by the freedom of the will the love of righteousness, by the love of righteousness comes obedience to the law" (103). These two different perceptions, while not completely opposed to each other, provide different

¹ This biblical quote is from the 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible, Bible Gateway <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/1599-Geneva-Bible-GNV/>.

interpretations of Faustus' justification and, as will be outlined later in the essay, come to be essential when discussing Faustus' final fate.

In the play, two characters stand out from the others in their constant insistence that Faustus repent and return to the faith, the Old Man and the Good Angel. Both characters pity his fate and recognize his initial sin as venial enough to warrant forgiveness through justification. These characters' attitudes suggest they are inspired more by Catholic than Protestant views, with the Good Angel specifically denoted as belonging to Catholic tradition (Poirier 139). Accordingly, the Old Man seems to think that Faustus can be justified in a Catholic manner, as when he first asks Faustus to repent for his sins and he states that he can see an angel with grace to pour into Faustus' soul (5.1.52-56). The Old Man's lines also seem to depict him performing a priest-like job, guiding and acting as an intermediate between Faustus and God. As Michel Poirier describes, the Old Man's and Good Angel's conviction that it is not too late for Faustus to repent and receive God's grace is that of a Roman Catholic or a moderate Protestant, not that of a Calvinist (139). Faustus' justification, which both characters insist is still possible, seems not to be of the Protestant kind that would be granted to Faustus due to his righteousness but rather seems to align with the process described by St. Augustine, in which Faustus' repentance will bring him that grace. It is only after Faustus commits demoniality² that the Old Man loses his hope for Faustus' salvation, proclaiming him as having excluded from his soul the heavenly grace of God (5.1.110-111). This last act of sin convinces the Old Man that Faustus is truly lost from grace, not only due to the sin itself but rather because it is a confirmation of his fall into despair.

Some who believe Marlowe's play is anti-Catholic point to the scene where the figure of the Pope is a victim of ridicule (3.1). However, this scene, like others, also serves to downplay Faustus' infernal powers, as well as the common Protestant perception of the pope as Antichrist. First, the petty scale of Faustus' acts against the Pope should be noted, for these jokes against the head of the Catholic Church are "a far cry from the display of supreme power for which the hero has bartered away his soul" (Smith 173). This scene shows how Faustus, even at the peak of his power, is not able to conjure anything of substance. Furthermore, the play fails to depict the papacy in the terms that would be expected of a Protestant, and specifically of a Lutheran work, since it does not conform with Martin Luther's declaration in the *Book of Concord* of the papacy as the Antichrist (4:10). For if the Pope is then an agent of Satan, why do Faustus and Mephistopheles act against him? While this depiction is certainly not overtly positive toward Catholicism, it is certainly a far cry from what an openly Lutheran or anti-Catholic work would be.

² "bodily intercourse with demons" (Kiessling 205)

When discussing sin in *Doctor Faustus*, it is most important to identify and understand those sins committed by the titular doctor. Poirier identifies his three offenses as (1) the sin of overstepping his natural boundaries, (2) the sin of Judas, despair, and (3) the sin of demoniality (141-42). These three sins ultimately originate from Faustus' capital sin, his pride. Faustus' first sin is special in two senses: it is first, the sin of Adam, a sin which makes him a new Lucifer; and second, this sin leads to his covenant with the devil, and not the other way around (141). Faustus' overstep of his natural boundaries stems from his desire for God's omnipotence, his desire to rule over all moving things, to become a deity (1.1.56-63). This sin, the result of his pride, makes him believe he is capable of being equal to God. His pride blinds him to the consequences of the pact and the petty rewards he obtains from it. Nevertheless, it is critical that this sin appears not to be mortal, at least not in the Catholic tradition, as evidenced by the Old Man's conviction that Faustus can still be redeemed.

However, the same cannot be said of the doctor's second offense, the sin of despair. Indeed, Poirier describes Faustus' second sin as "the only one that cannot be forgiven" (141). An analysis of Faustus' despair, which is Reformist in nature, is the key to understanding his fate and can even lead to criticism of Protestant doctrine. Despair in the theological sense can be defined as "the voluntary and complete abandonment of all hope of saving one's soul and of having the means required for that end" (Delany). Faustus' alignment with the reformer's ideas of sin and justification, especially those of John Calvin, can be appreciated in Faustus' perception of his own sin. The doctor believes his first sin is already worthy of God's damnation and that he is beyond redemption: "But Faustus' offense can ne'er be pardoned" (5.2.15). This perception of his first offense indicates a Protestant belief that all sins are mortal. Furthermore, Faustus seems to follow Calvin's doctrine of free will. As Honderich explains, Faustus feels his free-willed decision to do evil is evidence that he lacks the grace needed to turn back to righteousness (10). Aside from being a product of Protestant doctrine, his despair also seems to be due to his pride, a belief that he is particularly far gone from salvation. As Honderich notes, "Like Philologus (and many other Protestants) he seems almost to take a perverse pride in the conviction of his own unique depravity." It is Faustus' pride and Calvinist free will that lead him to despair, a sin that not even the Catholic God can forgive: as a result of his sins, Faustus is unable to be justified by either conception of God, for the Protestant God will not grant him grace after his first sin, and his Calvinist despair and lack of repentance deny him justification from the Catholic God.

Doctor Faustus' interplay between a Catholic and Calvinistic view of God can serve also to criticize the latter's radical ideas. Doctor Faustus has a conception of God as "wrathful and implacable" (Honderich 10) and "not the loving Father, but the wrathful Jehovah who cast the rebellious angels down to hell" (Ornstein 1383). This view aligns more with Calvin's ideas of God than any other. However, despite Faustus' perception of God, there is no further confirmation that the God Marlowe depicts in the play comes from the Calvinistic tradition. A Catholic interpretation

of God in the play is supported by the Old Man's and Good Angel's conviction that Faustus can repent until his last moments, while a Calvinist view of God leads to a situation in which "the audience could only have been invited [...] to exult in the spectacle of predestined depravity meeting its appropriate doom" (Honderich 10). If one interprets God in the play as coming from the Catholic tradition, Faustus' ultimate journey can be seen as a warning against following Calvin's teachings, for they will bring one to despair and negate one's chance to repent and be justified.

Faustus's third sin, demoniality, while not as crucial to his ultimate fate, serves as a last confirmation of his commitment to despair. This sin of demoniality has been a prominent subject of discussion about the play. For example, W. W. Greg identifies the scene with Helen as the moment Faustus loses his soul, his new sin being mortal and beyond salvation (106-107). Conversely, other authors like Nicolas Kiessling have debated this position, disregarding the doctor's demoniality as beyond salvation, and instead pointing to pride being the sin definitive to his fate: "Even if we grant that he did commit the latter sin [demoniality], it was not, in this scene, either 'ultimate' or 'beyond repentance'" (211). While Kiessling's refutation seems to be stronger and more coherent than Greg's position, it does not address the Old Man's reactions after the act. Why does the Old Man afterward seem so sure of Faustus' condemnation? The Old Man's statements, rather than a Protestant condemnation of demoniality, seem to be a recognition that Faustus has completely fallen into despair and is beyond Catholic justification. First, it is important to note that, as Kiessling explains, intercourse with demons was perceived as a venial trespassing that could be forgiven, which discounts the idea of the Old Man outright condemning the act as beyond redemption in Act 5 (208). The request to Mephistopheles comes after Faustus is almost moved into redemption by the Old Man's words. To combat this urge, he commits the sinful act to prove his loyalty to Lucifer, a final reward before accepting that his fate lies in hell and not in heaven. In the eyes of the Old Man, this last action proves above all Faustus' commitment to despair, as he seeks the pleasure of the flesh before his inevitable condemnation.

Although Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* delves into religious themes and doctrines, the inconsistency of its theology means it can be neither a work that endorses one specific theological vision nor a work entirely critical to one of them. The story displays a series of theological ideas and concepts such as sin, justification, and ultimate salvation, but these ideas are not shown indisputably through one denomination's perspective. Not even the play's conception of God can be described as consistent, for it differs between characters like Faustus and the Old Man. Because the perceptions of these various denominations coexist in the story and are given similar weight, Marlowe does not establish any perspective as definitive or the only valid one. Honderich states that these inconsistencies derive from Marlowe's ignorance, as he "is not writing as a theologian nor a pastor. He is an artist making whatever use seems to him necessary of whatever material is available" (10). Religious views in the work, much like in Early Modern England more

generally, are diverse, a mixture of old Catholic ideas and the surging Anglican, Lutheran, and Calvinist conceptions. The context in which the play was written, along with Marlowe's artistry, requires that the work be examined from these often-contradicting perspectives. For this reason, it is inexact to say that the play's theological messages solely depict the conceptions of one denomination. It is not a work entirely derived from the ideas of the Reformation. It is also not appropriate to ascribe to the play a message of entire opposition to any of these perspectives, for the work can be seen as critical of both: it is not an anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant play, but above all a work of dramatic art that uses these theological ideas to better convey to the audience its tragic and universal Christian message against sin.

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The Construction of Gothic Romance and the Burkean Sublime in Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*

MARAH MOHD

Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* aired on NBC from 2013 to 2015. The show was a new adaptation of Thomas Harris's popular *Hannibal* novels that reintroduced the cannibalistic serial killer Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a fictional character who first came to popular consciousness through Anthony Hopkins' portrayal of him in Jonathan Demme's multi-Oscar-winning 1991 film, *The Silence of the Lambs*. Departing from the usual portrayals of Lecter in the film series, *Hannibal* revisits the relationship between FBI Special Agent Will Graham and Dr. Lecter that Harris first established in his 1981 novel, *Red Dragon*.

Centering on the Graham-Lecter relationship, *Hannibal* diverges from the typical crime television format by incorporating traditional characteristics of gothic romantic narratives. In this merging of genres, *Hannibal* offers a postmodern gothic narrative that seeks to reclaim queerness within the gothic genre. Simultaneously, the show incorporates a rich blend of aestheticism and terror, akin to Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime. By delving into the role of the sublime in *Hannibal*, we gain a deeper understanding of the widespread appeal of crime media, as well as insight into Graham's descent into darkness, thereby fostering empathy towards his character.

Over three seasons, *Hannibal* focuses on the character of Will Graham (played by Hugh Dancy), an ex-FBI agent with uncanny abilities caused by an "empathy disorder" that enables him to get into the killer's mind by merely surveying a crime scene. Graham is rehired by the FBI to consult on serial murder cases. Projecting himself into killers' minds leaves him psychologically deteriorated, leading him to turn to the forensic psychiatrist, Dr. Hannibal Lecter (played by Mads Mikkelsen), who is secretly a serial killer and cannibal. Through consulting sessions, Lecter becomes fascinated by Will's empathic ability, and he recognizes in Will a familiar desire for violence. Thus, Graham and Dr. Lecter develop a unique bond that threatens to uncover Lecter's penchant for murder and causes Graham to immerse deeper into "dark places" ("Amuse-Bouche") within his interiority. Ultimately, Lecter's efforts to unleash Graham's psychopathic desires haunt Graham until he no longer suppresses the growing violence within himself.

In this paper, I will examine academic articles that center on Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* and address the following questions: How does Fuller's *Hannibal* explore gendered power dynamics in contemporary society, critique gothic romance conventions, and resuscitate the Graham-Lecter relationship? What is the reason behind the prevalence of unsettling connections between contrasting elements, such as

aesthetics and grotesqueness in the show? In the words of Jaquelin Elliott, how does Fuller's *Hannibal* investigate the "postmodern desire for reclamation of queer monstrosity"? (249). In addition to these questions, I intend to raise inquiries that these articles may or may not answer: In what ways does Fuller's *Hannibal* navigate and redefine traditional boundaries of gothic romance within the context of contemporary television? How might the homoerotic tension between Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter be interpreted as "gothic"? In the end, how does Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime provide a framework for understanding the broad attraction of crime media, while also rationalizing Graham's anticipated transformation? Due to the distinctive narrative and visual approach of the show, I argue that by depicting and redefining the role of gothic elements in *Hannibal*, we gain a better sense not only of how gothic romance has an ongoing significance in contemporary television but also recognize how Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime can contribute to explaining the widespread appeal of the serial killer and true-crime genre in television format.

This essay comprises three key sections, with the first one analyzing gothic romance themes within *Hannibal* through the exploration of power dynamics and deconstruction of gender roles. The second section explores the relationship between dreams and their role in uncovering Graham's concealed desires and perceptions. In the essay's conclusion, we examine how Lecter's character embodies attributes of the Burkean sublime. This analysis forms a compelling foundation for justifying Graham's transformative journey and aids in understanding the broad appeal of crime television formats.

1. EXPLORING IMBALANCED POWER DYNAMICS

Fuller's *Hannibal* intertwines themes of imbalanced power dynamics between Lecter and Graham to evoke a sense of gothic romance. Evan Hayles Gledhill notes that *Hannibal* delves into themes of legal and social power seen in the older novels, while openly embracing "queer possibilities" (79): The Graham-Lecter relationship "can be explored as slash fiction and a critique of gendered power relations in contemporary society, but it [also] works with and through the codes and conventions of the gothic romance to critique this textual tradition" (80). In the series, Graham, with his lower social standing, assumes the disempowered role typically associated with gothic heroines. In contrast, Lecter, as an authoritative psychiatrist, holds power over Graham. Utilizing his psychological expertise, Lecter strategically manipulates situations to disrupt Graham's professional standing, particularly when he perceives him as a threat to Lecter's ability to continue committing murders. Lecter's actions lead Graham to experience hallucinations, seizures, and dissociation, which are exacerbated by Lecter concealing Graham's diagnosis of encephalitis. As a result of Lecter's extended and undiscovered manipulation of his therapeutic methods, Graham suffers a loss of identity that significantly impacts his job, relationships, and social status.

In season two, this inequality in power dynamics in Lecter's relationship with Graham is highlighted when Lecter asserts, "I only want what is best for you," prompting Graham to respond, "You don't want me to have anything in my life that isn't you" ("Tome-wan"). This exchange illustrates Lecter's control over Graham and Graham's recognition of his dependency on Lecter, showcasing the interpersonal power dynamic between them. Lecter's manipulation reaches its peak when he frames Graham for his murders, resulting in Graham's imprisonment in a psychiatric hospital until he eventually consents to Lecter's seduction. Lecter's abuse of power as a psychiatrist not only blurs the boundaries between Lecter and Graham but also consistently puts Graham in disempowered positions.

Moreover, Graham frequently grapples with feelings of inadequacy when confronted by authoritative figures, including Lecter but also other influential men. Jack Crawford (played by Laurence Fishburne), the FBI chief who first enlists Graham's assistance, often urges him into investigating murders, pushing Graham into what he perceives as "dark places" within his mind. Despite Graham's attempts to resist, he always succumbs to Crawford's pressure and finds himself immersed in deeper psychological distress. This ongoing struggle highlights the internal conflict Graham faces between his own well-being and the demands of his profession, as well as the power dynamics at play within their relationship.

Hannibal also challenges conventional ideas of gothic romance by breaking away from traditional gender and sexual norms. The series critiques heteronormativity and reclaims gothic queer monstrosity. Elliott notes *Hannibal's* subversion from normative social and sexual categories:

[*Hannibal*] positions itself in the lineage of queer Gothic and generates [...] a queer Gothic narrative that shamelessly celebrates the dissolution of both social categories and simplified sexual categories. This queer Gothic story explicitly depicts queer desire and does not revert to conventional morality in its depiction of queer. (263)

Lecter's portrayal of masculinity challenges traditional norms seen in the gothic genre due to his openly queer identity. This queerness is illustrated through his interests in non-traditional masculine activities such as opera, gastronomy, and art. Conversely, Graham embodies a more heteronormative masculinity, as his appearance aligns with masculine traits, yet he consistently finds himself in disempowered positions. An example is Graham's beard, as compared to Lecter's consistently shaved face, which emphasizes Lecter's delicate features and signals the open queerness of his character. The complexity in Graham's character arises from his unwillingness to accept the non-normative aspects of his identity that Lecter encourages him to acknowledge. Another reason is the series' intentional reference to the relationship of Clarice Starling and Lecter in the original novel and film, paralleling it with the relationship between Graham and Lecter to critique heteronormativity and reveal the constructed nature of gender. Through *Hannibal's* duality, the series thereby deconstructs traditional notions of gender and heteronormativity.

Alternatively, some have criticized the utilization of queer coding within Fuller's *Hannibal*, attributing it to the series' purported subtextual portrayal of the romantic relationship between Lecter and Graham. However, this critique fails to fully acknowledge the nuanced and subversive nature inherent in the series. Sean Donovan, in subjoining this perspective, posits that *Hannibal* deliberately deviates from the prevalent trend of openly queer characters in contemporary television. Donovan further contends that the show aligns itself with the tradition of gothic horror, often employing romanticized portrayals of queer villainy to juxtapose heteronormative traditions. He argues, "[*Hannibal*] centers on the glamor and mystery of queer villainy to proudly defy a rhetoric of knowable normativity." Considering *Hannibal*'s deconstruction of gender and sexuality, the series' core potential is to explore alternative forms of queer desire. By establishing intertextual parallels between Graham and Clarice Starling (the original female character of Harris' *Hannibal Lecter* franchise and film adaptations), parallels evident in both dialogue and visual depiction, the series not only exposes and critiques the constructed nature of gender and heterosexuality but also validates the romantic bond between Lecter and Graham.

Donovan's observations disregard the humanizing purpose of integrating romance into gothic narratives. Rather than employing queerness as a device of horror, it serves as a narrative tool to illustrate the vulnerability and humanity of the villainous character. Lecter's desires for murder and cannibalism are depicted as being superseded by the intimate connection he shares with Graham. Hence, *Hannibal* utilizes queerness not as a means to perpetuate Lecter's villainy, but rather to establish his character in a more vulnerable and humanizing light.

2. GOTHIC HYSTERIA AND DREAMS

In *Hannibal*, Graham's recurrent dreams serve an essential purpose in the narrative. They not only function as ominous warnings of Lecter's impending danger but also reveal Graham's hidden perceptions of him. As Heta Pyrhönen notes, the "female Gothic plot [...] represents the heroine first dreaming of terror and darkness, and then the subsequent narrative realizes her nightmare when she experiences the imagined in literal, concrete terms" (218). Graham's dreams parallel the gothic heroine's experience of dreaming about terror. Graham is shown to have recurring dreams throughout the series, which are symptomatic of his psychological and neurological disabilities. However, these dreams take a disturbing turn after his interaction with Lecter when he begins dreaming of a black wendigo-like creature. The wendigo, explained by Elliott, represents a mythical "half-man and half-beast cannibal doomed to walk the earth, devouring, but never satiated by, human flesh" (254). Accordingly, Graham's dreams of the wendigo unveil Lecter's identity, symbolizing how Graham's subconscious mind perceives Lecter as a threat.

As Lecter delves deeper into Graham's psyche using his destructive therapy techniques, Graham's dreams of the wendigo intensify, accompanied by escalating hallucinations and seizures, ultimately resulting in a loss of his identity. This loss becomes evident when Graham admits to Lecter: "I'm having a hard time thinking. I feel like I'm losing my mind. I don't know what's real" ("Rôti"). Graham's prolonged unawareness of Lecter's disruptive therapy techniques gradually blurs the boundaries between reality and dreams, causing confusion in his identity and ultimately leading to psychological distress, described in gothic terms as "hysteria."

3. THE BURKEAN SUBLIME UNVEILED: A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

Ultimately, I suggest that what makes *Hannibal* such a riveting and radically gothic television show is the presence of the sublime, as articulated by Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in his canonical treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1757. I argue that Graham's transformation into, and embrace of, the gothic entity of Lecter can only be understood via Burke's theory of the sublime. This theory provides an account of how Graham's struggle between fascination with and dread of Lecter's monstrous nature approximates the terror and attraction of the sublime.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke describes the sublime as an experience that emerges from anything terror-inducing related to "the ideas of pain, and danger [...], whatever is in any sort terrible, or [...] operates in a manner analogous to terror" (39). Continuing, he defines the "highest degree" of the sublime experience as "astonishment," followed by "the subordinate degrees [of] awe, reverence, and respect" (136). In the same way, Lecter's character evokes a blend of terror, admiration, and respect through his appreciation of aesthetics coupled with the abandonment of ethics. According to Alberto N. García, Lecter embodies a "moral grotesque" characterized by a "dissonance between the moral concepts associated with elegance and culture (goodness, truth, beauty) and [a] murderous, gory means" (89). Lecter's character creates tension by simultaneously indulging in aesthetic pursuits and engaging in amoral actions like murder and cannibalism. This duality presents Lecter as both elegant and terrifying. Furthermore, Lecter's ability to embody contradiction underscores his immense power and authority, along with the potential for terror he wields. As Burke notes, greatness or power often evokes feelings of both admiration and fear (66). In this regard, Lecter personifies the sublime, where strength and power are intrinsically tied to terror. By possessing the power to evoke both admiration and terror in observers, Lecter epitomizes the sublime within the narrative.

Lecter's culinary creations serve as more than just aesthetic creations; they also are evocations of his sublime character. The power of Lecter's dual nature is seen in his dishes, which combine his desire for aesthetics and the unethical inclusion of

human flesh. By meticulously emphasizing representation, Lecter's dishes are consistently depicted in close-up shots and dark tones of red, intensifying the sense of uncertainty. The use of red is a characteristic of the sublime, as Burke draws a connection between intense colors and dark lighting to the sublime, suggesting that the sublime needs to be dark and ominous, rather than light, to have a profound impact on our emotions. He also emphasizes that the object should be as different as possible from what we are accustomed to (81). Therefore, red signifies threat and danger, particularly when associated with blood.

Furthermore, the terror induced by Lecter's dishes initially affects the audience, as they are aware of the grotesque "secret ingredient," while the characters experience a variety of emotional responses. According to Burke, emotions like astonishment, fascination, fear, and respect contribute to a combination of fear and pleasure resulting in a "delightful horror" when the observer can self-preserve themselves from danger (136). Thus, the true horror of the sublime becomes apparent to Lecter's guests only when they realize the horrible source of the meat, linked to the taboo nature of consuming human flesh. This revelation adds a terrifying element to what was initially aesthetically pleasing. Lecter's guests are confronted with the confusion that the creation of such grotesque masterpieces demands a great power and a disregard for morality—a state which Burke equates to encountering the sublime power of God, which has the potential to "destroy" the perceiver (135). Moreover, Lecter not only embodies the sublime in his character but has the power to produce the sublime and impact others with it.

Another sublime manifestation of Lecter's artistry is evident in his tableau murders, which have the power to astonish observers while also posing the potential for their own destruction. The repeated features of "Murder of the Week" or "tableau murders" across the three seasons depict victims' bodies undergoing artistic transformation and elevation by Lecter or other killers, mutilations that are meticulously arranged according to the killer's precise specifications in the most obscure ways. Burke describes encountering obscurity in a sublime creation, stating, "The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of [...] confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused" (62). Lecter's tableau murders, while aesthetically pleasing, evoke a sense of confusion and danger due to their infusion of obscurity. Viewers are left struggling to discern whether these seemingly artistic creations are comprised of human bodies. According to Burke, astonishment is the primary emotion experienced in response to the sublime, characterized by the suspension of all other thoughts and movements of the soul, often accompanied by a degree of horror (57). These creations possess the same terrifying nature that evokes astonishment and horror, leaving observers' souls captivated and overwhelmed. When examining Graham's encounter with the "tableau murders," we can discern emotions akin to experiencing the sublime, especially through the lens of Lecter's grotesque artistry.

Graham experiences profound terror when navigating crime scenes, a sensation rooted in the obscure nature of the murders and exacerbated by his heightened empathic abilities. During his navigation, he enters a trance state where he envisions himself as the killer, allowing him to discern the methods and motives behind the crime. Despite his declared fear, Graham is repeatedly compelled by authorities to examine crime scenes, a task which profoundly impacts his emotional experience, given his empathic abilities. Regarding fear of sight, Burke contends: "For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too" (57). Similarly, Graham openly admits his fear of surveying murders, stating, "It's getting harder and harder to make myself look...and you know what looking at this does" ("Coquilles"). As Graham is consistently exposed to Lecter's sublime productions, not just by observing them but also by empathizing with the killers, he becomes directly influenced by Lecter's character.

Crucially, Will Graham's profound transformation is primarily influenced by his exposure to Lecter's character, which embodies the sublime. According to Stephanie A. Graves, Will's "malleability of perspective costs Graham on a personal level." Given his "empathy disorder, [he] has a subject positionality that is endlessly mutable and fluid," underscoring that this is "what draws Lecter to Graham" (54). Lecter, the sublime entity, finds Graham's "malleability of perspective" intriguing, seizing the opportunity to blur the boundaries between Graham's authority and his psychopathic mind. Lecter's deliberate establishment of liminality leads to instability and a loss of rational thoughts for Graham, ultimately eroding his sense of identity. Exploiting this fluidity, Lecter dissolves Graham's sense of rationality and ethics, implanting his own amorality in Graham, with the aim of transforming him into something else—a figure who shares his own psychopathic tendencies.

Throughout the series, Lecter's sublime characteristics function as catalyst for transforming Graham into a willing accomplice. By identifying the shared inclinations in Graham's murderous desires, Lecter envisions the possibility of Graham fully embracing these similar interests. Lecter's sublimity, therefore, is not merely a destructive force aimed at Graham; it also presents an opportunity for Graham to unleash his repressed desires. In agreement, Elliott states: "Hannibal terrifies and enthralls Will, who even as he is aware of the dangerous nature of the psychiatrist is unwilling to break Hannibal's hold on him" (256). Graham's unwillingness to resist Lecter's continuous seductions, despite his awareness of the moral imperative to do so, stems from his gradual self-discovery of his hidden desires. Additionally, David B. Morris elaborates on the sublime's function within the gothic genre, highlighting its role in prompting characters to delve into their suppressed desires, while also posing the threat of a terrifying unleashing these desires:

[T]he Gothic novel pursues a version of the sublime utterly without transcendence. It is a vertiginous and plunging—not a soaring—sublime, which takes us deep within rather than far beyond the human sphere. [...] Gothic sublimity—by releasing into fiction images and desires long suppressed, deeply hidden, forced into silence—greatly intensifies the dangers of an uncontrollable release from restraint. [...] Terror [is] a liberating—hence dangerous—force. [...] In its excessive violations of excess sense, Gothic sublimity demonstrates the possibilities of terror in opening the mind to its own hidden and irrational powers (306).

Therefore, the terror that Graham experiences from Lecter's sublime character is particularly dangerous because it aims to undermine his morals and ethical reasoning to awaken his destructive hidden desires and challenge his self-control. The gothic world epitomized by Lecter is tempting for Graham, not only because it provides an outlet for these suppressed desires but also because it holds the potential to liberate him from this state of terror and confusion. Initially caught in the vertiginous state of resisting and being tempted to embrace his latent psychopathic tendencies, Graham ultimately succumbs to these desires in the climactic scene of *Hannibal*. This transformative moment occurs when Graham joins Lecter in the killing of Francis Dolarhyde, a serial killer. In the final scene, Graham revels in the sight of his bloodied hands, remarking, "It really does look black in the moonlight." Lecter expresses fulfillment, stating, "This is all I've ever wanted for you, Will...for both of us." Enthralled, Graham finally concedes to Lecter, declaring, "It's beautiful" ("The Wrath of the Lamb"). In admitting the beauty of the brutal murder Graham had committed, he escapes the confinements of the sublime, breaking free from the state of confusion and fluid identity. Instead, he chooses to act upon his psychopathic instincts, ultimately seeking fulfillment in embracing his identity.

Contemporary fascination with crime in the context of media consumption can be analyzed through the lens of the sublime as applied to Graham's experience. As Oriana Binik details, the sublime is an emotion that motivates individuals to confront their own limitations, the "dimensions of human destructiveness," which provide an opportunity for self-discovery beyond the confines of everyday life. The sublime allows individuals to acknowledge their fear of insignificance and empowers them to acknowledge latent abilities—the "otherness" within themselves (46). In the contemporary context, where there is a demand for intense emotions beyond the limitations of everyday life, crime TV programs offer a platform to explore dark desires within human nature in a controlled environment.

Drawing on Burke's theory of the sublime, Binik further suggests that sublime feelings compel individuals to confront the fundamental boundary between good and evil, prompting them to ponder questions about existence. Acknowledging the presence of evil within the sublime underscores its intrinsic aspect of nature, including human nature (18). Thus, our fascination with crime media can be understood through

Burke's theory of the sublime. When watching a crime show, viewers experience intense and contrasting emotions. They are flooded with terror while simultaneously being intrigued by the opportunity for self-discovery, all within the safety of a controlled environment. These conflicting feelings leave viewers in a state of confusion and contemplation, causing them to reevaluate their perceptions of "good and evil." This process challenges their established boundaries and prompts a quest for a deeper understanding of human nature. By meeting the contemporary demand for intense experiences, crime media offers a pathway for fulfillment by exploring the complexities of human nature within limited proximity.

CONCLUSION

Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* offers a captivating reinterpretation of the Graham-Lecter relationship. Through its fusion of genres and in its incorporation of gothic romantic elements, the show presents a postmodern narrative that aims for reclamation of queerness in the gothic genre. Additionally, the series' juxtaposition of aestheticism and terror, reminiscent of Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime, intensifies the narrative and visuals. By delving into the role of the sublime in *Hannibal*, we gain valuable insights into the widespread appeal of crime media through the psychological journey of Will Graham, ultimately fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexities of his experiences. *Hannibal's* juxtaposition of aestheticism and grotesqueness, along with its thematic depth, leaves a profound impact on viewers, prompting them to contemplate the intersections of beauty, morality, and the complexities of human nature.

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The Sisters of Sophocles' *Antigone*

ALANNIE CERVANTES

The expectations of women in ancient Greek society consisted of the duties of being a mother and wife while maintaining family loyalty. In Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 441 B.C.E.), these expectations compel the sisters, Antigone and Ismene, to occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of femininity and to function as "foils" for each other based on their own ideas of how women should act. This essay discusses the significance of the societal expectations imposed on women within ancient Greek society, as they not only affect the behaviors of the female characters in Sophocles' tragedy, but also how their actions impact their broader society. Ismene's character can be seen as portraying the archetype of the "perfect" or "conventional" woman since she prioritizes these expectations of obedience and loyalty to family, causing her to be deeply affected by the loss of family members in the play. The complex dynamic of Antigone's and Ismene's sisterhood highlights their contrasting roles, explaining their differing approaches towards femininity. While some may argue that the stark difference in the sisters' actions is a result of their contrasting personalities, Ismene's actions and views are fueled by their sisterly relationship within the context of an ancient Greek society where women are expected to be loyal and family oriented.

Women in ancient Greece were expected to seclude themselves from society, prioritize their household duties, and raise and obey the paternal lineage of a family. Sheila Murnaghan notes that "elite women in particular were expected to lead secluded lives" (xi). Despite their royal status, Antigone and Ismene are treated no differently from other Greek women; they are isolated from the common areas of society, and they are expected to uphold the paternal interests of their family. Commenting on the need to include gender politics when discussing *Antigone*, Amy E. Story notes that "Antigone, as a Greek woman, is denied access to the political realm and [...] her act of rebellion against the political sphere is her only real means of acting at all" (176). The lack of political and societal power for women in ancient Greece fuels Antigone's actions of perceived societal disobedience. Antigone's actions are compelled by her beliefs that true family loyalty to her dead parents and brothers requires her to disobey the law. She prioritizes the peace and wellbeing of her family over societal approval, demonstrating her devotion to familial duty over social standing.

This familial duty is closely tied to the preservation and emphasis on the paternal lineage in ancient Greek society. Antigone is seen as prioritizing her natal family over her soon-to-be marital family, but her decision "to sacrifice the living

(herself and Ismene, who is left alone and devastated) on behalf of the dead reflects the social values that make brothers more important than sisters, men in general more significant than women” (179-80). Antigone demonstrates this way of thinking when she states: “I have to please / the dead far longer than the living; / I will lie with them forever” (ll. 74-76). Although Antigone’s loyalty to Polyneices is based on the perception she will have a transcendent connection with him in death, she fails to view her fidelity as an extension of the prioritization of the paternal lineage in her family, and she confesses to Ismene (and to the audience) the lesser value their sisterly relationship has in comparison to her loyalty to Polyneices. Antigone subconsciously adheres to the expectations of ancient Greek women by prioritizing the men in her family. Thus, her rejection of Ismene, even as she attempts to maintain familial loyalty, is the first stage of their complex sisterly relationship.

Ismene’s character in *Antigone* can be interpreted as a commentary on the ideals of perfection and conventionality that ancient Greek society imposed on women. More aware of these expectations than her sister, Ismene dutifully follows these ideals. Since she recognizes the potential repercussions of Antigone’s actions, Ismene attempts to dissuade her sister from a path that will leave them isolated and suffering. While Ismene keeps these expectations at the forefront of her mind, her emotions also allow her to prioritize her family in a different manner than Antigone. Jennet Kirkpatrick reminds us that the first lines in the play establish the sisterly bond and tragic lineage Ismene and Antigone share. While Ismene’s first reaction is to help her sister, “she [eventually] refuses Antigone, emphasizing that, as women, the sisters are forced to yield to the unjust commands of men” (407). Ismene expresses this when she states, “[W]e are women, / not suited by nature to fight against men, / properly ruled by those who are stronger; / we have to accept such things---and still worse” (ll. 62-64). In saying this, Ismene dismisses her own grief over her brother’s death and prioritizes the rules set in place by King Creon, her uncle. She has her own sense of familial loyalty, predicated on the “stronger” institutional power of patriarchal society. Ismene views her duty as a woman as one that respects and upholds the patriarchal power symbolized by her uncle, King Creon. Ismene’s instilled values affect her initial response to grieve, which follows along with the belief that women should not display strong emotions in public and, instead, handle their feelings in the privacy of their home. As a result, Ismene maintains her support for her sister in secrecy, aiming to both honor her brother and ensure their well-being as women.

Ismene demonstrates her awareness of her social status while also indicating that her actions are directed by the gender norms in her society rather than a genuine desire to be obedient. Bonnie Honig states that Ismene “is ‘neither-nor’: a quiet actor willing to take some risks but not powerful enough to stem the tide of events” (“Ismene’s” 44). While this idea of Ismene being a “neither-nor” is demonstrated by her reactions to Antigone’s ideas, she is in fact powerful enough to change the tide of events, as her decision to ultimately support her sister fuels the anger of Creon, who is influenced by the betrayal of his two nieces when punishing Antigone. This betrayal strikes at the familial basis for Creon’s political leadership, which Ismene’s vocal

disobedience complicates and calls into question. Ismene directly states to Creon that “Oh yes, I did it—if she agrees, that is. / I’ll take blame along with her” (ll. 536-37). In these lines, Ismene is again presenting her loyalty to family while also disobeying the institutions she promised to uphold. Ismene is only willing to disobey the laws if she is to gain her sister’s approval. Although Ismene’s need to seek acceptance from others is instilled in her by patriarchal society, she is willing to be punished alongside her sister. Ismene is much more concerned and affected by the consequences of her disobedience and refusal to conform to the gender norms of ancient Greece, but she also wants to honor her brother alongside her sister in an approach that adheres to the womanly bond she shares with Antigone.

The complex sisterly relationship between Antigone and Ismene not only causes them to act as “foils” to each other, but it also portrays them as opposites in terms of femininity. Within a sibling relationship, it is common for sisters to act as different individuals, changing their beliefs and behaviors to be distinct from one another. Antigone’s outspokenness can be viewed as a masculine trait, but it can also be interpreted as Antigone’s personal application of femininity. Feeling as if she must balance this, Ismene is more submissive and compliant, influenced by her upbringing of what an “ideal” Greek woman should be. Blake Tyrrell and Larry J. Bennett state that Sophocles “unites them [Ismene and Antigone] as a pair and then has them differ verbally. They separate, their separation causes more verbal violence, and they spring further apart” (3). Sophocles is aware of the unspoken tension that lives amongst women, even in familial bonds, and he uses this to further contrast Antigone and Ismene. Stefani Engelstein states that “Ismene reads the two brothers as a double unit and the two sisters as another [...]. The sisters constitute two nonidentical but transsubjective links in an alinear, synecdochal network” (47). The stark differences between the sisters are seen as a product of their society rather than as an outcome of their differing wants. Antigone feels that her sister also has a responsibility to honor her brother, and “implies that her sister and she are ‘two persons or things which, by nature or association, form a pair’” (Tyrrell and Bennett 5). The jointness of the sisters and the link that will always connect them, in turn, makes them vulnerable, as “no one can be left behind” (Engelstein 47). Once Ismene realizes she will be the lone survivor of her family, she “confesses her act and then seeks her sister’s permission to confess” (Honig, *Antigone* 164.). Honig points out that Ismene asking for Antigone’s permission to confess is an act that can be seen as loyal and rational rather than weak. If Antigone acts out of desire for justice and revenge, Ismene is led to believe she can obtain this justice by taking an opposite approach to her sister. Although the sisters share a common desire to honor their brother, ancient Greek society has conditioned their approaches to femininity in a way that marks their differences.

Although there has been a tendency to read Ismene as “weak” and Antigone as “strong” based on their actions, I argue that the sisters’ respective acts of resistance are done in the need of balancing each other out. The patriarchal ideals imposed on ancient Greek women like Ismene and Antigone influenced the sisters’ different approaches to grief, familial responsibility, and femininity. While Antigone focuses

on family loyalty and honor at any cost, Ismene approaches this situation in a more secretive manner due to her belief that women should not stand out too much in public. The complicated relationship between Ismene and Antigone has allowed them to be affected by gender norms differently, while also being intrinsically intertwined by their blood bonds. As Ismene becomes aware of this jointness, she sides with her sister, risking her life and displaying her true ambitions of honoring her brother. Both Antigone and Ismene navigate and express their familial obligations on separate ends of the spectrum of femininity, and the sisters learn to prioritize their family through balancing their differences.

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Education and Status in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

ELEANOR REFT

It is surprising to most modern readers of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) that the Creature can speak and express himself so eloquently. In the pervasive pop culture perception, the Creature is incapable of communication and intellectual thought. This discrepancy, between the novel and this popular perception, is at first confusing. It might be assumed that if the Creature can communicate so clearly, then he should be accepted by society, at least prior to his acts of violence spurred by society's rejection of him. Some might find that the self-taught, informal nature of the Creature's education conveys that he would have been accepted by society if he had received a formal education like his creator, Victor Frankenstein. However, it is also possible that the Creature's education equals Victor's and that his ostracization from society is due to something deeper than mere intellect.

Alan Rogers notes that the novel features three types of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal learning is defined as "a result of experiences in an education or training institution, with structured learning objectives, learning time and support which leads to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective" (15). Non-formal learning is "learning [that] is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured [...]. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective." Finally, informal learning "results from daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. It is not structured [...] and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional." From these definitions, it is clear that the bulk of Victor Frankenstein's education is that of formal learning, as it occurred in an accredited institution that provided certification. In contrast, the Creature's education is wholly an example of informal and, later, non-formal learning, as the Creature's education shifts from unintentional and unstructured, to intentional and structured.

The Creature begins his existence with no family or background, experiencing informal education as he navigates the world, such as learning the properties of fire: "I found a fire [...], and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!" (75). The Creature, having only experienced cold, marvels at fire's ability to provide warmth and inflict pain. He continues to learn of the world through his daily experiences and struggle for survival until he arrives at the De Lacey house, where through observation the Creature learns language, social norms, and culture: "I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and

feelings to one another by articulate sounds. [...] This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it” (81). Through intentional, continual observation, with structure and a goal in mind, the Creature masters language and later develops himself intellectually by studying books that he serendipitously acquires.

As compared to Victor’s education, the Creature’s is far from formal and exists outside a standard system. While the Creature comes from nothing, Victor’s aristocratic background, wealthy family, resources, and connections allow him to attend a university. Through a large educational institution like Ingolstadt, Victor obtains a proper, formal education that provides him with worldly knowledge. This education stands in contrast to that of the Creature, whose education is limited to a single-family unit and few resources. Victor’s higher education is concrete, as he is admired by the other students and faculty, going on to become a distinguished student at Ingolstadt: “My ardour was indeed the astonishment of the students; and my proficiency, that of the masters. [...] I made some discoveries in the improvement of some chemical instruments, which procured me great esteem and admiration at the university” (33). Victor’s ability to excel at Ingolstadt cements him as a great scientist in the minds of his professors and fellow students, emphasizing the gap between himself and the Creature.

Due to Victor’s accomplishments and his high standing at the university, it can be argued that Victor’s formal, worldly education gives him an elevated status as compared to the Creature’s isolated informal and non-formal education. The self-taught nature of the Creature’s accomplishments seems rather unimpressive against the groundbreaking scientific work that Victor has achieved. While Victor undertook vigorous coursework and absorbed information from a multitude of texts, the Creature has only read three books in his lifetime, once again reinforcing the inward, isolated nature of his education. Under this reasoning, one can assume that society is justified in rejecting the Creature. Had the Creature been formally educated, with the same resources Victor enjoyed, then the Creature would have been embraced by society in the same way as Victor.

However, even if the Creature had been formally educated, he still would not have been accepted by society. The Creature and Victor, despite their different educational styles, possess the same keen intellect. The Creature accomplishes feats similar to those of Victor given his circumstances. As Claudia Rozas Gómez writes, the Creature’s application to learning about the De Lacey’s and their language is comparable to Victor’s fervent application to the sciences: “In the same way that Victor commits himself to his study, the Creature commits himself with the same rigour, giving his [constant attention] to studying the cottagers” (365). The Creature’s later mastery of language and literacy, in a fairly short span of time, speaks to his perceptiveness and intelligence, much in the same vein as Victor’s quick mastery of natural philosophy.

Furthermore, the Creature's accomplishment of speech proves shocking to others, due to the other characters' perception of his distinct non-human appearance. Rochelle Rives comments on how Walton reacts to the marvel of what he sees as a non-human entity mastering the art of speech: "Walton is dismayed by the monster's mimicry of human utterance precisely because it undermines the presumption of a unique and individually incarnated human subject. What does it mean if this monster, which cannot be granted the status of a subject (at least by the humans surrounding him), is the source of enunciation?" (348). The reactions of characters like Walton, and even Victor himself, show that the perception of the Creature as non-human makes his articulate speech incredibly impressive to those who encounter him. Rives' statements on the Creature's monstrous appearance further establish the Creature as an "other." Oftentimes, people outside the formal education system, such as those in places without access to formal education or those lacking the resources to obtain formal education, are sometimes treated as less than human or are considered "flawed" in their humanity due to the nature of their education, making them an "other."

Despite the limits of the Creature's education, he still gains comprehensive emotional intelligence. As the Creature observes the De Lacey family, he judges them as extremely generous people: "The more I saw of them, the greater became my desire to claim their protection and kindness; [...] I dared not think that they would turn them from me with disdain and horror. The poor that stopped at their door were never driven away" (96). The De Laceys are kind enough to welcome the poor and destitute at their door, demonstrating their charity and inadvertently teaching the Creature compassion. These characteristics make the De Laceys the perfect subjects for the Creature to study and emulate, as they steer him toward acceptance of himself and others, at least before their crushing rejection of the Creature.

In addition, although the Creature's worldview is limited to the few texts to which he is exposed, he still obtains a level-headed perspective and awareness of human nature, that is, prior to his acts of violence. While the Creature's violent outbursts are key to the novel's narrative, they occur after his genuine attempts at human connection. His actions up until his rejection by the De Lacey family are all sincere, based in what he has learned, and aptly demonstrate his keen understanding of human nature. Gómez elaborates on the effectiveness of the Creature's education in connecting him with others: "The production of knowledge cannot happen in a manner that is disconnected from others and from the world. [...] The more the Creature learns about the De Lacey family, the more he feels connected to them" (363, 365). As much as the Creature's education is restricted and isolated in scope, it is also open to the experiences of the everyday, the real world and the real feelings of others, something that Victor's education lacked. Furthermore, although formal education is often touted as a guaranteed way to adequately socialize the young and connect them with the world, a strong disconnect still exists between academia and the "real world." The nature of academia in higher education is often far removed from the practical challenges of the everyday.

Despite all his advantages and accomplishments, Victor's education is lacking. Although Victor possesses all the resources to become a great scientist, and often has acted as one, his education is inhibited by his obsession with the outdated, pseudo-scientific teachings of writers like Cornelius Agrippa. Prior to arriving at Ingolstadt, Victor explains his progress in natural philosophy to his professor, M. Krempe, who dismisses and belittles his readings in pseudo-science: "[E]very instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems, and useless names" (30). However, M. Krempe's firm condemnation of Victor's fixation with these old readings and later recommendation of newer, more credible resources did not fully persuade Victor to step away from pseudo-science.

Victor suffered from a stubborn, self-centered, reclusive nature, often ignoring those, such as M. Krempe, who tried to dissuade him from pursuing such old texts. Even when Victor started to look past his attachment to archaic texts, he still held on to some pseudo-scientific ideas, including reanimating dead organisms. In describing his excitement at the prospect of creating life, Victor's self-serving nature is exposed: "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (35). Victor's motivation for creating life is rooted in the elevation of his status, emphasizing the gratitude that his creation will "owe" him. Victor's fixation with bestowing life and achieving godlike power leads to his disconnection from society. His ambitions and need to increase his own status overtake ethics and personal responsibility. The outcome of Victor's actions shows that the style of education one receives does not necessarily guarantee successful social learning. Victor had every opportunity to become a renowned and respected scientist, but factors beyond the scope of formal education, such as his temperament and selfishness, prevent him from achieving such goals.

In this way, Victor is a foil for the Creature, as he lacks empathy and does not look beyond himself and his desires in his formal education. Meanwhile, the Creature gains empathy and social connection through his informal and non-formal education: "Unlike Victor, the Creature's pursuit of knowledge through observed conversations, stories, songs and everyday experiences enables him to develop empathy and social connectedness with others" (Gómez 367). The Creature learns what Victor had failed to learn: how to recognize and empathize with the feelings of others. Although the Creature later lashes out, he approaches people with the desire and ability to empathize with them, whereas Victor is usually unfeeling but able to escape scrutiny due to his privilege.

What is notable, however, is that, despite Victor's internal alienation from others and the world, he is still accepted and embraced by society. In comparison, the Creature, who learned empathy and how to care for others, and who actively sought out positive social interaction, was always rejected from society. After confronting

Victor on the mountaintop, the Creature expresses the impossibility of acceptance despite his attempts at connection: “Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? they spurn and hate me” (73). Even though the Creature possesses kindness and compassion for others, he is still deeply hated, condemned to be alone regardless of his empathy and intellect.

This outcome leads to the notion that education does not affect status in *Frankenstein*. Although it is often thought that education can bridge gaps between those divided by social hierarchies, the hopelessness of the Creature’s situation demonstrates the exact opposite. Brian E. Harper discusses the larger societal forces that impact the Creature beyond education, relating these forces to those experienced by modern black students: “Victor Frankenstein’s creation is defined by his environment. The reaction to his presence within that context is largely negative, which inspires an unhealthy self-conception” (231). The Creature’s struggle is similar to that of people of color who face challenges with the inequality produced by racism. Such struggles both stem from discrimination based on appearance. In formal education, black and other minority students are often forced to contend with societal structures, based in racism, that tell them they will not succeed (Harper 232). These barriers greatly inhibit development and progression in socio-economic status for minority students, much in the same way that social barriers inhibit the Creature (Harper 232). Due to societal prejudice, the Creature learns to think of himself negatively, as someone unworthy of love. At first, the Creature resolves that education, and learning how people connect with one another, can allow him to integrate into society despite his physical grotesqueness.

However, this was not meant to be, as the Creature realizes, through his informal education, that he is severely restricted by his appearance. Ultimately, as John Bugg notes, the Creature realizes that becoming educated cannot wholly integrate him into society: “[T]he exact referent of the Creature’s difference is less important than the basic fact of alterity: as the Creature learns to read and speak, he also learns that his body will condition the terms of his existence” (659). This fact is true for many groups that experience oppression in education, such as people of color, women, and individuals with physical disability. As these groups learn and leave the blissful ignorance of childhood, they become privy to the ways of the world, especially regarding how their bodies will determine their movements and actions within it. The Creature realizes that education, which at first seemed like his salvation, only confirmed the limits of his existence. No matter how educated he might become, the Creature will never be able to bridge the gap between himself and society.

Having not been able to socially connect, the Creature is left with three choices: (1) to keep trying to bridge the gap and potentially face lethal consequences, (2) to accept his fate and live in total isolation, or (3) to accept his fate but do so violently. The creature opts for this third choice and decides to take what he wants by

force, resulting in his violently lashing out in revenge as compensation for his suffering, even if it only worsens his situation. While it cannot be said that the Creature's choice was the correct one, the decision speaks to the kinds of actions certain groups might take in response to immense social pressures. Violence and crime are often linked to poverty, lack of resources, and low quality of life (Kang 618-21). Whether or not the Creature's actions or anyone else's are moral does not change that these actions stem from suffering and inequality.

In popular culture, it is obvious why the Creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is ostracized from society. The combination of the Creature's unsettling appearance and the common belief that he is unable to communicate establish the Creature as a "monster." However, in the source material, the reasoning behind the educated Creature's exclusion from society is less apparent. Some might argue that his ostracization is supported by the idea that the Creature's informal and non-formal education do not provide him with the adequate tools to connect with and be embraced by humanity. A more thorough analysis shows that the Creature is equal to Victor Frankenstein intellectually and that the two characters' educations contrast with each other in a meaningful way. With the Creature and his creator being equal, the Creature's rejection from society suggests that education does not impact social status. Instead, the ways in which people like the Creature are received by society are impacted by far larger forces than education, and in the Creature's case, this larger force is societal prejudice.

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Geoffrey Chaucer's Wife of Bath: A Product of Medieval Patriarchy

GRETTA KOMPERDA

The Canterbury Tales (c. 1392) by Geoffrey Chaucer is a collection of tales rich with characters who differ in social class and moral values. Despite these differences, the women in *The Canterbury Tales* remain stereotypical to societal expectations of the era. Reflecting a commonly held medieval view, women served as second-class citizens, which often made them subservient to their male counterparts. Valerie Edden states that women in this period were a little more than chattel (346). Yet, the titular character in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" is a morally ambiguous counter example, seeking power by elevating her socioeconomic status through her past husbands. In "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," Alisoun's sexual power over men is undeniable, whereas the other women on the pilgrimage, the Prioress and the Second Nun, value chastity. The Wife differs from the other women on the pilgrimage, as the narrator describes her in the "General Prologue": "She coude muchel of wandringe by the weye. / Gat-tothed was she, smoothly for to seye" (ll. 467-68). Laura Hodges demonstrates how Chaucer uses double meanings in the Wife's costume and appearance to conflate her geographical and carnal knowledge (359-60). In the Wife's prologue, the Wife exhibits agency in her ability to choose her lovers in the medieval patriarchy, a system in which women lacked social sovereignty. Though the Wife criticizes the medieval patriarchy through her sexual agency and individuality, her rebellion against societal expectations is ironically undermined, since she empowers herself by subverting male authority rather than attempting to redefine the terms of the patriarchal system. The Wife rebels, yet she remains, nonetheless, trapped in such a system. The Wife's resistance is due to occurrences in both her prologue and her tale. First, the tale undermines her resistance through the happy ending for the criminal knight; second, the prologue does so through the limitations on the Wife's female agency, as she shares the same name with the object of desire in "The Miller's Tale"; and finally the prologue and tale should be understood through Alisoun's manipulation of Christian figures and Scripture.

The dominance of the patriarchy is underscored by the gender and social rank of the protagonist of the Wife's tale, a knight.¹ Medieval society valued knights as pinnacles of masculinity, as they are highly ranked in society and from aristocratic

¹ The centrality of the knight figure to both *The Canterbury Tales* and to the medieval patriarchal culture it represents is evident by a knight being the first pilgrim described in the "General Prologue" and by that same character's being given the honor to tell the first tale on the pilgrimage.

backgrounds. Helen Phillips reports that knights were portrayed as the highest secular exemplars of masculine ideals (300). English social hierarchy granted knights more power than average citizens, often providing them with indemnity in cases of malfeasance. Their reputations as courtly and heroic could protect them when they were ethically ambiguous or in the wrong. The knight's presence in the Wife's tale is significant because while this archetype suggests nobility and chivalry, the knight's status allows him to avoid beheading, the typical punishment for his rape of a maiden. Instead, he is granted a second chance by the Queen: "I grante thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me / What thing is it that wommen most desyren" (ll. 904-05). When the knight is exempted from his punishment, his rape is dismissed, allowing the audience to focus on his adventure rather than the vile nature of his crime.

The Wife's knight embodies the all-pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology, both in medieval culture and in the narrative itself. Rather than punishing the knight for the sexual violence he inflicts on the maiden, the Wife rewards him by making him the protagonist of the tale. Wendy Scase acknowledges that the Wife's tale is a romance, therefore "focus[ing] on the experience of the knight; it has nothing to say directly of the viewpoint of the maiden who is raped by the knight, nor the motives and identity of the old woman" (289). As a result, the Wife plays upon the patriarchal expectations of her audience in valuing a man's experience over that of a woman. Though the tale is written by the Wife, where she discusses the question of "What thing is it that wommen most desyren," the moral of her tale is ultimately decided by a man (l. 905). The tale's focus on the knight reaffirms widely accepted misogyny present in her medieval society, as it perpetuates the perception that violent acts against women are often ignored.

Another ironic consequence of the violence toward the maiden is that the perpetrator becomes the hero who resolves the tale. He is rewarded his life by the court for discovering that women desire sovereignty in relationships, his response being less than a lesson taught to a rapist than, as Sylvia Federico states, a "patronizing wink between men who have been caught denying women their sovereignty" (420). Federico discusses how Chaucer's attempts to investigate what rape means outside of courtly punishment does not necessarily excuse the author from the levity with which he treats this horrendous crime. The knight returning from his grandiose and romanticized journey with his meager answer emphasizes the limited state of any agency women might have within the patriarchy. Many men of the medieval period may have denied their wives the right to make decisions until they were confronted directly for their misogynistic actions, like the knight in the Wife's tale. Federico's description of the "patronizing wink" may also point out that actions akin to those of the knight are a commonplace in a male-dominated society and that misogynistic ideologies are often exempt from punishment.

The persistence of the patriarchy throughout the tale is further evident in the way the Wife describes the knight's being forced to uphold his promise and marry the old woman who told him the secret of his quest.

The Wife of Bath creates sympathy for the knight when he responds to the old woman's demand to marry her:

“My love?” quode he, “nay, my dampnacioun!
Allas! that any of my nacioun
Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!
But al for nought, the ende is this, that he
Constreyned was.” (ll. 1067-71)

The true victim, the maiden, disappears from the tale, and what continues to be in the spotlight is the frivolous plight of the knight in his contract with the old woman. In the medieval period, rape cases were often resolved through marriage, which lead to the vicious standard that women who were raped by men were raped “with the goal of marriage in mind” (Federico 421). Federico suggests that the knight “is assigned the role of a rape victim [...] to diminish the seriousness of the crime against the ‘mayde,’ who is so unambiguously raped at the beginning of the tale” (421-22). The Wife of Bath puts the knight in the position of an unwilling partner: “I seye ther nas no joye ne feste at al” (l. 1078). She narrates in such a way that suggests a rape case being resolved in marriage: “Ther nas but hevinesse and mucche sorwe, / For prively he wedded hire on morwe, / And al day after hidde him as an oule, / So wo was him, his wyf looked so foule” (ll. 1079-82). The Wife's rhetorical positioning of the knight as the victim allows for her male audience to identify with his tainted character, garnering sympathy for him and ignoring the actual rape victim herself.² Even so, her attempts to punish the knight's actions are futile. Instead of women employing their own self-agency, it is the knight who educates women in their desire for sovereignty. Therefore, the Wife's deflection of true victimhood is damaging because it shows how women can be both silenced and made invisible in a male-dominated society.

The magical transformation of the ugly, old “hag” into a beautiful young wife reflects the patriarchal system of the time, as women possibly only could be granted sovereignty by their male lovers in relationships. She is bestowed autonomy only when the knight decides to give her the choice over her future, allowing her to transform. Her impossible metamorphosis in the tale subverts a classic medieval romance trope, which follows the typical pattern of an old and ugly woman becoming beautiful on her wedding day after being granted sovereignty in their relationship. Jackie Shead notes how Chaucer reverses this typical romantic trope: “First, the choice she gives the knight on their wedding night is no longer whether she should appear beautiful by night or by day, but whether he will have her ugly and faithful or beautiful and risk being cuckolded.” Chaucer uses cuckoldry in contrast to

² Interpreting the knight's impending marriage with the old woman as having parallels with a rape-to-marriage case opens discussion of how Chaucer might have been mocking the notion of rape cases and their seriousness.

faithfulness, expanding on the desire for sex rather than focusing on physical attractiveness. Through the tale, the Wife emphasizes how beautiful and young women are assumed to make cuckolds of their husbands, reinforcing negative depictions of women within medieval society, including that women are objects of sex, lacking the strength to resist any sexual opportunity. Furthermore, the patriarchal influence is evident as the Wife instills in her story these restrictive ideas that dissolve female agency in her society. Women are only allowed to transform, becoming beautiful and faithful, if their husbands grant them the power of choice within their relationship, reinforcing the oppressive and omnipresent nature of a male-dominated society.

Nevertheless, the Wife attempts to challenge conventional views of power in marriage through the critique of male ownership of woman's sexuality and agency. The patriarchy is emphasized by the old woman *solely* having power over her "lover" when she confines him into marriage, as she is the one assuming power in their relationship. Therefore, as Phillips asserts, "Though the text interrogates these conventional, gendered ideas of power and honor, it remains deeply imbued with masculinist rhetoric" (301). The conventional, gendered ideas of power highlight how the Wife uses her tale to rebel against patriarchal expectations of womanhood, allowing her character, the old woman, to acquire sovereignty. The Wife's rebellion is diminished by her inability to subvert expectations of the time, as the old woman is granted sovereignty by her husband rather than possessing it on her own, demonstrating the limited role of women in male-dominated society.

The Wife's prologue and tale contradict each other, since Alisoun is agentive in her control over men, and the old woman becomes complacent in her subservience to the knight, effectively undermining the tale's message of female autonomy. Analyzing the old woman's transformation, it can be argued that she is an oppressive force, to the point of the knight fantasizing about death rather than marrying her. Once the knight grants "false sovereignty" to the old woman, she transforms:

That she so fair was and so yong therto,
For joye he hente hire in his armes two;
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.
A thousand tyme a-rewhe he gan hire kisse,
And she obeyed him in every thing
That might doon him pleasance or lyking (ll. 1251-56).

After the transformation, the old woman becomes subservient to her husband, catering to idealized expectations of female marital roles. Contrasting the fate of the old woman to that of the Wife sparks discussion as to why the Wife would depict the old woman in such a way, considering that she and the old woman share numerous characteristics. The prologue empowers the Wife, displaying her self-agency and femininity through the power dynamics of her relationships and the subversion of

male vanity in marriages. Barbara Gottfried notes the boisterous, unrelenting nature of the Wife in her prologue: “Her performance in her *Prologue*, humorous, aggressive, and self-assertive, presents her audience with a version of her experience at once expurgated and embellished” (203). When reading the prologue and Wife’s tale, modern audiences view a disparity between the agency of the old woman and the Wife, who possesses sovereignty over her husbands due to her resistance to societal expectations of women in marriages. The Wife, untraditionally agentive, uses her sexual prowess to assert authority over men, in contrast to the deceptive old woman’s ultimate obedience to her husband. Although her tale of this fantastical society suggests to the travelers that an obedient wife is ideal, the patriarchy distorts her perception of what women are capable of in medieval society. As a result, the Wife contradicts the characterized version of herself in the prologue with the inclusion of the old woman’s transformation, as they both become wives who live to please their husbands.

The Wife’s prologue also emphasizes how women use sex as one of the few ways to empower themselves in a male-dominated society. The prologue shows how the Wife can only define herself as agentive in relation to the patriarchal culture which equates her sex to power. She commences her journey of empowerment through sexual prowess and deception at the age of twelve, easily attracting her husbands due to marital expectations of the period. Gottfried explains: “At the same time, her artfulness, and her appearance of having beaten men at their own game, deflect attention” from the fact that her apparent victory is mitigated by her social context. “Even as she attempts a deconstruction of patriarchal literature in an experiential revision of it, the Wife necessarily falls short of the goal of overcoming authority because she can only define herself in relation to that authority” (203). Through manipulation, the Wife profits from her marital relationships. The Wife elevates her economic status by using her sexual power to acquire her older husbands’ wealth. Though the wife profits from deceiving her husbands, she never separates herself from male authority. Therefore, the Wife struggles to overcome male rule since she relies on marital relationships to acquire agency and power.

Despite the Wife’s use of marital relations as a means to empower herself, her provocative pursuit of wealth is tolerated by men. Exploring the Wife and her relationship to economics, Stewart Justman writes, “The bond between the sexual and the economic is all the more persuasive in that the sexual condition of marriage enables the Wife to get rich, and all the more provocative in that economic appetites are tolerated *distrustfully*” (348). Justman then quotes R. H. Tawney, who states, ““Because they are powerful appetites, men fear them”” (348). Since the husbands’ elderliness limits accessibility to sexual partners, they welcome the Wife’s willingness to marry, even though their romantic relationship disguises one of her few means to pursue economic status.

The Wife integrates personal experiences into her tale, as she is traumatized by her abusive experience with, Jankyn, her fifth husband. The role of Jankyn in the prologue is like that of the knight in her tale; they both commit acts of violence against the Wife or a character that embodies the Wife's desires. As mentioned before, even though the Wife "refutes and repudiates the conceptions of women disseminated by the Church Fathers, her husbands, and the books of 'wicked wives' with which they aggravate their predisposition to misogyny, she is haunted and indelibly marked by them" (Gottfried 203). The Church's influence allows for constructions of misogynistic tendencies to manifest as abuse and malintent toward women for the suggestion of their wantonness. The Wife is changed by her experience with her husband as she implements him into her tale. Additionally, Robert Edwards asserts that the fifth section devoted to Jankyn "serves in many ways as a thematic and structural mirror for her subsequent tale of the knight-rapist" (328). Jankyn's role demonstrates how women voluntarily subordinate themselves to their husbands in each relationship, which strips the empowerment from being a sexual object.

The order of the tales also emphasizes the unimportance of the female experience in the medieval patriarchy. Prior to telling her story, the Wife attempts to educate the men on the pilgrimage about the true desires of women and how they seek power in their male-dominated society, but then she is interrupted by the Pardoner. Robert Edward notes how the opening of her tale is "punctuated by the Pardoner's ill-advised intervention, sound[ing] her themes of experience and authority" (328). By listening and therefore abiding by the direction of men and their thoughts, the Wife demonstrates that she remains complacent in the patriarchy. Instead of immediately continuing her tale, she calms the Pardoner by assuring him that her tale will have aspects that appeal to him. This acquiescence shows she ultimately caters to men and their woes first, belittling the value of her experience or words of wisdom.

Additionally, the theme and positioning of "The Clerk's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* exemplifies men's domination of the Wife in the grand scheme of the tales. Traditionally, "The Clerk's Tale" precedes the Wife's tale, signifying the precedence of a male character's account to that of a female character. The Clerk is disgusted by the idea of women's sovereignty in a relationship and is determined to prove what a "true" marriage should look like. The goal of "The Clerk's Tale" is to undermine the Wife's untraditional sense of femininity and self-agency to confine women to their righteous place within marriages and, by extension, society. Phillips explains how "The Clerk's Tale" is both a spiritual allegory and a misogynist slur on modern wives that "endorses the message of wifely obedience" (304). The Clerk's sense of holy justice supersedes the profound and personal tale told by the Wife, and his ignorance of women replaces the moral of her tale. Her lifelong rebellion is altogether swept aside as other story tellers reestablish patriarchal norms.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, many scholars assert that the Wife empowers herself through a rejection of societal expectations regarding women, differentiating her from the other women depicted in the tales. These other women, the Prioress and the

Second Nun, are defined by their adherence to religious expectations, whereas the Wife is characterized by her rejection of such patriarchal influences. John Ganim argues that the Wife of Bath “appear[s] to be among the first characters to articulate their needs, desires, lives, and circumstances in a fully developed and unified vision” (225). She exemplifies what it means to be human, as she identifies herself as an autonomous, coherent individual. The Wife sets herself apart from the Prioress and the Second Nun not merely through her sexual liberation, but, more importantly, through her rejection of defining herself in relation to religion. The Wife, then, uses her sexual prowess to elevate her status in the eyes of men and still remain in control: “She is able to see that the route to power and sovereignty in marriage is through gaining control of her husband’s property by ransoming her sexual favors” (Gottfried 213). The Wife repeatedly controls her husbands by whatever means possible, refusing to confine herself as an obedient lover and opting instead to use deception as a tactic for personal gain.

Though the Wife differentiates herself from the other women, she is all too willing to exchange her worth for material value. The Wife’s autonomy is minimized because her power is only achievable through using her body; she must reduce herself to a sexual object to acquire any semblance of power in a medieval patriarchy, and the status and wealth she gains is only material. The Wife of Bath boasts the illusion of possessing agency in a male-dominant society, evidenced by the simplicity of her name being Alisoun, the same name of the female object of desire in “The Miller’s Tale.” The two characters having the same name discredits the nuances in Chaucer’s characterization of the Wife and strips away her individuality. While the Wife articulates her desires, Alisoun from “The Miller’s Tale” is sexualized before we learn her name. Drawing these comparisons, John Slefinger claims that “the naming [which] also comes in the form of an address makes her into a literal object: something to be watched, observed, or questioned: not an independent agent like the men” (158). Her individuality is locked behind her body, and she is only valued for her sexual ability. The Miller’s Alisoun is not an agent of her own sexuality: before we know who or what she desires, we know how physically attractive she is.

Additionally, Alisoun’s lovers in “The Miller’s Tale” recognize that she lacks autonomy, a trait typical of most women in the thirteenth century. As such, they take interest in Alisoun due to her sexual capacity, emphasized by Nicholas violating her and then winning her affection: “This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye, / And spak so faire, and profred him so faste, / That she hir love him graunted atte laste” (ll. 3288-90). That Alisoun completely lacks the Wife’s greatest strength, her sexual agency, begs the question: why must they share the same name? Perhaps it serves to exemplify how the patriarchy ignores the plight of women in their quest to rebel against societal expectations. Despite the Wife possessing bodily autonomy where the Miller’s Alisoun does not, they are both similarly relegated to a lower status indicated by a series of comparisons to animals. The Miller’s Alisoun is sexualized through the animals she is compared to, including a weasel, a colt, a lamb, and a swallow

(Slefinger 159). She is depicted as weasel-like, pure of nature, fair skinned, and beautiful. These purely sexual and attractive characteristics tempt the male figures around her, as Alisoun is represented as having no other motivation or purpose in life other than sex. The Wife of Bath, on the other hand, is a distinct character, made up of more than just her sexual experience. She is compared to a lioness: “Stiborn I was as is a leonesse, / And of my tonge a verray jangleresse” (ll. 637-38). Her lion-like comparison shows her stubbornness and exotic nature, which may intimidate men seeking sexual gratification. In a medieval patriarchy, men desire women like the Miller’s Alisoun because she exhibits an animal-like simplicity that the Wife’s complex nature and experience transcend.

Along with her nonconformity to societal expectations, the Wife of Bath also challenges Christian-religious expectations of the time through her flouting of religious doctrine. She seems proud of her multiple husbands and embraces sex as an example of her independence from religious norms. In the tale she reaffirms the value of virginity but excuses herself:

Virginitee is greet perfeccioun,
 And continence eek with devocioun. [...]
 And lordinges, by youre leve, that am nat I.
 I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
 In the actes and in fruit of marriage. (ll. 105-06, 112-14).

She acknowledges that most women devote themselves to religion, searching for a life of purity and chastity until marriage. However, the Wife does not revel in her purity but rather embraces her capacity to garner power from her sexual prowess. Even though she differentiates herself from other women, her resistance against stereotypical norms is still confined to the realm of sex and is only established in relation to what other women fail to do. The Wife never defines herself outside of sex in her medieval patriarchy, a trap that even a woman elevated in the eyes of men cannot escape.

Another instance of the Wife attempting to empower herself is through her manipulation of biblical Scripture. She justifies her overtly sexual actions by distorting and removing the context of biblical verse. For instance, she disregards the typical religious stance on marriage but quotes Scripture out of context to fit her needs. Robert Edwards makes the point that she “may claim her right to interpret Holy Writ for herself [...] electing her texts carefully for her own purposes” (346). As an older woman, the Wife uses her tale to potentially deceive younger men, promising that when they marry her, she will be transformed into a beautiful wife, similarly to the old woman of her tale. Since Christianity was the dominant ideology in medieval Europe, the Wife can use the manipulation of Holy Scripture to justify her actions. As such, she often turns to saints or religious figures to alleviate societal pressures against her actions, using the biblical figure of Abraham to justify her multiple husbands. If godly figures can indulge, she asks, why can she not?

Using this tactic, she also employs the actions of King Solomon to normalize her lust for men, citing how he possessed seven-hundred wives and three-hundred concubines. Furthermore, her tale is a “confessional,” a genre of storytelling that follows the lines of the main character atoning for the sins they have committed. Michael Cornett defines the confessional as “[f]unctioning as a mirror for self-examination, [...] voic[ing] through a first-person speaker the manifold variety of sins that might be acknowledged by the penitent” (3-4). Telling these confessional stories, like the sacrament of going to confession, is seen as a deeply religious practice, one where sins can be cleansed. However, the Wife does not atone for her sins but, rather, subverts the idea of the confessional and indulges in all her bodily desires. Edwards acknowledges the Wife’s sensual individuality: “The energy of her performance establishes her rhetorical echoes: she is a credible, sympathetic character, because she seems to disown no part of her appetite” (328). She possesses sovereignty in both her body and speech, demonstrating her resistance to patriarchal norms and her power within the sexual economy of her marriages. Yet, the Wife’s manipulation of religion does not truly justify her actions or give her more sovereignty. Shead denotes that one of her more outlandish justifications is “her outrageous conclusion where she invokes Jesus to send women ‘Housebondes meeke, yonge and fresshe abedde,’ [l. 1259] and to shorten the lives of any men who will not be governed by their wives.” The Wife inserts her own wants into her tale based on her own experiences, musing that Jesus’s intervention is necessary for husbands to be governed by their wives. Although she does not truly challenge Christian views, she does distort Scripture so she can justify actions that would be condemned in the Church’s eyes. Due to her lack of power in the patriarchy, the Wife feels it is necessary to redeem herself by referring to religious figures because she realistically has no other method of empowering herself in medieval society.

Though the patriarchal system of the medieval period is oppressive, the Wife of Bath attempts to redefine herself, but her redefinition is flawed. Gottfried asserts that her “assumptions, concerns, and attitudes make manifest the dialectical interplay of experience and authority, rebellion and acquiescence. Thus, patriarchal society generates both the misogynist literature she protests against, and the opposition to it she herself embodies” (203). The Wife of Bath is a stubborn character, yet she remains a product of her environment who uses the tools at her disposal in the attempt for agency in a male-dominated society. And though she differentiates herself, she is still subject to the whims of the men around her. In her prologue, she reflects on her abusive relationship with Jankyn: “I trowe I loved hym best, for that he / Was of his love daungerous to me” (513-14). Despite the abuse she has endured by his hand, she still excuses his actions. Thus, her desire to please the men in her life overpowers her logic, demonstrating that women are still beholden to patriarchal traditions at the risk of their safety. However, she carries her love and experiences with her on her journeys, changing and perhaps inspiring women in pursuit of sovereignty in medieval society.

Yet, inspiration is not enough and, ultimately, the Wife remains entrapped in the patriarchal system. In resisting her disempowered status within medieval society, the Wife is undermined by her own actions in three ways. First, she grants a happy ending for the tainted knight in her tale; second, her reliance on seduction and sexual prowess leads toward a demeaning resemblance to the Alisoun in “The Miller’s Tale”; and third, the Wife distorts and quotes biblical Scripture out of context to justify her lifestyle, in turn equating herself to the patriarchal religious figures she intends to rebel against. Thereby, we can understand that though the Wife’s attempts at redefining herself in a male-dominant society are valiant, many aspects of the patriarchy have already foreclosed on her ambition, and her attempts to redefine womanhood and femininity are ultimately compromised throughout *The Canterbury Tales*.

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