

Penumbra



AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE INQUIRY

Issue 3, Spring 2016

Penumbra

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE INQUIRY

Issue 3, Spring 2016

Penumbra: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Critical and Creative Inquiry

www.unionpenumbra.org

Issue 3, Spring 2016

© 2016 by Penumbra Editorial Team

All rights reserved. Published in 2016.

Penumbra is the official, refereed, scholarly journal of Union Institute & University's Ph.D. Program in Interdisciplinary Studies. The journal is published at regular intervals and dedicated to challenging traditional academic and creative disciplinary boundaries in the context of social change.

Penumbra's purpose is to promote theoretically informed engagements with concrete issues and problems. The journal publishes socially engaged, innovative, creative and critical scholarship with a focus on ethical and political issues in the humanities, public policy, and leadership. *Penumbra* is a peer-edited and peer-reviewed journal committed to spanning the divide between scholarly and creative production, and to fostering work from graduate students, junior scholars and emerging artists, in addition to more established critical and creative voices.

EDITOR Gariot P. Louima

ASSOCIATE EDITORS Amy Heath
Marianna Boncek

ASSISTANT EDITORS John Soden
Gina Stump

EDITORS EMERITI Elizabeth Aiossa (2013-2014)
Jon Ross (2013-2014)
John Giordano (2012-2013)
Tiffany Taylor (2012-2013)

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

Provost and Vice President Dr. Nelson Soto
for Academic Affairs

Associate Vice President & Dean Arlene Sacks
Graduate Programs

Associate Dean Michael Raffanti
PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies

EDITORIAL BOARD

Diane Allerdyce
Union Institute & University

Shelley Armitage
Union Institute & University

Anthony Bagues
Brown University

Nancy Boxill
Union Institute & University

Myriam Chancy
University of Cincinnati

Richard Couto
University of Richmond

Vicki Crawford
Morehouse College

Toni Gregory†
Union Institute & University

Sylvia Hill
University of the District of Columbia

Norma Jenckes
Union Institute & University

Lois Melina*
Union Institute & University

Karsten Piep*
Union Institute & University

Larry Preston
Union Institute & University

Andrea Scarpino
Union Institute & University

John Shook
George Mason University
University at Buffalo

George Shulman
New York University

Richard Shusterman
Florida Atlantic University

Georgia Sorenson
University of Maryland

MaryAnn Steger*
Union Institute & University

Christopher Voparil**
Union Institute & University

* Member, Journal Advisory Committee

**Chair, Journal Advisory Committee

† Late Founding Board Member

GUIDELINES

Submit online (preferred) at www.unionpenumbra.org
or in email to penumbra.editor@myunion.edu.

Penumbra invites scholarship of all kinds, creative nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and visual works that address any aspect of the journal's mission and scope. We seek submissions from graduate students, junior scholars, and emerging artists, in addition to more established critical and creative voices. All submissions undergo double-blind peer review. We do not accept previously published work. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but the editors should be notified immediately upon a work's acceptance for publication elsewhere.

Submitting Online

Author name(s), email(s), and brief bio(s) should be included in the Author Comment box on the submission page. The author name(s) should not appear anywhere on the manuscript in compliance with our double-blind peer-review process.

Submitting in Email

Submit two Word attachments. In the first document, include the title of the work, author name(s), email(s), brief bio(s), and a 200-250 word article abstract in the first document. In a second document, submit the article for consideration. Author name(s) should not appear anywhere on the manuscript in compliance with our double-blind peer-review process.

Scholarly Submissions

Submit as Microsoft Word compatible documents (do not submit PDFs). Article manuscripts should be double-spaced and between 4,000 to 6,000 words in length. Please follow MLA guidelines for in-text citations and bibliography.

Creative Submissions

Submissions may include a maximum of five poems or flash prose works; a single

short story or novel chapter of no more than 6,000 words; or creative non-fiction prose of up to 6,000 words. Submit as Microsoft Word compatible documents (do not submit PDFs). Interdisciplinary text-based works in non-traditional formats are also acceptable. Please query the editors at penumbra.editor@myunion.edu regarding text-based projects that do not meet our submission requirements.

Images and Diagrams in Manuscripts

All line diagrams and photographs are termed "Figures" and should be referred to as such in the manuscript. They should be numbered consecutively and presented in a form suitable for immediate reproduction (i.e. not requiring redrawing). They should be saved at 300 dpi and should be no smaller than 5 inches (130mm) on the shortest side. Images should be submitted as .jpg or .eps files. All figures should have short descriptive captions typed on a separate sheet.

Visual Art/Interdisciplinary Arts Projects

All visual artwork and proposed artists' projects must be submitted electronically. A proposal for an artist's project or portfolio should comprise a one-page written description accompanied by ten or fewer uploaded sample images. Also acceptable are hyperlinks to an online gallery of up to ten images, or up to three videos/multimedia pieces. Projects that do not meet these requirements will also be considered. Please contact the co-editors regarding artists' projects that do not meet our submission requirements. If an original artwork for Penumbra is proposed, samples of comparable work should be submitted along with a one-page written proposal. All work must be submitted electronically. Please contact the co-editors if you have concerns about submission format.

IN THIS ISSUE

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---|
| Gariot P. Louima | 9 | Editor's Note |
| John Giordano | 12 | The Art of Interdependence:
Autonomy, Heteronomy, and Social Support in
Shannon Jackson's Criticism of Contemporary Art
Social Practices |
| Kate Reavey | 28 | Beyond Colonization:
Polyphony, Alterity, Humor and Wisdom in
Louise Erdrich's <i>Four Souls</i> |
| J.M. Parker | 43 | The Day Trip |
| Lawrence Karn | 48 | Tokyo Tropes in Nebulas and Neighborhoods:
Five Locations from Eternity to Home in Tokyo |
| Timothy Charles Hall | 54 | The Honor of God with Kierkegaard:
A Kierkegaardian View of the Play <i>Becket</i> |
| Thomas Wallingford | 66 | Aether |
| E.M. Comiskey | 78 | Steak and Wine |
| Greta Enriquez | 82 | Friendship in Frankenstein:
An Artistotelian-Thomistic Analysis |

CONTRIBUTORS

E.A. COMISKEY is an award winning blogger, nationally syndicated columnist and author of the forthcoming novel *More Things in Heaven and Earth* (Nuff Said, 2016).

GRETA ENRIQUEZ is pursuing a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Union Institute & University. She works as a mental health therapist in Massachusetts and New Jersey.

JOHN GIORDANO's projects have been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation and other national and regional arts funders. He is a professor of practice at Merrimack College and previous co-editor of *Penumbra*.

TIMOTHY HALL is director of academics of Thales Academy, one of the largest private school management organizations in North Carolina. His recent research on the philosophy of Kierkegaard and non-cognitive education was published in *A Companion to Kierkegaard* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

LAWRENCE KARN's photographs have been published in *Tokyo Journal*,

Business Week, Japan's *Metropolis*, and as environmental awareness billboards in Paris, and in a Rail Italia advertising campaign. He is Tokunin Koshi (Specially Assigned Lecturer) at Otsuma University International Center.

J.M. PARKER teaches literature and creative writing as an assistant professor at the University of Salzburg. His fiction has appeared in *Frank*, *Gertrude*, *ISLE*, *Harrington Fiction Quarterly*, *Segue* and other journals, and was selected for inclusion in Lethe Press's *Best Gay Stories 2015*.

KATE REAVEY's books of poetry include *Through the East Window* (Sagittarius), *Trading Posts* (Tangram), and *Too Small to Hold You* (Pleasure Boat). She is currently teaching at The Evergreen State College.

THOMAS WALLINGFORD is a Denver-area writer and poet. He is a contributor to *303 Magazine* and his work has been featured in *The Crucible*, a publication of the university of Colorado.

Editor's Note

The need to translate experience into something resembling adequate language is the writer's blessing or the writer's disease, depending on your point of view. That's why Whitman isn't sure if what sings to him is a demon or a bird. If it is indeed a symptom of a problem, of life not having been really lived until it is narrated, at least that's a condition that winds up giving real gifts to others. The pleasure of recognizing a described world is no small thing.

—Mark Doty, *The Art of Description: World Into Words*

“[A]ll perception,” writes the poet Mark Doty in *The Art of Description*, “might be said to be tentative, an opportunity for interpretation, a guessing game.”

Later, after describing a scene in Perry Grove, New York, Doty laments that his words don't “come anywhere close to evoking the actual visual or auditory experience.” These words remind me of the inadequacy of the written word to fully capture what it means to be. Doty continues:

Critical theory is full of discussion of the inadequacies of speech, and it's true that words are arbitrary things, assigned to their objects in slippery ways, and that we cannot rely on words to convey to another person what it is like to be ourselves.

“What proof do we have,” writes Craig Morgan Teicher, “that / when I say mousse, you do not think / of a stop sign?”

Yet, speech acts—requests, warnings, invitations, promises, apologies, predictions,

stories and criticism—provide us manifold opportunities to explore, understand, and contend with all manner of social circumstances. “Writing as practice,” says Natalie Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones*, can “help you penetrate your life and become sane.” While Goldberg does not define what she means by “sane” in that introductory essay, I interpret the word in much the same way I have come to understand what the novelist Toni Morrison intended when, in her 1993 Nobel lecture, she says: “Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.”

§§

This issue of *Penumbra* includes three critical articles, three short stories, and a photo essay. The work comes to us from scholars in academe and out, established and emerging writers and artist in the U.S. and abroad, individuals using traditional and experimental styles to explore the power of critical and creative expression.

In his essay “The Honor of God with Kierkegaard: A Kierkegaardian View of the Play *Becket*,” Timothy Charles Hall examines reading of Jean Anouilh’s play *Becket* through Søren Kierkegaard’s stages of existence. John Giordano’s “The Art of Interdependence: Autonomy, Heteronomy and Social Support in Shannon Jackson’s Criticism of Contemporary Art

Social Practices” looks at the connections performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson makes between the culture of “inter-dependence” that drives theatrical productions and a similar ethic she identifies in participatory social practices that are on the rise in the visual artworld. “Beyond Colonization: Polyphony, Alterity, Humor and Wisdom in Louise Erdrich’s *Four Souls*,” a work of literary criticism by the poet Kate Reavey, examines the ways in which Erdrich’s storytelling engages the complexities of self, community, and the continual and her characters’ efforts to “practice” the kind of “freedom” Foucault’s ethics demand.

Thomas Wallingford’s “Aether” is a work of speculative fiction in which a man struggles with solitude and his own identity while lost in space. J.M. Parker’s “The Day Trip” is the story of a visit to divorced parents in Israel during the Antifada. In Elizabeth Comiskey’s “Steak and Wine,” a young couple believes they’ve made all of the right choices, and a downed economy changes their lives dramatically.

While all of the criticism and fiction appearing in this issue were approved for publication following a double-blind review, “Tokyo Tropes in Nebulas and Neighborhoods: Five Locations from Eternity to Home in Tokyo” is a solicited work that scholar and photographer Lawrence Karn graciously shared for publication in this issue. We found the images to e

stunning. Coupled with Karn's brief essay, "Tokyo Tropes in Nebulas and Neighborhoods" adds a perspective that found in any of the other pieces we include in this issue.

As our founding editors write in the first issue of this journal two years ago, *Penumbra*, true to its mission, is interdisciplinary—not just across academic or scholarly silos but across a landscape of perspectives and backgrounds. That is true academic freedom—the pursuit and exchange of ideas and scholarship for their own sake.

— GARIOT P. LOUIMA

The Art of Interdependence: Autonomy, Heteronomy, and Social Support in Shannon Jackson's Criticism of Contemporary Art Social Practices

Shannon Jackson's critical work in performance studies has led her to a vital connection between the professional "inter-dependence" exhibited by those who make theatrical productions successful and a similar ethic that drives much of the participatory social practice art that is on the rise in the visual artworld. *Post-studio* visual art practices that enlist non-artist participants in performance-oriented statements aimed at social change have emerged in earnest since the de-materialization experiments of the 1960s when visual art's autonomy and commodification, and its tendency to reinforce art's insular history, would be challenged by artists looking for alternatives to modernism. Near the beginning of *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, Jackson asks, "[m]uch has been made recently of the 'social turn' in contemporary art...[but] what exactly does it mean? How do we know we are in the presence of 'social practice' in art?" (Jackson 11). As visual art has become increasingly conceptual over the twentieth century, and as much conceptual art is also political in its intent, such questions of art's nature are hardly unusual. However, Jackson's inclination as a critic interested in the social efficacy of participatory visual art practices tilts this question away from art's ontology in the direction of its efficacy in realizing social change.

This paper situates Jackson's interest in participatory art as a backdrop – a theatrical set, of sorts – for a discussion of the ways in which art and theater reveal the inherent

John Giordano holds a B.S. in Studio Art and Art History from Skidmore College, MFA in Painting from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies from the Union Institute & University. He has shown his artwork and community-based projects in galleries and museum across the country, and his projects have been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Andy Warhol Foundation, among others. Giordano is a professor of practice of Interdisciplinary Arts at Merrimack College and founding co-editor of *Penumbra*.

sociality of human association beyond the context of the arts. The inherent interdependence Jackson sees as fundamental to collective art processes thus reflects the way people more generally rely on each other to form functioning communities. In contrast to arguments centered on whether art in a social vein qualifies as *art*, Jackson prefers to focus on participatory and other collaborative social practices that successfully reveal art to be constituted by active social structures operating behind the scenes of both art and everyday life. Jackson writes, “[b]y selecting sites that use performative structures to provoke reflection on larger systemic assemblages, my hope is to raise the stakes of aesthetic conviviality...[and] place social systems in the foreground of analysis despite the fact that they usually occupy the background of experience” (Jackson 6). Jackson thus understands that a connection between the highly visible convivial spirit that drives certain participatory visual art social practices is enmeshed with a less explicit system of social interdependence that nonetheless shapes those art practices, forms of social interdependence that operate not only in the highly orchestrated spaces of theater or art, but in the acknowledged and unacknowledged social systems that drive everyday life.

Jackson understands performance studies to offer necessary support for a theoretical frame for social practice visual art. This notion is particularly important to consider here because it serves as an embodiment of her broader claim that one entity needs another entity in order to flourish. Just as a theater production cannot be successful without the understanding that one agent extends their perspective in order to fill a gap in other agent’s view, in the context of institutions the field of performance studies offers a necessary extradisciplinary perspective that augments emerging participatory social practice visual art discourse. Epistemological and political problems emerge here because such a way of understanding human interaction is grounded in a claim that all agents are limited in what they can know, which in turn, affects how agents interact with others to form social configurations.

Foregrounding the idea that interdependence drives human association -- as this claim is contextualized in performance-oriented art -- is a compelling way to situate a more fundamental discussion of the relationship between the individual’s autonomy and the inevitable limits to that autonomy in regard to the individual’s dependence on the social group. Just as Jackson sees the individual to need the support of its wider social network, and just as performance studies serves an illuminating supporting mechanism for social practice art, I claim that the strength of Jackson’s claims can be bolstered if her ideas are brought into greater contact with feminist philosophy that functions at the intersection of epistemology and political thought. I contend that Iris Marion Young and Shannon Sullivan’s framing of situatedness in the context of inclusion politics and pragmatist transactional epistemology can further foreground the idea that social limitations are actually generative contingencies that drive social cooperation. In order to contextualize Jackson’s understanding that human limitations are generative, I look to

Young and Sullivan because their works intersect with each other in challenging a primary assumption of feminist standpoint theory that sees marginalization to engender privileged standpoints. Taken together, these two thinkers take a positive view of the notion of limited standpoints. Rather than rehearse an association between marginalization and privilege, all agents are understood to be necessarily dependent because they are limited in what they can fully know. In other words, feminist epistemology is helpful in strengthening Jackson's claim, but only if the notion that an agent's limited point of view is not seen as something that provides greater insight than other points of view. By questioning whether standpoint theory needs to jettison privileged points of view altogether, Jackson shows that the notion of human limitation understood through the critique of disability supports her claim that social systems of interdependence are incontestable across art and life. I make the claim that Iris Marion Young's conception of the value of limited standpoints in the process of developing stronger publics through deliberative democratic processes and Shannon Sullivan's pragmatist feminist epistemology both show how uncertainty and limitations bear out positively in social groups. Young and Sullivan help advance Jackson's interest in reframing disability as a vehicle for social interdependence when Jackson's claim for already existing systemic support is understood in a political-epistemological context. The intersection of disability studies and standpoint theory foreground an ethic of *care* circulating through art and wider social configurations.

THE INHERENT "PROSTHETICS" OF SOCIAL LIFE AND ART

Instead of solely promoting convivial exchange, Jackson insists that social practice art must promote interdependence among participants and situate that interdependence for the purpose of engaging groups of participants in critical actions that either bring attention to inequality or more directly ameliorate a social problem. The desire to develop a more critical form of participatory art that distinguishes rigorous forms of conviviality from projects that do little more than generate a party-like atmosphere among like-minded individuals stems from the propensity of some social practice art to reinforce the values of homogeneous communities rather than challenge social inequities. Jackson's contribution to social practice discourse centers on her insistence that conviviality can operate in effective social practice art projects as long as it accounts for "larger systemic assemblages" of interdependence that embody a necessary ethic of dependence understood as mutual, rather than charitable or celebratory -- lateral rather than top-down. This view rests on the claim that a critical understanding of such practices depends on the recognition that artistic production is only possible when individuals can depend on the support of those whose points of view or skill sets inevitably extend beyond those of the other associated social actors. Mechanisms such as *props*, *stage-hands*, *supporting actors* and *backdrops*, take on new meaning when they are applied beyond

culture of support that runs deep in theater and performance settings. Thus an ethic of interdependence intrinsic to the theatrical culture it draws from emerges for Jackson as the most accurate way to understand the nature of visual art social practices that attempt to address social concerns.

In a vein of thought provoked by a feminist political thinker such as Nancy Fraser, Jackson asks if the rhetoric of liberal self-governance elides the supporting mechanisms affecting even the most seemingly autonomous social actors. Questions of art's autonomy are thus enmeshed with epistemological problems centered on the individual's limitations because there is only so much any one individual can conceivably know about the social milieu in which they find themselves embedded. Some important problems inside the discourse of visual art social practice emerge as a result of Jackson's extradisciplinary (performance studies) view of the visual arts. Jackson asks if the performative turn in visual art demands that art's stubborn autonomy must give way to a more explicitly conceptualized sociality. In this view, theater cannot successfully function if its agents act autonomously. Where art discourse since the rise of modernity has associated artworks and their appreciation with a high degree of autonomy that frees artistic production from other value systems, Jackson emphasizes a contrary sentiment that has been expanding over the past century – art's heteronomous relation to other interwoven value systems upon which it both depends and offers support. Jackson thus takes a strong stand against a view of art that demands the sort of artistic-political autonomy that originated with enlightenment liberalism. Instead of understanding the political actor, or the artwork and its viewer, as atomized agents, Jackson aligns herself with a heteronomous conception of art that recognizes the contingency of interwoven standpoints in both social practice art and in social relations beyond art.

Because she understands such interdependence to stem from the fact that agents can only act as far as their experiential standpoints allow, Jackson borrows from feminist epistemology and the discourse of disability studies to make the claim that art and life are grounded by the notion of social “prosthetics,” meaning that supportive structures surround every individual, whether those individuals are perceived as lacking normative abilities. The precariousness resulting from human limitation serves as a primary impulse leading to social reliance, thus Jackson considers how contingent social practices in art can aim to reform or renew wider social institutions. Unlike performance fields, visual art has been slow to recognize the infrastructure supporting its artists, artists who are often elevated for their fierce independence and singular perspectives; invoking a feminist and disability perspective brings social support out of the shadows and into the primary action of art and life. There are important political and epistemological implications of Jackson's notion of systemic support. Contingency and situatedness are key features of “social assemblages” because she believes that art, like wider social experience, is inherently cooperative; people often want to find agreement even if they cannot claim to

know the world in the same way, and they want to address problems together within the social configurations they comprise.

A relationship between disability and the limitation of individual standpoints affirms for Jackson why the notion of support in art and life should be valued rather than dismissed as a sign of weak ethics or superficial political actions. Questions raised around the primacy of aesthetic autonomy destabilize the way autonomy normatively adheres to criticality in dominant art discourse. In contrast, aesthetic heteronomy is then not so much a deliberate move in art practice toward the melioration of social problems as much as it is an ever-present phenomenon of human social experience inside and outside the confines of art. Such an explication brings this discussion closer to the relevance Jackson's work has to rethinking the epistemological and political ground of more complex and critical social practices and the wider everyday world they refuse to separate themselves from. Jackson sees the relationship between the person perceived as disabled and their environment to further affirm her case for the inextricable heteronomy of art and life. In Jackson's sense, heteronomy is understood as the deep support systems within which individuals cannot avoid being enmeshed regardless of whether they perceive themselves as highly autonomous or not.

Drawing on the work of Vivian Sobchack, Jackson notes that the way the disabled person traverses her environment, "expose[s] the formal and systemic contingencies of environments that take certain embodiments for granted" (Jackson 5). Contingencies, therefore, are not limited to the disabled even if their ability to navigate the world is amplified by their dependence on social and technological "prostheses." In this view, so-called abled people not only take their abilities for granted, they also tend to miss the fact that supporting tools help them navigate the world as well. Jackson goes on to say, "[d]isability comes forward not only as a factor through which identities are 'othered' but more radically as an impulse to reckon with human contingency in 'the systemic whole'....[As] Sobchack reminds us, it can be tricky to expose systemic contingency precisely because enabling systems often go unregistered in the moment that we use them" (Ibid.). Jackson takes this point further by noting, "citizens need reminders that bodily capacity can be stopped short at any time" (Ibid). This is because "normative spatial motion disavows the fragile contingency of bodily ability" (Ibid. 6). Sobchack's own words help elucidate this point further:

As we go about our various projects in the world, in so far as we have learned to use them, we incorporate our prostheses and tools and—unless there's a function problem or they become of interest 'in themselves'—they are experienced as subordinate to our focus on our goals and projects; that is, they are generally the ground of our intentional movement and acts, not the figure. (Sobchack quoted in Jackson 6)

Heteronomy emerges as an intrinsic value of social practices (and perhaps all art) because even the most seemingly normative experiences are propped up by what is perceived to be a neutral environment but is nonetheless a support structure teeming with multiple vantage points that extend beyond the individual's own limitations. She writes,

The social world is in fact a large systemic prosthesis for the normative bodies its structures support. If, however, this social prosthesis is subordinate into our focus and goals, then it requires a break or deviation for us to remember that it is there...when everyday objects are not in reach...we register the contingency of the 'ground' that supports our everyday acts of self-figuration. (Jackson 6)

The experience of those deemed disabled thus helps others *see* the supporting ground that is ordinarily taken for granted. In other words, the limited perspective of the abled person is opened up in such a way that the normative status of the everyday life environment for that person is put into question. As Sobchack stresses, the very act of riding in a car makes life more fully navigable whether one's mobility is limited or not. Recognizing this dependence on supporting mechanisms thus destabilizes commonly held perceptions of "figure" and "ground" when the meaning of this relationship between person and environment shifts away from that of an autonomous individual who takes the supporting environment for granted to that of an always-fragile individual whose abilities are continually supported by surrounding tools. The aggregate of contingent people and the apparatuses that support them in the wider environment thus constitute "systemic assemblages." Perhaps the most important aspect of a social assemblage is the dependent connections one has with other people. Jackson thus claims that, "a necessary sphere is one where interdependence is not imagined in compromised terms or where a recognition of heteronomous personhood comes only after grudging acceptance." Instead, she proposes, "supporting acts that sustain and are sustained by social actors ... avow the relational systems on which a conception of freedom rests. It is to make a self from, not despite, contingency" (Ibid. 36).

A connection emerges here between the dependency any person has regardless of ability on the wider social assemblage it constitutes and is constituted by, and the notion that its contingent relationship to the wider environment perhaps drives an illusory desire for self-governance. Jackson's art criticism takes on political dimensions while raising the point that stubborn Western epistemological assumptions potentially thwart human freedom. The relevance of the move to see the art experience as an assemblage of artist, artwork, environment, and (often participating) art public, on contingent terms, is important here because this particular moment in the development of twentieth century

art emergence with concurrent feminist epistemologies.¹ Mid-century participatory art forms that held everyday life in high regard may at first glance appear curious as a context that reflects the seismic political and epistemological recalibration that takes place in the twentieth century west, but as Jackson writes,

It is worth remarking that Alan Kaprow and fellow Happenings and Fluxus artists used the language of ‘assemblage’ to describe their unsettling of figure and ground, object and support, art and life. The perpetual pursuit of autonomy continues to animate a theory of democracy as well as a critical concept of aesthetics, the bounded referents for autonomous personhood and autonomous art become less stable and more permeable in contemporary critical imagining. (Ibid. 35)

Thus the move in art away from gallery objects and toward the collaborative and performative signals the unraveling of “bounded referents for autonomous personhood and autonomous art.” If “contemporary critical imagining” means giving up the hope for a rational, and thus, autonomous individual in favor of a socially constituted (interdependent) self, a self that operates not unlike a social artwork, Jackson wants to emphasize that this move also means that such imagining stands against “the discourses [that] raise autonomous personhood as a self-governing idea against the heteronomously continuing disabled citizen, undocumented migrant, or welfare mother” (Ibid 36).

Crucial to a transformed political and epistemological imaginary then is the recognition made by Nancy Fraser and other feminist critics² who, as Jackson explains,

argue that a discourse of dependency simultaneously allows certain citizens to imagine themselves as independent and “self-governing.” The perception of autonomy is once again achieved through a kind of disavowal, a disavowal of the tax breaks, military pensions, public schools, wifely labor, house-keep-

1 A relationship between the emergence of collective artworks and feminist epistemology also has to take into account the emergence of the notion of the socially constructed self in twentieth century philosophy and social thought. Subsequent adjacent thinking in philosophy and psychology follows Emil Durkheim’s understanding that society shapes the individual. See George Herbert Mead’s *Mind, Self and Society: From a Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*; the notion of the social self runs through John Dewey’s entire oeuvre. See especially, *Reconstruction in Philosophy, Democracy and Education*, as well as, *Knowing and the Known* with Arthur Bentley; Mikhail Bakhtin explores the concepts of the “dialogical imagination” and “heteroglossia” in his literary philosophy. See *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*; in developmental psychology, see Lev Vygotsky’s *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

2 For a comprehensive account of texts that cover the politics of unacknowledged support and social marginalization in Nancy Fraser, Linda Gordon, Wendy Brown, Gwendolyn Mink, Mimi Abramovitz and Theda Skocpol, see note 34 in Chapter 1 of Shannon Jackson’s *Social Works*.

ers, off-shoring, and capitalist alienation that allows certain persons to believe themselves to be unfettered and individually responsible for their private success. (Ibid.)

Thus, the disavowal of systemic support allows the seemingly self-governed person to perceive a sense of autonomy only because they push the supporting mechanisms they rely on into the background of life to the point that these mechanisms become imperceptible. Jackson's performance studies lens helps foreground that support in recognition of the "staged management" that allows theatrical productions to succeed. For example, actors may occupy the central point in the theatrical production, but the infrastructure that supports those actors is generally perceptible; few would contend that the actor has achieved success in regard to a performance individually. Yet the public perception of the visual arts has been slow to recognize the infrastructure supporting its artists. Contrary to this, it is not uncommon to perceive the success of the visual artist as individually obtained because the distance between the artist, artwork and audience are so pronounced. In theater, there is general consideration of the importance of dramaturges or stagehands; yet these kinds of vital points of view rarely enter into the common conception of the success of the visual art even when curators and dealers play a clear role in the development of the artist. Jackson urges a wider understanding that even the most prominent features of social (art) assemblages have limited abilities and limited points of view contributing to the success of the configuration. This recognition brings out some vital epistemological and political problems that can be worked through when social art assemblages are understood in the context of emergent epistemologies in the context of democratic processes.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL ASSEMBLAGES

I want to now shift the focus of this discussion of contingent points of view and the constitution of social assemblages by connecting Jackson with Iris Marion Young and Shannon Sullivan – two thinkers with whom she shares common ground. All three address the topic of standpoint theory and its relationship to the perception of disability, yet Young and Sullivan proclaim more explicitly than Jackson that feminist epistemology has to renounce its claims for privileging the standpoints of the marginalized. Bringing such a perspective to the foreground advances Jackson's claim that purported disability opens up greater recognition of inherent support systems impacting all people, not because Sobchack's privilege reveals the limits of those who are assigned normative physical or mental status, but because the partiality of one perspective necessarily engages with other standpoints in order to engender a process of mutual social constitution.

Young and Jackson both identify feminist epistemology as a likely source for better understanding social configurations. Young's perspective comes out of political theory

aimed at the inclusion of marginal voices in democratic processes, a view that only partially intersects with Shannon Sullivan's contemporary feminist pragmatism. Both make a similar claim that feminist standpoint theory provides a logical frame for understanding and engendering more equal social configurations. Both focus attention not only on how these configurations come into existence, but also on the ways in which these social assemblages best operate when the distinction between individual standpoints is understood in relation to the interests of other standpoints and the wider environmental conditions that shape them. Importantly, both Sullivan and Jackson see limitations in the primary argument that has arisen from the standpoint theory originally proposed by such figures including Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, Nancy Hartsock and Patricia Hill Collins, limitations that need attention in order for standpoint theory to better articulate the generative potential of limited viewpoints.³

While the possibility of objective knowledge drives the feminist epistemological conversation that brought about an ethos of situated knowledge in western thought in conjunction with second-wave feminism, Young and Sullivan, as should become evident, are less concerned with questions of objectivity than the others. Young provides a good overview of the concerns of standpoint theorists when she notes the tension *and* potential of "situated knowledge" in the work of the primary contributors for feminist standpoint theory:

Writers such as Donna Haraway, Lorraine Code, Sandra Harding and Ismay Barwell have criticized what Haraway calls a 'god's eye' conception of the process of attaining reliable knowledge, which assumes that there is a standpoint transcending the particularities of history and social position from which the truth can be ascertained. They theorize instead what Haraway calls 'situated knowledges', which I interpret as a conception of objectivity as constructed from the partial and situated perspectives of differently positioned social actors. My argument applies to this feminist epistemology to the knowledge and judgment that ideally ought to result from inclusive democratic processes. (Young "Situated" 20-21)

Instead, when they put value on the notion of situated knowledges, they qualify that value on the grounds that political and epistemological concerns should be directed at

3 For more on feminist epistemology see Sandra Harding's *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives and The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* and Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature and When Species Meet*; Nancy Hartsock's "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism"; Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

the better functioning of social groups, the possibility of which depends on a multiplicity of lateral perspectives put into use in the process of forging equitable social associations.

Each takes a pragmatist approach to testing the limits of certain points of view and the truth claims advanced by such positions. As Young puts it, “[a]long the lines of the Deweyan understanding of democracy, the democratic process ideally should be a formal inquiry and the results a kind of knowledge” (Ibid. 21). Young goes on to explain, “individuals have particular knowledge that arises from experience in their social position, and those social positioning also influence the interests and assumptions they bring to inquiry. All positionings are partial with respect to the inquiry” (Ibid. 25). Sullivan’s own vantage point, one that is even more distinctly pragmatist than Young’s, comes out of a phenomenological and epistemological critique of identity as identity is manifested in the transactional body, a view that leads her to contextualize individual standpoints as part of the many “flourishing transactions between organic bodies in the world” (Sullivan 10). This advances Dewey’s *transactionalism* -- the post-epistemological notion that all entities, people included, of a wider environment are mutually entangled and co-constitutive. Normative epistemology would recognize these features of environment as separate entities, but a transactional epistemology see them to shape and define – that is, to co-constitute – each other. Young in a different but complimentary move attends to the relationship between democratic processes as a crucible for the development of positionality. Where Young focuses on the relationship between positionality and the development of thriving and just democratic processes for the purpose of inculcating a more inclusive social body, Sullivan takes this further to say that “[r]ejecting the notion that humans can attain a ‘God’s eye’ point of view does not mean, however, that one must accept judgmental relativism” (Ibid. 10). Where Harding and others locate feminist epistemology on questions of objectivity, Young and Sullivan are less inclined to believe questions of situated objectivity are particularly salient unless they make situated knowledges directly useful to democratic flourishing. They take the rejection of the “God’s eye” view as an opportunity to consider how situated knowledge impacts the way communities are formed, and how they can be made more just when the hope for objective truth outside the individual’s perspective is dropped.

Sullivan and Young thus contend that a step in this process requires the modification of a central assumption of standpoint theory. Where figures such as Harding, Hartsock and Collins promote the notion that marginal standpoints provide epistemological privilege to those marginalized by dominant groups, Young questions the usefulness of this notion when she writes:

By pointing out how the standpoint of those in less privileged positions can reveal otherwise unnoticed bias and partiality I do not mean to suggest, as have some standpoint theorists, that people in less advantaged social positions are

'epistemologically privileged.' They too are liable to bias and self-regard in overstating the nature of situations, misunderstanding their causes, or laying blame in the wrong places. (Young "Situated" 27)

Sullivan concurs on this point when she ponders how Harding can claim that, "there is no Archimedean point of absolute infallibility" (Sullivan 137), yet simultaneously stand by the claim that "[u]nlike men, whose view of the social relations of patriarchal society is distorted by their position as 'master,' women have a privileged perspective on reality because they are marginalized...thus their perspective can provide the starting point for accounts of knowledge that are undistorted by gender loyalties" (Ibid. 134). For both Young and Sullivan, all points of view come with limitations, and therefore, distortions are pervasive; nobody in particular is free from the potential of blind spots or bias. Therefore, flourishing as a social assemblage requires the lateralization of value placed on points of view. But rather than dismiss this lateralization as relativism, the ethic of care, that is, the desire to be cooperative, drives agents to recognize the limits of their own perspectives and thus enlist useful perspectives from associated (and co-constituted) others.

Putting situatedness in this way draws out the generative dynamics of collapsing the hierarchy of positionality. From her pragmatist perspective, Sullivan puts it in these terms: "[t]ruth can be achieved only through transaction with one's physical, cultural, political and other environments because there is no self apart from the world in which it exists. Humans are not set apart from an independent reality as detached spectators, but are always already participants in a world that is in part shaped by them." She goes on to say, from the point of view of the pragmatist conception of truth, "something becomes true when it encourages flourishing...when it promotes...the enlargement of life's meaning and the growth of experience through enriched transactions with the world" (Ibid. 143). Yet the process of validating truth claims comes with the qualification that "obligates one to examine and update current truths if they no longer serve the interests and needs" (Ibid 145). Doing so, then, requires the participation of associated others who work across their differences.

Difference can be approached with an ethic of cooperation that values thoughtful communication. Along these lines, the process of examining and updating truth claims leads Young to recognize that

Only [by] pooling the situated knowledge of all social positions can positions produce such social knowledge" because "[s]peaking across difference in a context of public accountability often reduces mutual ignorance about one another's situations, or misunderstandings of one another's values, intentions and perceptions and gives everyone the enlarged thought necessary to come to more reasonable and fairer solutions to problems. (Young "Situated" 28)

Such accountability – in the form of sharing and processing situated knowledge – thus

serves as a form of social recalibration as long as those who lack (political) visibility are given the right to speak, and as long as others are committed to listening. Whether this “gives everyone the enlarged thought necessary” is hard to prove beyond the possibility of engendering inclusion if such values are put into practice because “narrative exchanges give reflective voice to situated experiences and help affinity groupings give an account of their own individual identities in relation to their social positioning and their affinities with others” (Young “Inclusion” 73). Narrative exchange emerges for Young as the primary vehicle for “pooling...situated knowledges” for the purpose of bringing justice to difference (Young “Inclusion” 117).

Returning to Jackson’s interest in disability as a position from which to better understand the way inherent systems of support, Sullivan’s transactional account of social groupings sharpens Jackson’s use of Vivian Sobchack’s account of disability. Jackson writes, “If normative spatial motion disavows the fragile contingency of bodily ability, then citizens need reminders that bodily capacity can be stopped short at any time.” This point is easily illustrated by the kind of confrontation to bodily capacity a broken elevator presents to the mobile person. Discourse on disability offers to defamiliarize the normative environment in order to “expose the formal and systemic contingencies of environments that take certain embodiments for granted” (Jackson 5). In turn, as Sullivan points out, the work of Susan Wendell shows:

that disability is ‘socially constructed,’ by which she means that ‘the biological and social are interactive in creating disability.’ According to Wendell, the biological and social are ‘interactive’ with respect to (dis)ability in two important senses. First, social factors ‘interact’ with bodies to create their health, illness, and levels of functioning. And second, social arrangements can make almost any biological condition that was not a disability into one by making that condition relevant to a social situation, and vice versa. (Sullivan 21)

For Jackson, Sobchack’s observations show why our (social) tools fail to be foregrounded in our experience unless a bodily challenge forces such (social) prostheses into consciousness. As Sobchack writes,

As we go about our various projects in the world, in so far as we have learned to use them, we incorporate our prostheses and tools and unless there’s a function problem or they become of interest ‘in themselves’ they are experienced as subordinate to our focus on our goals and projects; that is they are generally the ground of our intentional movement and acts, not the figure. (Sobchack quoted in Jackson 6)

Sullivan would interpret this point to mean that the *figure* of the person and the *ground* of the environment (or tool) should be taken on equal terms. While Jackson and Sob-

chack perhaps give greater attention to the “grounding” factors, Sullivan is inclined to bring caution to privileging one factor over the other. The point here is that the individual and the environment (including other people), shape each other, and therefore, should be understood laterally. Figure and ground need to be taken on more equal terms.

Jackson aims for a similar understanding when she foregrounds systemic support. As she puts it,

The social world is in fact a large systemic prosthesis for the normative bodies its structures support. If, however, this social prosthesis is subordinate into our focus and goals, then it requires a break or deviation for us to remember that it is there...When everyday objects are not in reach, we register the contingency of the ground that supports our everyday acts of self-figuration. (Jackson 6)

The interruption of a tool’s usefulness serves as the “break” that helps one see this support, which prompts recognition of Wendell’s point that “social arrangements can make almost any biological condition that was not a disability into one” (Wendell qtd. in Sullivan, 21). Young is helpful here in advancing Jackson’s claim for heteronomous systems of support operating across social configurations, a claim that aims to expose the fallacy of self-governance. She writes, [e]veryone comes to a political conflict with some biases, prejudices, blind spots, or stereotypes. Frequently in situations of political disagreement, one faction assumes they know what it is like for others” (Young, “Inclusion” 77). To restate, the perception of self-governance demands the omission that one’s perspective inherently limits their ability to see another’s standpoint to the point that the individual believes they can fully grasp the perspective of another. For Young, “[t]hrough narrative the outsiders may come to understand why the insiders value what they value and why they have the priorities they have” (Ibid. 75). On Sullivan’s terms, “story” or “narrative” is put in more phenomenological terms as a corporal and environmental transaction in which a false atomized self does not thwart the dependence of one’s point of view on other factors; the self is instead seen as committed to transacting with other points of view in order to overcome epistemological blind spots.

CONCLUSION

For Jackson, the discourse of ability serves to point out some vital problems with political and aesthetic autonomy, problems that foreground the limitations and opportunities of performance. Ability only becomes *dis*-ability when capability is constructed in terms of the perception of a generalized normative experience, thus inflating the rhetoric of dependence for those who do not meet normative criteria. Yet the critique of disability also reveals that even the perception of normative experience (the ability to navigate the physical and social world without support), actually requires inherent support structures that can be illuminated when the rhetoric of disability is applied back to purported nor-

mative capacities. Tools of everyday living – cars, computers, and *associated others* – can be made more opaque in regard to the way normative experience depends on such “prostheses.” Thus social practice artworks according to Jackson assume that dependence on the skills of others is necessary to the production’s success. Rather than disregard or designate support as the background labor that silently assists in the production of the traditional autonomous artwork, now the notion of the social prosthetic is foregrounded as inherent to any successful and vibrant social production or configuration.

In this account of art and the politics of dependence, personal success is only possible when others support the individual in ways that allow them to flourish. Mobility, a successful theatrical production, a social practice art project, or a thriving social configuration cannot come about unless the extent of an individual’s limits are enmeshed with other standpoints, which in turn, have their own limits. Standpoint theory, as it is extruded through Jackson’s performance perspective, Young’s politics of inclusion, and Sullivan’s epistemological/phenomenological transactionalism, is made to suggest that the acceptance of the limits of one’s standpoint needs to be “supported” by other standpoints in relation to the “staging” or “background” of social groupings and institutions.

Where these values operate in visual art social practices can be made more explicit is when such practices are put in conversation with the “staged management” of theater and its wider performance genres in order to attend to the “run crews” who make social life possible. Jackson echoes Sullivan and Young’s observations when she eschews the superiority of the performance studies lens in order to recognize its limits, and instead views it as a lateral tool for sharpening the systemic support structures of visual art. She nonetheless puts that performance perspective into narrative transaction with the values and disciplinary concerns of art. By sidelining claims for superior points of view, standpoint theory as Jackson, Sullivan and Young understand it, acknowledges the non-hierarchical nature of all standpoints. Yet as Young and Sullivan attest, such a move should not lead to accusations of a relativistic conception of truth because the transactional and narrative processes strive for parity that can only come about by recognizing the outer edges of a singular standpoint under *continual revision*. On this view, an ethical commitment to caring for others through cooperative communication aims at democratic exchange.

Collaborative and participatory visual art practices that strive for reordered social reconfigurations are now understood as dynamic assemblages of systemic support that inveigh against atomized accounts of political and aesthetic autonomy. The notion of self-governance as something apart from a process and ethic of social support appears less tenable when it is confronted by the intersecting claims of performance theory, visual art social practices, and the politics and epistemological problems of bodies and their environments. Critical conviviality as a feature of social practices is made sufficiently rigorous, as Jackson sets out to do, because the concept is freed from consensus building

and is thus aligned with a more critical transactional process that requires “reflective voice to situated experiences” and a commitment to listening to others without assuming that one can fully grasp one’s own or the standpoints of others.

Long-term conversations grounded in the limits and possibilities of individual, contingent perspectives offer political discourse a direction for imagining the ethos of political and ethical deliberations beyond the “staging” of art – transactions, deliberations, conversations – that can only come about in a culture of *acknowledged* mutual support. Doing so requires recognition of the ways in which standpoints result in both opportunities and limitations. Recognizing that social action requires the understanding that individuals are able to function as a result of undergirding support systems casts doubt on lingering conceptions of self-governance that more and more appear to rehearse hackneyed ideals of liberalism. The critical perspective of feminist standpoint theory, as it intersects with disability perspectives and feminist pragmatism, give a context for robust social practices in art that point to a generative way to think about broader political life as a form of mutual interdependence.

WORKS CITED

- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Cooley, Charles H. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner’s, 1902.
- Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education in The Middle Works: 1899 - 1924*. Edited by Jo A. Boydston. Vol. 9. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2008. Print.
- . *Knowing and the Known in The Later Works, 1925-1953*. Edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Vol. 2. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.
- . *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004.
- Harding, Sandra G., ed. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Harding, Sandra G. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women’s Lives*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- . *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. London: Free Association, 1991.
- Hartsock, Nancy. “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism.” In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, edited by San-

- dra G. Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1983. Print
- Jackson, Shannon. *Social Works Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Edited by Charles W. Morris. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Rose, Sheldon D. *Group Therapy with Troubled Youth: A Cognitive-Behavioral Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.
- Sobchack, Vivian. "Choreography for One, Two and Three Legs (A Phenomenological Meditation on Movements)." *Topoi* 24 (Spring 2005): 55-66.
- Sullivan, Shannon. *Living across and through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Edited by Michael Cole and Vera John-Stein. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Young, Iris M. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- . "Situated Knowledge and Democratic Discussions." In *Politics of Inclusion and Empowerment: Gender, Class, and Citizenship*, edited by John Anderson and Birte Siim, 19-35. Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Beyond Colonization: Polyphony, Alterity, Humor and Wisdom in Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls*

Louise Erdrich's novel *Four Souls* presents complex and sometimes surprising alliances. Her characters engage in a discourse well beyond that which can be read as a simple criticism of historical practices of allotment and land ownership. Rather than dichotomize good and evil—although elements of the latter loom large—Erdrich emphasizes relationships, in order to challenge perceptions of property, sexuality and colonization. In “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples,” Andrea Smith argues that “violence does not simply occur within the process of colonialism,” but that “colonialism is itself structured by the logic of sexual violence” (70). *Four Souls* not only highlights this structural reliance of colonization on sexual violence, but furthermore suggests that decolonization premised on a close attention to “alterity” potentially leads to sexual self-determination. *Four Souls* leads readers into complex engagement with such alterity through, for instance, its depictions of Nanapush, Fleur, Margaret, Fantan and other characters, who re-inhabit a realm of inter-relationships—not only with other humans but ancestor spirits and the plants/animals/habitats that sustain these relationships. Reading *Four Souls* in light of Giles Gunn's *The Culture of Criticism and The Criticism of Culture*, Michel Foucault's “Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” and Smith's “Not an Indian Tradition,” I examine the ways in which Erdrich's

Kate Reavey earned an M.A. in Poetry from U.C. Davis and is a candidate for the Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies at Union Institute & University. Her books of poetry include *Through the East Window*, *Trading Posts*, and *Too Small to Hold You*. She has taught English composition, literature, creative writing, and interdisciplinary courses at Peninsula College since 1993, and she is currently teaching for The Evergreen State College. In 2010, Reavey taught literature and creative writing in Florence, Italy as the WCCSA exchange professor.

storytelling engages the complexities of self, community, and the continual efforts her characters employ to “practice” the kind of “freedom” Foucault’s ethics demand.

Erdrich’s novel carries the dynamic interplay of history, language, culture, and human relationships such that the work itself creates an alterity that challenges traditional Western dichotomies between self and other, past and present, hero and oppressed. Thus, although Erdrich’s novel concurs with Smith’s assessments of “colonialism” being “structured by the logic of sexual violence,” *Four Souls* delves into the relationships that continue to be shaped by history and culture, so that the story can emerge from “Under the Ground” (the name of an important character in the novel, the mother of the first character whose name was “*Four Souls*”) with a resonance that provides a measure of hope, sustained by the potential for decolonization. This decolonization is premised on the polyphony of the novel itself, which is populated by a host of characters, including Fleur Pillager, who *says* very little but effects change through her actions. Fleur’s actions have been shaped by the ethics of her tribal, familial, and female powers. Erdrich is not creating a heroic or an anti-heroic ontology, but rather a human, and thus flawed model of co-existence. Despite their apparent flaws, each of the novel’s characters and each of its voices hold wisdom and potential for change—for a kind of “becom[ing]” the words of Nanapush describe. Douglas Andrew Barnim draws on this “becom[ing]” and presents an astute inquiry into trauma, its historical legacies, and Erdrich’s complex engagement with “becoming” in relation to “healing.” I depart from Barnim, however, in his suggestion that change is the same as progress. He explains that “*Four Souls* addresses the healing of the Ojibwe people through a reposition of identity in terms of returning to the land and an embrace of change—i.e. progress” (63). The word “progress” is too reminiscent of the settler-colonial approach toward indigenous peoples to portray the “embrace of change” (63) evident within the novel. Barnim explains that although “the hybrid identity is, in some cases, questionable as an interpretive lens through which to examine the history of a people that continue to be colonized” (65), he sees this lens as beneficial because it “offers a way of tracing the oscillation that Erdrich’s characters undergo in their search for identity” (65-66).

I concur with Barnim’s assessment that “Erdrich’s characters never possess static identities” and that they challenge readers to remain aware of the potential for healing through an “embrace of change” (63), yet I question his assertion that “they oscillate between cultural extremes” (66), because the idea of “oscillat[ing]” presents a dichotomy, a binary. His attention to Nanapush as one who “facilitates the narrative memory of Native trauma” (56) is astute, and his analysis opens with important, dynamic inquiries. However, when Barnim asserts that “Nanapush himself is a hybrid of the seemingly dichotomous cultures” and that Fleur is “a character symbolic of the Ojibwe” (56) these assertions present a fixity and an overgeneralization, which serve to undermine his otherwise useful ideas that focus on healing through culturally-determined means.

Neither can one person function as a “symbol” of an entire people, nor can a trickster narrator like Nanpush be accurately fixed as the “hybrid of” binaries. My challenge to the critical lens of “hybridity” within the context of Erdrich’s novel meets a useful rebuttal in the work of Summer Harrison, whose emphasis on hybridity depends upon the trickster identity. She explains that the trickster appears not only among the characters, such as Nanapush, but through the author and the reader, in a relational and dynamic way. Harrison explains that “the reader must hybridize both narrators’ accounts to understand Fleur’s attempt to define her own identity” (58). Such multiple occurrences and intersectional dynamics require the reader to become, as Harrison explains, “a trickster” in her or his own role, as the characters engage in dialogue with one another and with the reader. Barnim and Harrison both present useful inquiries into the dynamic nature of “self” within Erdrich’s novel and has therefore influenced this study in terms of my discussion of self-determination. The term has political as well as social, cultural, and literary importance.

American Indian¹ insistence on self-determination is evident in Erdrich’s novel, which depicts community as a multitude of human relationships, and elaborates on self- and other-sustaining functions of sexual intimacy, love, and marriage. Sexuality itself is not demonized but rendered through wit and humor as a complex set of relationships with self and other that has the power to create what can be “evil” (and is evident in historical contexts) yet also holds the potential for that which is *better* than good. Sexual relationships literally hold the power for creation, for healing, for a future to exist at all. In his “Ethics of the Concern for the Self,” Michel Foucault maintains that the “game” of power is premised always on “relationships.” He specifies his definition of “games” as “a set of rules by which truth is produced” (297). This is useful in light of understanding Nanapush, one of three narrators who deliver *Four Souls* to readers. Nanapush cuts through simplistic themes of private property, colonization, and oppression when he says that “we [humans] are dreams, blasts, shadows [...so that] this stub of a grain dealer’s pencil that moves across the page of paper is not real, either, and that the truth lies on the other side of even these words” (58). When “the set of rules” created by certain people negates the value of land except for its monetary price, and when those rules also include the commodification of women, the dynamic is no longer a “game” of “truth” finding, in Foucault’s terms. Foucault’s “concern for the self” before the concern “for others,” as a strategy toward ethical behavior, becomes useful in considering the multi-vocal experience of reading *Four Souls*, which requires paying close attention to relationships.

¹ Here American Indian is used, rather than Native American, because the reference is to self-determination, which has historical and legal relevance, particularly within the constructs of the naming of legislation, such as the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638).

Erdrich's narrative approach in *Four Souls* can be illuminated through Gunn's discussion of the "polyphonic" (131). As in Gunn's characterization of humanistic discourse, *Four Souls* illustrates that the extension of self to social and political spheres is implicit in the attention given to ethos, to the *character* one develops in order to engage others. Foucault cites Socrates as an example of such a character, who, as "a person who took proper care of himself would [...] be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others" (286). In Foucault's assertion that "care of the self is ethically prior [to care of others] in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior" we see the formation of some of the "rules" of a "game" in which "limiting and controlling" one's power is crucial. We also see a connection between *character* as a practice/result of *ethos* (ethics) and the polyphony of characters in *Four Souls* as they gain wisdom of "self" and of "other." The novel is premised upon the destruction and losses that resulted from contact, the transmittal of diseases, colonization, and the intended de-humanization of Native people. This includes not only the capture of lands but the intentional, planned, and often successful destruction of indigenous languages and cultural practices.

In the context of colonization, the very opposite dynamic of that which Foucault encourages was at play: rather than "limiting and controlling" power, the extension and advancement of power were the prerogatives. When Smith argues that "sexual violence is not simply a tool of patriarchy, but it is also a tool of colonialism and racism," she begins her discourse with a challenge to a dichotomous construction, not unlike the wisdom approach Erdrich has employed. Smith cites Susan Brownmiller's observation that rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (71) in order to problematize its overly simple "nothing more or less" much more than to challenge the question of "intimidation" and "fear." This simplification renders the statement "inadequate," according to Kimberle Crenshaw, whose analyses Smith discusses in order to emphasize "racism and classism" and to shed light on colonization as an embodiment of sexual violence. Further underscoring colonialism objectification of women, Smith cites Aime Césaire's concise, simplified definition, which is so pared down that even the word *equals* is replaced by the equal sign: "colonization='thingification'" (74). Correspondingly, in the still colonial or un-decolonized relationships between landscapes, other people, places, history, and culture depicted in *Four Souls*, that which is named as chattel (thingified) can be owned and thus mined for its value in the market economy. Erdrich's characters are embodied within the dynamic roles of humans who have been – in the case of Fleur Pillager and other women in the novel—colonized through marriage, and marriage in this context equaled the ownership not only of the woman's body, but of lands and bodies of water as well.

In nineteenth-century America, real-life counterparts to characters such as John James Mauser in Erdrich's novel sought to marry Native women order to *access land*. In depicting these marriages of expediency, *Four Souls* not only castigates the woman's loss

of her freedom, but the ecological destruction that followed, as thus acquired lands were frequently mined, for example. The families, the tribes, as well as other disenfranchised groups that have historically *not* had a voice in decisions of land ownership are given voice by Erdrich through characters, including Nanapush, in a polyphonic embodiment of community, culture, and inhabitation. When he asserts, in light of a turn toward what would become industrial agriculture, that “the stub of a grain dealer’s pencil that moves across the page of paper is not real [...] and that the truth lies on the other side of even these words” (58), Nanapush problematizes the literal, the written word as he takes a postmodern, polyphonic approach to ethics.

Foucault’s statement that the “Greeks problematized their freedom, and the freedom of the individual, as an ethical problem” has import for a return to “power, command” (286). It underscores that the “care of the self” is always in “complex relationships with others.” This is true for human connections, but as Erdrich points out, “others” include species such as trees and mammals. Such “care” required a diversity of approaches to living on the land rather than a single-minded attention to mining or clear-cut logging. After “settlement,” a combination of hunting, fishing, and horticulture, the lands and waterways were forced to sustain a single plan: farming. To make matters even worse, land was bought and sold with no attention to sustainable practices. In the words of Nanapush:

Land dwindled until there wasn’t enough to call a hunting territory. That was because we were supposed to learn to farm in the chimookomaan [white man’s] way, using toothed machines and clumsy, big horses to pull them. [...]

Just as the first of us had failed at growing or herding or plowing the fields, we were told we could sign a piece of paper and get money for our land, but that no one would take the land until we paid the money back. Mortgage, this was called. This piece of banker’s cleverness sounded good to many. I spoke against this trick, but who listened to old Nanapush? (80)

To be clear, Erdrich’s character Nanapush is not without his own complexities and human flaws. His sometimes hapless and often humorous actions convey to readers that Erdrich is neither deifying nor putting on a pedestal this single character. Rather, his voice, often *not heard* even by his own people (as noted above) becomes the voice of the historian, the one who digs, the one who problematizes. Nanapush continues his story of the land, the results of the pressure to farm that emerged full force from the Allotment Agents:

People signed the paper. Got money. Some farmed. Others came home night after night for months full of whiskey and food. Suddenly the foreclosure notice was handed out and the land was barred. It belonged to someone else. Now it appeared our people would turn into a wandering bunch, begging at the back

doors of white houses and town buildings. Then laws were passed to outlaw begging and even that was solved. No laws were passed to forbid starvation, though, and so the Anishinaabeg were free to do just that.

Yes, we were becoming a solved problem. That's what I am saying. Who worries about the dead? They are safe in the ground. (79)

Foucault asserts that "domination caused by an unjustified political system" arises when power relations are hierarchical and thus unequal. It is vital to distinguish between being "the head of household" (283) and being a master (of slaves or of a dominated wife, for example.) Foucault provides a clear direction for a kind of decolonization centered on these distinctions: the goal is "to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ēthos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible" (298).

The voices in Erdrich's novel emerge from a variety of sources, including the first person narration delivered by three of the living characters: Nanapush, Polly Elizabeth, and Margaret. Those who *speak*, however, come to include not only living characters, such as Fleur—through limited dialogue and through her silences, such as her resistance to naming her son any name at all, and her actions, such as literally standing up to the woman who attempts to shame Polly Elizabeth—but also she who is called "Under the Ground," Fleur's grandmother.

This Ojibwe woman's name was "Fanny" until she transformed herself and her name by having "herself buried alive in a birch-bark covering" and staying "connected only to the upper world by a breathing straw" (49), then emerging from that earth with "her power" and her abilities to heal. While she was there, transforming, "old men drummed and the women sang to give her courage, but all that they could see from the soft earth of her grave was the tube of rawhide" (50), the breathing straw. A simpler story would conclude with a "happily ever after" when the transformation was complete. In this context of alterity, however, names have power beyond the simple dichotomies of happy/sad, good/bad. Nanapush explains that when she took the name "*Four Souls*," that "name influenced Fleur's actions and told her what to do" (57). Thus the power of "voice" in Erdrich's novel looms eloquently large, both above and below the ground. Because "each of us has an original [which is the name no one speaks] living somewhere underneath the shadow of our daily life" (58), so, too, does the character Polly Elizabeth have a "shadow side." Through the course of the novel, this becomes her most enlightened and "happiest" side. This transformation is shaped by her relationships within the white, Ojibwe, and mixed families she comes to know intimately.

Polly Elizabeth, the white woman who at first embodies such a depth of racism as to seem a caricature, is poignantly changed by inhabiting the home of Fleur. Erdrich will not privilege the Native over the "other" who is white in simplistic dichotomies.

Rather, her novel begins to enact a kind of decolonization with polyphonic resonance, so that such limitations are no longer evident, and such boundaries and dichotomies are diminished. When we are first introduced to Polly Elizabeth, she is simply known as Ms. Gheen, the sister-in-law of John James Mauser. She is describing the house Mauser has built “on the most exclusive ridge in the city,” with its “pure white” presence, as “pristine as a cake in the window of a bakery shop.” We are aware of the *caricature quality* of the white-ness of it all, including even nature/ even the out-of-doors becoming whitewashed with “white deer at the gate, dusted with a sugar powder, paw[ing] delicately” as they “nosed the glittering air” (11). Here caricature builds to cliché, as readers cannot help but see the explicit reference to having her “cake” and eating it too, as even the suggestion of the un-tamed world requires “sugar” coating and a relegated place “at the gate,” but never engaged nor confronted nor connected with directly.

By the time that Fleur becomes the Mistress Mauser, Polly Elizabeth’s attempts to better understand and embody her own sexuality are on their dynamic course, giving the novel another measure of alterity, as it confronts a postmodern engagement of “colonization” as well as a potential for transformation. This is realized through a multitude of characters and a polyphonic, narrative unfolding. For example, Polly Elizabeth’s initial treatment of Fleur is dismissive, as she is “anxious to hire” her so that she has “a woman specifically to launder, to live in the basement and use the soapstone tubs and iron taps to scald and renew the sheets as Fantan [the manservant to the lord of the home] carted them down and up, down and up, and down again” (13). The ironies of this initial set-up of hierarchies run deep, as the very “sweat” which must be “scalded” from the sheets is the bodily fluid of the materially wealthy Mauser, her brother-in-law, who is, we come to find, suffering from what will be diagnosed as “a locomotor ataxia and melancholic neuralgia complicated by a rare male cholrosis, all brought on by a damming of the sperm” (39). The doctor, upon rendering this diagnosis, asks the ostensibly *placid* wife, thus named “Placide,” where she thinks this ejaculatory material might go. The couple have been practicing what Polly Elizabeth calls “karezza,” which in Placide’s words, “exercises the mutual power of our wills [...] and the power of the heart” [...] to “collect and act on loving thoughts.” Placide suggests that this allows “a conscious conservation of creative energy,” and insists to the perplexed doctor that “It has had the most exciting effect on my artistic output” (37).

The fact that Polly Elizabeth is listening to her sister explain this (to the physician and her sister’s husband) through a glass propped up against the door that separates them is both comedic and symbolic. Thus, when the interview is completed, with the advice from the doctor that previous treatments had included placing his “posterior against a cold wall” and “immersion of the male member into a basin of warm water,” it is not surprising that Polly Elizabeth was so overcome with bouts of laughter, that “it was at least half an hour before [she] could compose [her] features and calm [her] nerves suffi-

ciently” to emerge from the room from which she eavesdropped. The doctor answers his own question to Placide, as to where this unresolved matter might go, this sperm that has been reserved: “To the brain!” he explains. “To the brain.” Within this chapter, which is titled “Karezza,” Polly Elizabeth’s laughter takes on the dimensions of symbolic meaning and comedic levity. The laughter is the first release we observe from this otherwise tidy and stiff sister-in-law. The novel traces, lightly though poignantly, her coming of age in sexual terms. This reaches its conclusion with Polly Elizabeth’s love for Fantan, but not before the many-leveled embodiments of her racism, her “white cake” of having and eating too, and her disgust at seeing “the savage woman I hired to scrub clothes” become dear to her heart are dynamic engagements with history and relationships Erdrich presents in the novel.

When Polly Elizabeth sees Fleur “bent over brother-in-law [...] like some kind of bird,” she calls her “[h]awk-winged and territorial,” and describes “her brown skirt spread” open, with all its sexual connotations (19). There is depth and irony, however, in this act, as Fleur is securing the safety of Mauser, is nursing not seducing him. The scene is further complicated by the image of Fleur and Fantan together. With the help of Fantan, who “kneeling” next to Mauser’s body that has just survived a seizure, Fleur is tending to this man’s needs. What Polly Elizabeth does not know is that Fleur intends to nurse him back to health only so that she can kill him. Nanapush tells us: “She wanted the man healthy so that she could destroy him fresh.” However, Polly Elizabeth is not privy to Nanapush, his wisdom and his hapless complexities. She sees only the intimacies, first between her brother-in-law and a Native servant, then between Fantan and Fleur, as they tend to the limp body of the master of the house, “the heavy and relaxed form between them” (19). This closeness is only an outward reminder of what they share in the hidden chambers of their bodies, the Native blood. Such closeness between them is, at this moment, suggested in the word “form” but disappears just as quickly. Most central to this scene is the literal form of a man who is both “master” and fool, according to the “game” (Foucault) of power play that Erdrich’s novel masters in its polyphonic (Gunn) complexities. Polly Elizabeth concludes that the “words form against the inside of my skull [and although] I can see them [,][t]hey make no sense and yet compel me with their vehemence” (19). Not until Polly Elizabeth “forgets the borders” of her own body, through loving Fleur’s half-Native child, in deeply compassionate care-giving instincts, and loving Fleur, as a sister, a dearest of friends, does she begin to make “sense” of the place she inhabits, in her body, and in place, on the lands of the *Anishinaabeg* (the *Ojibwe*) people she so clearly attempted to disdain.

The complexities of land and human life are so deeply ingrained in the first chapters of *Four Souls* that throughout the novel the reader cannot separate Mauser’s estate from the mining it necessitated. This is not the toxic mining that Winona LaDuke addresses in her research of “uranium production [...] 100 percent” of which takes place on or near

Indian land (1993; qtd in Smith 81). Nor is this a reference to the “650 nuclear explosions on Western Shoshone land at the Nevada test site” from which “[f]ifty percent of these underground tests have leaked radiation into the atmosphere” (Taliman, 1991; qtd in Smith 81). Still, Erdrich is well aware that Native peoples are considered “the expendable ones” and are therefore “situated to suffer the brunt of environmental destruction so that colonizers can continue to be in denial about the fact that they will also eventually be affected” in what Cesaire notes as “the boomerang effect of colonization” (qtd in Smith 81). The architecture of Mauser’s estate required that the “soundest of the wood [be] processed right at the edge of the city” and the “best brownstone came from an island called Gichi gami” (5). Nanapush describes a time when “the ground of the island was covered with mammoth basswood that scented the air over the lake, for miles out, with a swimming fragrance of such supernal sweet innocence that those first priests who came to steal Ojibwe souls, penetrating deeper into the heart of the world, cried out not knowing whether God or the devil tempted them” (5). When Mauser’s house was built, “there was more than enough brownstone quarried, cut, hand-finished, shipped, and hauled uphill, for the construction” [and after all] “it proved easy and profitable to deal with the Indian agent Tatro who won a personal commission for discovering that due to a recent government decision the land upon which [the best] trees grew was tax forfeit from one Indian, just a woman—she could go elsewhere” and “there was no problem about moving the lumber crews in” (6). Not only was there wood to be had, despite the fact that by “now the island [Gichi gami] was stripped of trees”; there was slate for the roof shingles, and the “chimneys were constructed of a type of brick requiring the addition of blood, and so, baked in the vicinity of a slaughterhouse, they would exude when there was a fire lights a scorched, physical odor” (7). The descriptions of the necessity of “mining” for the adornments of the house at first seem to reach their apex with this description from Nanapush: “the Moorish-inspired turned railings” required iron that was “mined on the Mesabi Range by Norwegians and Sammi so gut-shot with hunger they didn’t care if they were trespassing on anybody’s hunting ground or not and just kept on digging deeper, deeper into the earth” (7). However, there is more, much more to raise the concern of those interested in a more socially-just wisdom-inquiry in the humanities. These include the sound of “women” as they “coughed in basements of a fabric warehouse” and the gunning down of “more than a hundred sandhill cranes” (7). Such a multiplicity of descriptions serves to describe the momentum of colonization, with its violent and often literally or symbolically sexual references from mining to clearcut logging to inhabitation of a home on the very land that was the “same ground” where “[d]uring a bright thaw in the moon of little spirit, an Ojibwe woman gave birth” (4) to a child. This occasion of his birth was not so surprising, for this was “high ground” that had been “a favorite spot for making camp in those original years before settlement” (4).

Although the descriptions of the mining seem most poignant in Nanapush’s assess-

ment of the necessities of such a manor, providing the most evidence for this kind of sexual colonization Smith contends, there is something more haunting to me as a reader, and that is the relationship between Mauser, his wife Placide, and the lynx he “killed near the building site” (7). For in that moment, it is not so much that the colonizer set the “one claw [...] in gold and hung [it] off the watch fob” that dangled from his waistcoat; nor is it the fact that he “presented his wife with a thick spotted muff made to the mold of her tender hands” with the fur of the feline. The embodiment of sexual violence against Natives was most fully realized in Placide’s calling it “ever after as ‘our first housecat,’” for in this vocalization the conflation of the wild and domesticated, the killing for pleasure and adornment rather than for protection and nourishment is presented. The act of hunting becomes counter to need, becomes a way for Mauser to attempt to seduce that which he already owns. A bizarre turning of the tables occurs when we are told that she “meowed at him a little,” which we first experience as flirtation, as her own brief attempt at seduction, but then we are told that “she was much too well brought up to do more than that and stiffened harder than the iron banisters when she was touched” (7). This is where we first learn of her aversion to Mauser, which we may read as her being frigid, for we are told that “to make love to her was for young Mr. Mauser like touching the frozen body of a window mannequin” but later realize is particular to this coupling, to her marriage to Mauser. For she was drawn to her art teacher, we learn from Polly Elizabeth, and was “practicing karezza” with him while still married to her husband. Thus the wife of Mauser does seem to hold some mastery over her husband, whom we at first assume is the colonizer who embodies fully the violence upon which his house was erected. This notion is problematized by not only the power that Fleur holds over him but Placide, as well, in their complex marital arrangement.

The question of who is who, as well as which boundaries hold and which dissolve become crucial to the dynamic interplay of the games of poignant “truths” (in Foucault’s sense of power). Epiphanies are realized through the humor that flows through Erdrich’s novel like an un-dammable river of history, tragedy, and possibility. So much seems to hinge on Fleur, who strategically orchestrates the killing of Mauser. Through a mixture of medicine and domestic chores, alliances and the trust built from those relationships, Fleur sets about her task of strengthening Mauser so that she can kill him “fresh,” and thus make him suffer. When she places the knife against his neck and says “I have come here to kill you,” it is impossible to say who is more surprised at his response, the reader or Fleur herself. “What took you so long?” Mauser asks, and the two begin to converse in Ojibwe. She is further surprised when he says, in answer to her question “Who am I?”, “You’re a relative of one of the women I wronged” (44). Outraged, she replies “One of them? *Awanen*? I am the woman whose land you stole.” His recognition is internal, confused, shedding light on the history we guessed but are now given from inside his confusion:

Mauser was silent. He'd taken the land of so many it was impossible that he should remember just who they were. His mind was reeling back through titles and false transfers and quitclaim deeds. He thought he'd had her figured. Who could she be? (44)

Among the most compelling elements of Erdrich's work is that when the reader thinks we have someone "figured," that imagined construction is undone, problematized by the complexities of a shared history, one in which there is potential for healing, even after such violence.

This is not a simple story nor is the healing going to be a simple process. The novel seems at first premised upon Fleur as hero. Will she kill Mauser now? Will she kill him later? Will that even be the central action of the story? Not until Margaret, the wife of Nanapush, creates the Medicine Dress and invites Fleur to wear it do we see that, just as the dress—something so vitally important—must "begin where all things begin—with the death of something else" (176), so too must Fleur suffer in order to be transformed. Thus, the hero of the story is not a single person, not necessarily Fleur, although she vividly becomes an "agent" of change in the most evidently postmodern sense of understanding agency. The story needs all its characters for "The Healing" (of the final chapter's title) to occur. Fleur's transformation, her "healing," requires that she is "driven past her limit" by the "tiny spirits" Margaret predicts will drive her. Yet Margaret must sew the dress, must experience the accidental "snaring" by her love, Nanapush. She must live the story of her life and participate in the story of Fleur's life, the life of her un-named boy child, and so on, like the many drops of rainwater in the sacred lake, or the many stitches required to complete the medicine dress, which began with the snaring that almost killed Margaret and then continued with the bones of the "cow moose" that her sons had to kill "without the use of any white man's weapons" (176). Fleur will need to meet Margaret "halfway there," in order to receive the medicine of the stitches; only through "let[ing] the dress kill [her]" can she "[l]et the dress save [her]" so that she can "walk the middle way" (206) to "change and become" (210).

Smith's assessment that "[w]omen of color do not just face quantitatively more issues when they suffer violence (that is, media attention, language, barriers, lack of support in the judicial system, etc) but their experience is qualitatively different from that of white women" (71) is relevant in the novel. When Smith describes her work as a crisis counselor, and details the experience that "every Native survivor I have ever counseled said to me at one point, 'I wish I was no longer Indian'" (*Native American*...116), I am moved to suggest that Erdrich is presenting a counterpoint to that dynamic in a precise way. She is doing so, if not through her own cognizance of such "experience," then simply because a story as good as Erdrich's will find itself accessing the "truths" that Foucault explains as the result of the "game" of ethics. The reason, Smith argues, that one might

no longer “wish [to be] Indian” is because of the driving paradigm of institutionalized racism, that Native people are “dirty”; thus they are considered sexually violable and ‘rapable’ [...and] in patriarchal thinking, only a body that is “pure” can be violated” (73). For Erdrich, *The Medicine Dress* represents another *side* of women, embodied in the “sewing” that begets a transformative healing. The wife of Nanapush, Margaret Kashpaw, tells us that “to sew is to pray” as “[w]e women turn things inside out and set things right.” Margaret, in creating the medicine dress, teaches us that “[w]e salvage what we can of human garments [...]. Sometimes our stitches stutter and slow... Other times, the tension in the stitches might be too tight because of tears.” Not only do the Ojibwe women in the novel embrace their Indian-ness, so too does Polly Elizabeth become her truest self when she stops creating borders between herself and other women. It is only after she begins to love Fleur, and Fleur’s son, that she is able to express the following:

These were the happiest and most requited times of my existence. [...] Sometimes I gazed so long into the baby’s face that I forgot my own face. Or I touched the shining skin and forgot my own borders, melted skin through skin. As I made my way home each night, I had to remind myself that he was birthed of Fleur, belonged to Mauser, that I was nothing and no relation. Yet I had given away my own heart, and once that’s done there is no easy way to take it back. (69)

One of the most curious words in this passage is “requited,” because so often we hear this dynamic only in the negative, only as “un.” Polly Elizabeth not only expresses her lack of “borders” in words; her actions embody the ironies of colonization and the history of racism in the United States. In the eighteenth century, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur described the surprising dynamic that “[t]housands of Europeans [have become] Indians, and we have not example of even one of these Aborigines having from choice become Europeans!” (qtd in Smith 77). Smith asserts that the fact that “a number of white people chose to live among Indian people while virtually no Indians chose voluntarily to live among the colonists” had much to do with the “egalitarian nature [of Indian life] posing a threat to the ability of white men to continue their ownership of white women because they belie patriarchy’s defense of itself as ‘normal’” (77).

Smith’s suggestion that all Natives share “egalitarian” societal practices is a generalization. However, oft-cited and more accurately generalize-able, is that violence against women is not found in the records of Indian/Native American life and culture. Smith cites William Apess (Pequot) who “once stated in the 1800s: ‘Where in the records of Indian barbarity, can we point to a violated female?’” (77) She goes on to cite Brigadier General James Clinton of the continental Army, who “said to his soldiers as they were sent off to destroy the Iroquois Nation in 1779: ‘Bad as the savages are, they never violate the chastity of any women, their prisoners’” (77). Smith concludes this section of her

essay with the assertion that the “demonization of Native women, then, is part of white men’s desires to maintain control over white women” (78). This a potent statement in the context of history and sheds light on the *Four Souls* (and more) in Erdrich’s fiction. Polly Elizabeth concludes her chapter “The Fortune” with these words:

Everything that happened since I answered the door to Fleur was leading up to this. Warm sun falls on us through diamonds of lead glass as we work. If I am a fool, I am proud to be one. I have married one servant and declared another my sister. My husband and I do not speak in flows of words, but we connect by the heartstrings and by laughter and by signs. I am that rare thing thought only to exist in death. I am a happy woman. (161)

She is engaging in the “work” of living in community, a habitat of human to human relationships as well as deep and significant relationships with the land and the bodies of water that sustain us.

Fleur, too, will be transformed within the pages of this novel, but not as a result of what she thought was the best path: revenge. Rather, the Medicine Dress, the sewn fragments, will assist her in a journey that will purge her from the alcohol that has also colonized her body, and return her to the influence of the spirits of her ancestors, that will heal her. She needs, however, to become “brave enough to experience fear” and at that time “to ask the dress for its name and plead for it to help [her]” (206). As much as we might admire Fleur for the heroics she seeks to employ, Margaret teaches us that she also must carry humility: “If you ask humbly enough, the dress will tell you, and if you have the strength to accept the name, then the dress will give its name to your spirit” (207). The act of taking a false name was a big problem for Fleur; it is arguably what gets her into so much trouble. When Margaret explains, “Your name will live inside of you,” we realize that this is not exactly the opposite of colonization, but a kind of re-inhabitation of self and place and culture. When she is told, “Your name will help you heal. Your name will tell you how long to live and when to give up life,” we understand that the name, which will arrive with the assistance of Medicine Dress must be a name that can sustain the heroics and the humility alike, so that a kind of “self-determination” is created, but not without the voices of the elders as support. Pollination and fertilization can be welcomed, as can work, and sustained community, and spirit, but as is evident in *Four Souls*, self-determination is only possible within the support of community. The community extends beyond the bounds of human to human ties, so that Margaret’s words to Fleur, “For you have been lonely so long, you nameless one, you spirit, and it will comfort you to finally be recognized here upon this earth” (207), remind us that being recognized requires a “concern for self” and for “others.” In Erdrich’s novel, we find ourselves engaging in change, in an always-dynamic “game” of finding the truths that sustain such rich relationships of becoming.

An article written in 1899, and cited in Smith, describes the “women of the Iroquois [as having] a public and influential position. They had a council of their own.... which had the initiative in the discussion [...] an orator of their own sex to present and speak for them.... Sometimes female chiefs (73). Smith investigates “how a politics of intersectionality might fundamentally shift how we analyze sexual/domestic violence” and Erdrich’s novel embraces such intersectionality to engage the relationships of the past, the present, and the future of Ojibwe/white truths and their consequences. Our humanities inquiry benefits, therefore, from an approach wherein “alterity” rather than a simple idea of “solidarity” is privileged.

Gunn outlines some typical dynamics that push humanities into the “far edges of the academic curriculum” (116) and he critiques them. Erdrich’s *Four Souls* provides an excellent example of literature that holds the potential for Gunn’s emphasis on alterity, in the dynamic engagement of polyphony. When Gunn returns to the humanities as “a kind of subject matter or body of material [...] scientific as well as philosophic, social as well as artistic, anthropological as well as religious” (126), it is easy to see how Erdrich’s novel fits so well into his goals for humanities discourse. In her complex, deeply engaging narrative a “given civilization has conducted its own self-scrutiny” (Gunn 126), while also scrutinizing the colonial powers that arguably raped not only the women, the land, but the history. *Four Souls* provides an engaging, fascinating narrative within which humanities scholars and classroom teachers alike can encounter the questions not only of colonization, sexuality, and violence but of discovering the self and others as poignantly tied to the bodies that nourish us (lakes and rivers for example) and those we inhabit. In the final words of the novel, Nanapush explains that the Ojibwe can “change and become” (210). Erdrich’s novel engages all of us in a process of becoming that is polyphonic, wisdom-based, and more ethically and socially just.

WORKS CITED

- Barnim, Douglas Andrew. “‘Even our bones nourish change’: Trauma, Recovery, and Hybridity in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*.” *Native Studies Review* 19.1 (2010).
- Erdrich, Louise. *Four Souls*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. “The Ethics of Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom.” In Paul Rabinow, ed. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Vol.1 New York: The New Press, 1997. 281-302.
- Gunn, Giles. *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture*. New York & Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Harrison, Summer. “The Politics of Metafiction in Louise Erdrich’s *Four Souls*.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 23.1 (2011): 38-69.
- Smith, Andrea. “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples.”

Hypatia 18.2 (2003): 70. *Academic Search Alumni Edition*. Web. 1 May 2012.

- . "Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change." *Feminist Studies* 31.1 (2005): 116-132. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 1 May 2012.

The Day Trip

The air outside the car windows already has an early spring tone here: sun-warmed yet not fully soft, still vaguely fragile. If this were home, there would be late forsythia, early daffodils. Instead, trees bright with lemons flash by. In the fields beyond, then suddenly quite close, white blimps float overhead, filming the sky. Heading south, they become more frequent, and Tobi's father eventually stops pointing them out.

"When the peace comes," his father says, five, six times. "When the peace comes..." He coughs. His father is narrating our trip. He has just seen a doctor. Something is wrong with his lungs. "When the peace comes, this field will be, this land will be –" he says again. Then he coughs.

We pass through towns where every bus stop boasts its own concrete bomb shelter. "And there," his father points, "is a kibbutz that took lots and lots of rockets these last eight years, during the –" and he coughs.

We drive and drive and look and look. Stopping at a persimmon tree, he jumps out to the road's edge and gathers fallen fruit. I join him. They're tiny, dry, mottled orange globes. He's faster at collecting than I am. Soon he has two handfuls, and presses them into my palms, cupping his own hands around mine, as if I were a child.

§§

We're stopped at a gas station, and he comes out with cups of espresso. "Just here," he says, pointing beyond the parking lot, "Forty-thousand people were crossing this road every day, in both directions, before –" and he coughs.

J.M. Parker teaches literature and creative writing as an assistant professor at the University of Salzburg. Parker's fiction has appeared in *Frank*, *Gertrude*, *ISLE*, *Harrington Fiction Quarterly*, *Segue* and other journals, and was selected for inclusion in *Lethe Press's Best Gay Stories 2015*.

"This was the border crossing," says Tobi. "The check-point."

Now, on a Saturday afternoon, there are tourists. Drove of them, parked below a mound of earth, the highest point on the plain, from which you can look beyond into Gaza.

"There, on that hill," his father points, "were twelve, fifteen rockets falling every day, during the –" and again the cough. The events? The disturbance? The unrest? The incursion? The invasion? The war? Is he waiting for Tobi to finish his phrase? "Have you two had lunch yet?" he asks.

Tobi and I look at each other – somewhat guiltily, as his mother fed us before we left – and I let Tobi answer no.

The smack of a meat tenderizer on chicken flesh sounds at the counter behind us. "My own father ate lunch in this restaurant every day for fifteen years," says his father. "Because his office was just across the street."

Tobi's mother had walked us along this same block of the city that morning, strolling back and forth on our way past the traveler's insurance office and the money-changer's, the Russian quarter, the town's first shopping center and a dried foods store, past the same restaurant she must have known his father would take us to later today. Each of them has taken us on their own tour of the old town's same five blocks, each claiming their own stake, in our minds, of spaces central to the other's life, tracing nebulous trails that overlap in ways they must when two people live in the same space over the course of decades without sharing its parts.

Tobi's father drops us off at his mother's building after lunch, then sits in the car across the parking lot until we've reached the door.

In the entry hall, Tobi presses the button for the elevator with an angry sudden jerk, his lip curled. "He said his girlfriend was coming with us today. That's why my mother wasn't coming," he says.

Through the doors, we watch his father's car pull off finally, slowly tracing its route to his apartment a few blocks away, as if moored like one of the white surveillance blimps to the earth. When the peace comes, I think.

Five floors up, his mother's living room is papered with yellow roses. In a corner behind the dining table sits a collection of silk and plastic flowers in vases, sun-bleached, as is everything else near the louvered windows on the apartment's south side, the side one avoids when a siren sounds.

After showing us how to use the coffee maker and the oven, she'd explained that, "When you hear the siren, you have five seconds, counting like this," she'd slowly counted off the five numbers on her fingers, "to get to the stairwell."

These days, apartments are less expensive on this side of the building. Outside, a sandy park stretches to the next building, then the next, low and crowding the horizon so you wouldn't guess the city has any real end.

§§

In accordance with the spirit of modern convenience, the city's archeological center is designed for drivers. You pay through your car window at an entrance booth flanked by flowerpots, then, pressing the gas pedal, continue up the drive past freshly planted flowerbeds. In theory, it is possible to see the center's entire collection of unearthed exhibits without leaving your car seat. A Roman forum's bleached ruins lie spread across a freshly mowed lawn as if pushed up through the green turf like teeth from gums, or dropped from the sky. On nice days like today, Tobi's mother muses, one would normally have difficulty finding a vacant parking space, let alone a table in the picnic area. Today, though, every table is deserted. Further on, the way is blocked by a security van.

After speaking with a ranger, Tobi's mother says, "The other side of the park is closed. Two rockets just fell over there. Only one went off. The police are coming to explode the other one."

In due course, an ambulance pulls slowly up beside our car, followed by a military jeep. She parks, slides her seat back, lights a cigarette, and opens a magazine.

"We'll go for a walk," Tobi says, "Over to the Canaanite gate."

"Come with us?" I ask his mother.

"She's already seen it," says Tobi.

"I'll be in the car," she says.

We walk along the coast taking photos of freshly planted flowers, pausing on the cliff's edge to gaze south at the power plant supplying electricity to Gaza. Tobi's arms are already brown from two days of sun. As we kiss, the short pop of an exploded rocket sounds from the parking lot, and birds rise from the trees in concentric rings, like a stone dropping in the water.

By the time we arrive at the marina for lunch, the air has cooled. His mother rests facing the huge modern row of buildings behind us. A dozen tiny sparrows balance on the railings above the water, watching our table with quick, anxious sideways glances.

"That's where Tobi's father lived after he moved out," she says, distracting my attention from the sparrows when Tobi leaves for the bathroom. As his father's father left behind a ruined country, his own father left a marriage. "In one of those apartments," she says, gesturing with a back-handed wave, at once proud, vague and dismissive. This is her job, I think: to show us her apartment, the street where his father grew up, the shops, the place where his father went after he left her apartment. The before, during and after of an absence. And this is his father's job, I think: to show up at random times in her narrative just to prove his presence, that he still exists as more than an imaginary geography.

The power plant is still visible down the coast at the beach's far edge, supplying electricity to make our coffee and the complimentary biscuit now feeding sparrows.. Soon, as we drive home, Gaza's lights, like those all along the coast, will flick on, the sea-blue twilight folding over the shore like a luxurious bed quilt.

§§

In the city, people lounge on white sofas in white living rooms with enormous black coffee tables and enormous black televisions, talking into telephones, playing video games and watching scenes of incredible fictional violence filmed in Los Angeles. Between calls or during commercials, they pause to say, “I’m doing an MBA. I don’t know why I’m doing an MBA, but I’m doing it.” Laughs ensue.

His father has followed us to Tel Aviv after another appointment with his doctor. “It’s not asthma,” his father says, before hanging up. “I’ll tell you about it if you’ll meet me for dinner.”

“He’s such a drama queen,” says Tobi. There’s a warm breeze between the wings of the mall, and Tobi’s sister comes out in gold jewelry to meet us, flushed from an argument with the cell phone company over her bills.

At dinner, I’m afraid to ask. I want to say the restaurant is elegant but ugly, but it’s not. It is like a beautiful country where everything is wrong. That everything is wrong seems proven by a reversed axiology flawed by only two points: nothing here is ever quite right, except coffee and a cigarette. It’s a quiet meal.

“Smoking is nice, but you pay a heavy price,” his father says as we return to the table for a second time.

§§

In night-time Jerusalem, Klimt-like faces glow fleetingly in the streets. His father drives in for dinner, and gives us a tour by car in the dark: here, a lookout point, here Tobi’s old flat, further south, down a road one shouldn’t travel at night, a checkpoint dimly displayed in the distance. A small taste of adventure. All roads lead to checkpoints, either simply because all roads do lead to checkpoints, or because his father likes to push at the boundaries of this world, to feel and share its sides, its edges. Through the darkened car windows, the distance between the Old City and the West Bank is measured only by the streetlights flashing by between them, yellow pools marking space in the black road.

In the morning over breakfast, a glimpse of a low-green valley grazed by a herd of goats on the far side of the city wall tempts me with a sudden urge to climb the hill from its far side, and I wander off alone. The city wall sits atop a mound of yellow rubble glittering with smashed bottles. Walking up is like climbing a sand dune – it shifts under the feet, and slowly accumulates bits of plastic, discarded car parts, torn bits of cloth as it rises. Up along the wall, raw spring branches are speckled with lone sparrows, and the musty odor of scraggly horses and ponies seeps out in the still, cool shadowed air between the wooden lathes of sheds. Near a low, broken, taped window indicating a house, the bark of an angry dog tied to a stake sounds, and a group of boys coagulates on a rocky mound.

“Hello, hello,” they cry in surprise, “Money-money!”

I walk on, thinking of Jesus as a stone pelts the back of my coat, then another. En-

tranced by a jolt of adrenaline, I see safety ahead in recognizable objects: a paved street, a garage with a car pulling out, a woman standing in a driveway, a crowd of Russians on a terrace. Tobi and I meet in the bazaar, striding on wordlessly together to the Dome of the Rock's barbed wire (closed save for prayers; neither of us prays), down to the Gethsemane garden, up to a Muslim cemetery with dried palms stretched over graves behind the city wall. Sunset.

We were originally supposed to spend a few days at the Dead Sea with his father and the girlfriend, at a hotel where his father's own mother, suffering from a skin disease, spent summers floating in curative water, but Tobi decides to make it a day trip. Perhaps simply to have more time alone for the two of us, perhaps to spare his mother jealousy. Early in the morning they're downstairs loitering in the hostel driveway. Half an hour later, the sun has warmed the asphalt as his father, seeking coffee, weaves us around a herd of goats blocking the entrance to a gas station.

Then, suspended above the asphalt in our bubble of steel, glass and rubber, the four of us descend together to the lowest place on earth. Signs along the roadside mark our depth.

"The sea is shrinking every year," the girlfriend says quietly, aligning our gaze with hers through the car window as it appears. You can see where it's receded, the shore lined with concentric rings of salt. Jordan, a soft blue haze across the water is, in a sense, slowly growing closer.

At a seaside hotel we'll buy swimsuits. But we won't stay in the hotel. This is a day trip, after all. We won't swim in the sea, but instead float in a heated pool of filtered water drawn by a spa on its shore.

"You have to be very careful to keep the water out of your eyes," the girlfriend warns as we follow them into the pool.

"The water is full of –" his father coughs.

"It's best just to keep your eyes closed," says the girlfriend.

So the four of us float weightlessly, surrounded by the spa's other visitors in our own private circle, eyes closed, legs curled embryonically beneath us in the salted water, the glancing of our limbs guiding us together.

Tokyo Tropes in Nebulas and Neighborhoods: Five Locations from Eternity to Home in Tokyo

At one end of the spectrum, photographs are objective data; at the other end, they are items of psychological science fiction.

—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p 163

Lawrence Karn lectures at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Jikei University School of Medicine, Toyo Eiwa University, and at Otsuma University International Center, where he is Tokunin Koshi (Specially Assigned Lecturer). Karn is United Nations Association's Test of English (UNATE) in Japan Advisory Committee Vice-Chairperson and joint writer of UNATE's twice-yearly published *Kokuren Eiken Kako Mondaishu SA Kyu A Kyu*. His academic papers appear in *Gengo Bunka no Shosou* (Studies in Language and Culture), *Otsuna Journal of Social Information Studies*, and *Journal of International Education Research*. His photographs have been published in German-based *Tokyo Journal* international edition, *Business Week*, Japan's *Metropolis* magazine, and as environmental awareness billboards in Paris, and in a Rail Italia advertising campaign. Karn's M.A. in Political Science is from the University of Western Ontario, Canada.



Let's start in Yokohama at the red brick warehouses that withstood the 1923 Great Earthquake. In my constructed image where three unearthly objects hover in the night sky, imagine the center celestial body as Mars and the two moons as the distance between cultures. After World War II, American administrative offices commandeered those buildings. Occupying aliens who defeated Japan, who direct energy that fuels suns to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki—drawing the Empire of the Rising Sun into a new cosmos—stayed there. Yokohama's north dock port facility is still the US Army installation designated as FAC 3067.



Next, let's visit Shinjuku and explore Japan's financial engine skyscraper district—where, from a single building complex, the bureaucracy of Tokyo Metro Government administers a population the size of Canada. Faux satellite dishes serve the illusion of communication in 1990's homage to 1950's space-age sensibilities that were never a Japanese science fiction trope. Launching center stage, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's homage to architectural functionalism is borne aloft trailing illuminated entrails. Its 21st century counterpart—Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower—casts its eye to the west; yes, always looking to the West.



After the futuristic built world of commerce, let's get a breath of air in Rikugien—Garden of the Six Principles of Poetry—the suasive, the description, the comparison, the evocative imagery, the elegancia praising trustworthiness, the eulogies recounting and honoring these genuine words that create worlds of truth—built between 1695 and 1702.



Then we can wander through an ordinary neighborhood, like Nakano-sakaue, where the streets and alleyways are so typical they're used to film "period pieces" for Japanese TV dramas that belie the notion of period. Times coalesce. I've seen floodlit 1920's vamps and philanderers, succubus and incubus sashaying special-effects-spattered streets; a week later disco-era bell-bottomed boppers genuflect to each other on one of the short-span bridges that straddle the Kanda River. Scores of tech personnel record their tenderness from the out-of-shot ecosphere of state-of-the-art technology enveloping their intimacy. Nakano-sakaue was my home for a decade; the trite and true reality of my everyday world was their fourth wall.



We end our walk with a Tokyo West multi-billion dollar night view I enjoyed for over a decade. The five-story walk up had free access to the roof—a favored shooting location one staircase up from my apartment. It was also flat and drained poorly. I alerted the owners.

“Water swelling the walls is from a structural breach; it will weaken the building.”

“Yes, fat walls. We’ll fix them for you for free,” they agreed, and re-glued the wallpaper to the damp surface.

Moldy plaster smells—earth after a rainstorm with an under-aroma of old books—mixed with the lemon-furniture-polish bouquet of industrial paste. No problem.

It wouldn’t matter.

Until the earthquake.

The Honor of God with Kierkegaard: A Kierkegaardian View of the Play *Becket*

INTRODUCTION

Using a highly apropos line from the film *Becket*, I will preface this work by stating that these are only the “clumsy musings of a spiritual gatecrasher.” Understanding nineteenth century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard’s stages of existence is not an easy task when examined only through his writings. Thus, it can be very pedagogically useful to apply the Kierkegaard’s stages to literature to illustrate the nuances. In this essay, I will demonstrate this didactic point through a reading of Jean Anouilh’s play *Becket* (1959) that serves this educative task particularly well.

KIERKEGAARD AND THE DIALECTICS OF EXISTENCE

Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, is acknowledged by many to be one of the most influential thinkers of the modern era. Born on May 5, 1813, Kierkegaard was a native of Copenhagen, where he spent most of his life. Kierkegaard’s father was a wealthy merchant of the Old World city, who provided Kierkegaard economic independence for his entire life. He never married and almost never held any sort of job. Because of this independence, Kierkegaard was able to write extensively, although most of his books were published in small quantities of 500 or fewer. As such, his writing was not widely known outside of Denmark or Scandinavia prior to his death in 1855 at age 42. Some of

Timothy Hall is Director of Academics of Thales Academy, one of the largest private school management organizations in North Carolina. He is the author of several textbook supplements, curriculums, standards, and several popular history texts. He is the course administrator of the MOOC on Kierkegaard at Coursera titled “Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony and the Crisis of Modernity.” His recent research on the philosophy of Kierkegaard and non-cognitive education was published in *A Companion to Kierkegaard* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

his most notable works are *Fear and Trembling*, *Either/Or*, *Sickness unto Death*, and *The Concept of Anxiety*. Later, at the start of the 20th century, Kierkegaard's writings began to increase in popularity with European intellectuals. By the mid-20th century, his influence had spread to include the entire English-speaking world. By the end of the century, his works were translated into all the major languages of the world, making his impact even more pronounced. (Evans, 2009) Enrollment of 60,000 plus learners during the period of 2013 to 2016 in the Kierkegaard Massive Open Online Course, or MOOC, on Coursera, "Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony and the Crisis of Modernity" by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre only punctuate this impact.

Continued interest in Kierkegaard's writing is easily understood when looking at the pages of his immense authorship that overflow with both moral and religious insights. For Kierkegaard, existence meant facing and responding to fundamental truths about the human condition. Kierkegaard's writings explore such questions as: What does it mean to be human? How can I be true to myself or to another person? How should I use my freedom? How do I live a good life? How do I discover my life's vocation? How should I respond to suffering? These dialectics of existence can provide a valuable contribution to discourses about life and education.

My fascination with Kierkegaard is not longstanding, especially if considered in relation to the community in which I have become deeply involved. I was aware of Kierkegaard through my study of Western history and thought. But it was only during the first year of my doctorate program that my interest was brought to bear on the Dane. And it is from a unique source that I came across a reference to the Lutheran Kierkegaard. The reference was by the Roman Catholic Pope Benedict XVI in his significant theological work, *Introduction to Christianity*. Ratzinger recounts the story of Kierkegaard's clown, which I cite from the Dane's own work, *Either/Or*:

In a theater, it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they became still more hilarious. This is the way, I suppose, that the world will be destroyed – amid the universal hilarity of wits and wags who think it is all a joke. (Kierkegaard 30)

Kierkegaard's effort at indirect communication through this story was amusing and poignant; I was hooked. I explored the background and writings of Kierkegaard, discovering after some preliminary reading a writer wrestling with God, humanity, and himself and determining his relevance to modern life. In addition, I found that his writings defied any academic compartmentalization. Kierkegaard studies involve scholars from a variety of fields including philosophy, theology, ethics, sociology and psychology. In Kierkegaard studies, there appeared to be many disciplinary border crossings, allowing me to think that the interdisciplinary perspective that I was obtaining with my doctorate

would be applicable. I continued through my doctoral program while chipping away at the many sources of information on Kierkegaard and developing my ideas of bringing the relevance of Kierkegaard to education with several summer fellowships to the Kierkegaard Library and a culminating doctoral dissertation.

THOMAS BECKET AND CHURCH AND STATE POLITICS

Thomas Becket (1118-1170), Archbishop of Canterbury, once described himself as “a proud, vain man, a feeder of birds and a follower of hound.” (Burns 606). Once a friend and advisor to King Henry II, Becket opposed Henry’s legal reforms in relation to the Church. He thought that no member of the clergy should be subject to the laws of England and vowed to oppose King Henry’s Constitution of Clarendon as long as he lived. His stand represents one of the classic confrontations between Church and state in politics.

Becket rose from very humble beginnings to end up challenging a king. He was born in London and studied at Paris under a noted teacher, Robert of Melun. He then entered the service of the English monarchy, working with the English sheriffs as a clerk. In 1141, he became a member of the household of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury. Becket made a name for himself as a man with a considerable future. As a result, he was sent to study law at Bologna and Auxerre and in 1154 he was appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury. As a rising young star in English politics, Becket attracted the attention of King Henry II and they became fast friends. Both had similar tastes and interests; both had a love of hunting, women and luxury. Eventually, Henry gave Becket the position of Chancellor of England. Becket wielded vast power in English government and with his gift of administration, he ruthlessly enforced Henry’s political will. As Chancellor of England, Becket reduced the opposition of barons and centralized royal power, often to the detriment of the Church. Since the power of the Church was always a problem for the king, it seemed logical for Henry to appoint his friend and confidante to the post of Archbishop of Canterbury with the death of Theobald in 1161. Becket was reluctant to take the office, but did after Henry’s prompting in 1162.

Becket soon clashed with King Henry II on a number of issues. He excommunicated a baron, one of Henry’s loyal vassals; opposed a tax proposal; and fought against the Constitutions of Clarendon. Becket also rebuffed Henry’s claim that clerics who committed crimes should be tried in secular courts. Henry responded with some harsh measures of his own against his former friend. He had Becket condemned by a council of English bishops loyal to the king. As a result of the condemnation, Becket fled the country and came under the protection of King Louis VII of France. He remained in exile from 1164 to 1170. During this period, Becket appealed his case to Pope Alexander III, while Henry ran the Church of England through the bishop of York, who was loyal to the king. In 1170, Henry and Becket were reconciled. Becket returned to England in November of

that year. The people of England, who saw Becket as a hero, lined the roads to greet him as he made his way to the cathedral in Canterbury.

But the reconciliation did not last. By December, the final break between Henry and Becket occurred. Becket refused to absolve any of the English bishops who supported Henry during his exile unless they took an oath of obedience to the pope. Henry, upset over the public displays of support for Thomas, greeted the news with rage and fury. In the end, Henry, angry and drunk, supposedly referring to Becket, asked some of his knights, "Is there no one to rid me of this troublesome priest?" Four of those knights took Henry's words to heart as a command and murdered Becket as he prayed in the cathedral at Canterbury. Becket's last words, reported by one eyewitness, were, "Willingly, I die for the name of Jesus and in defense of the Church" (Attwater and John 342).

The death of Becket was universally condemned. Miracles were reported at Canterbury shortly after his death. Soon pilgrims began appearing at Canterbury, making it into one of the most popular holy sites during the Middle Ages. Becket received sainthood quickly from Pope Alexander III in 1173. Henry was blamed for the popular Becket's murder and performed penance for his sin, which included being flogged naked by monks. The king also agreed to recognize papal authority in Church law and to exempt clergy from punishment in the civil courts. But this did not end England's conflict between church and state; later another Chancellor of England, Thomas More, would meet a similar fate.

There has been some controversy about Becket's character, with ambitious and imperious most frequently used as descriptors. But his final defense of the Church has resonated through the centuries and attracted dramatists from Tennyson's *Becket* through T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, Anouilh's play *Becket or The Honor of God*, which was later adapted into the 1964 film starring Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole, to the musical drama *Becket* in 1970. Anouilh's play has been reproduced several times on the stage with continuing success into the 21st century.

THE STAGES OF EXISTENCE IN KIERKEGAARD

In Kierkegaard's writings, including *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Stages on Life's Way*, he sketches humans as living in one or more of three different spheres of existence. Kierkegaard refers to these spheres in a couple of ways, including 'the stages of life's way' and 'spheres of existence'. With the importance of these themes to the entirety of his work, Kierkegaard articulates the spheres more clearly in his later writing, *Stages on Life's Way*. In *Stages*, Kierkegaard reduces these to three basic terms: aesthetic, ethical, and religious (Kierkegaard 476). Each stage of existence corresponds with a particular understanding of the world, which includes motivations, values, ideals, and behavior. Through the stages, some humans will express a particular sphere in a less developed way, while others are more pronounced in their

expression of each stage. The stages are not automatic but require conscious choice through subjective understanding of the self in relation to the world, in part prompted at times by despair at the inadequacies of the current stage. Yet these different stages should not be viewed as self-contained, in which one spends their entire life. Rather, humans can move between stages as they experience and develop in life. Understanding Kierkegaard's stages of existence is not an easy task when examined only through his writings. In part, this is because Kierkegaard is less than systematic with the topic. So it can be pedagogically useful to apply the stages to literature to illustrate. This is an area that can be then connected readily to Thomas Becket. Reading Jean Anouilh's play *Becket* through the lens of Kierkegaard's stages provides an excellent demonstrative text to illustrate the stages. Clearly, it is not that a reading of Kierkegaard directly inspired the play *Becket* or that we have some historical knowledge of Becket's understanding of his self. But sketching these Kierkegaardian stages in relation to the play can bring more meaning to the choices that Becket makes in text. And although the play is not entirely historical, the exercise provides points to consider, not only in Becket's historical biography but in our own biographies.

THE AESTHETIC STAGE IN BECKET

For Kierkegaard, the "aesthetic" stage, as detailed in part 2 of *Either/Or*, is one that is focused on the immediate and pleasurable life of the senses (Kierkegaard 178). It is comparable in modern psychology to Lawrence Kohlberg's pre-conventional stage of morality (Noddings 169). The general result of this focus is a person who is carefree and indifferent. This state is also subject to the charge of amorality since it is not subject to any ethical considerations except by chance. The ambiguity that accompanies this stage leads to a selfishness mired in indifference to right actions and an inclination to deceive oneself and others. According to Kierkegaard, the lack of personal resolution, commitment and temporality of life found at this stage ends in despair.

In the play, the aesthetic stage is exhibited as Becket details the way in which his father was able to do so well in Norman England despite being a conquered Saxon.

BECKET: My parents were able to keep their lands by agreeing to "collaborate," as they say, with the King your father. They sent me to France as a boy to acquire a good French accent.

BECKET: He managed, by collaborating, to amass a considerable fortune. As he was also a man of rigid principles, I imagine he contrived to do it in accordance with his conscience. That's a little piece of sleight of hand that men of principle are very skillful at in troubled times. (Anouilh 5-6)

The conversation then turns to Becket and his view of collaboration, and Becket

discloses his aesthetic tastes, detailing his love of luxury and comfort. He even suggests that the defense of his sister was only a matter of convenience, rather than some ethical or moral code.

KING: And you?

BECKET: I, my Lord?

KING: The sleight of hand, were you adept at it too?

BECKET: Mine was a different problem. I was a frivolous man, you'll agree? In fact, it never came up at all. I adore hunting and only the Normans...hunt. I adore luxury and luxury was Norman. I adore life and the Saxons' only birth-right was slaughter. I'll add that I adore honor.

KING: And was honor reconciled with collaboration too?

BECKET: I had the right to draw my sword against the first Norman nobleman who tried to lay hands on my sister.....I killed him in single combat. It's a detail, but it has its points.

KING: You could have always slit his throat and fled into the forest, as so many did.

BECKET: That would have been uncomfortable, and not a lot of use....My Lord, did I tell you? My new gold dishes have arrived from Florence. Will my Liege do me the honor of christening them with me at my house? (Anouilh 6)

Becket even uses luxury and comfort to end the dialogue of more self-revelatory statements. Later, in a scene after a battle between the invading Norman English and the French, King Henry II inquires about and speculates on Becket's internal motivations and Becket provides more indications of his location within Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage of existence.

BECKET: My prince, shall we get down to work? We haven't dealt with yesterday's dispatches.

KING: Yesterday we were fighting! We can't do everything.

BECKET: That was a holiday! We'll have to work twice as hard today.

KING: Does it amuse you - working for the good of my people? Do you mean to say you love all of those folks? To begin with they're too numerous. One can't love them, one doesn't know them. Anyway, you're lying; you don't love any-

thing or anybody.

BECKET: There's one thing I do love, my prince, and that I am sure of. Doing what I have to do and doing it well.

KING: Always the es-es. . . . What's your word again? I've forgotten it.

BECKET: Esthetics?

KING: Esthetics! Always the esthetic side.

BECKET: Yes, my prince. (Anouilh 44)

THE ETHICAL STAGE IN BECKET

For Kierkegaard, the next stage of existence is the "ethical" stage. This stage is reached after the aesthetic stage brings despair through continual empty choices with which to please the self without gaining the selfhood. The individual at this stage is committed to society and the state, recognizing the benefits of maintaining the social order through positive interpersonal relations, ethics and law. It is most comparable in modern psychology to Kohlberg's conventional stage of morality. This stage is not without danger since the social order can sometimes work counter to the interests of the individual, leaving one who has championed the social order "out to dry."

There are several key moments in the play in which Becket demonstrates his strong commitment to the state of England and consequently the ethical stage of existence. The first comes very promptly after Henry II appoints Becket the Chancellor of England in front of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

KING: I have decided to revive the office of Chancellor of England, keeper of the Triple Lion Seal, and to entrust it to my loyal servant and subject Thomas Becket. (Anouilh 7)

There are some brief very appreciative remarks to the king from Becket, interrupted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who also expresses his congratulations to Becket, who used to be a deacon in his Church.

KING: Etc., etc... Thank you, Archbishop! I knew this nomination would please you. But don't rely too much on Becket to play your game. He is my man. (Anouilh 9)

After a contentious dialogue between Henry II, Becket and the Archbishop of Canterbury over taxes owed to England by the Church for an upcoming war

with France, Becket abruptly ends the conversation with an authoritarian gesture demonstrating his newfound power.

BECKET: I think, your Highness, that it is pointless to pursue a discussion in which neither speaker is listening to the other. The law and custom of the land give us the means of coercion. We will use them.

BISHOP FOLLIET: Would you dare...to plunge a dagger in the bosom of Mother Church?

BECKET: My Lord and King has given me his Seal with the Three Lions to guard. My mother is England now. (Anouilh 13)

Becket continues to demonstrate his loyalty to England and hence the ethical stage later in the play, when he discusses with Henry II some troublesome news concerning the rising power of the Church in England while the monarch is at war in France.

KING: Pay attention. Now is your chance to educate yourself. The gentleman is saying some very profound things!

BECKET: Suppose you educate us instead. When you're married - if you do marry despite the holes in your virtue - which would you prefer, to be mistress in your own house or to have your village priest laying down the law there?

KING: Talk sense, Becket! Priests are always intriguing. I know that. But I also know that I can crush them any time I like.

BECKET: Talk sense, Sire. If you don't do the crushing now, in five years' time there will be two Kings in England, the Archbishop of Canterbury and you. And in ten years' time there will be only one.

KING: And it won't be me?

BECKET: I rather fear not.

KING: What will God say to it all, though? After all, they're His Bishops!

BECKET: We aren't children. You know one can always come to some arrangement with God, on this earth. (Anouilh 46)

THE RELIGIOUS STAGE IN BECKET

Yet as play develops, Becket moves into Kierkegaard's religious stage, in which the individual's love is centered on an absolute relationship with God. This stage is initially thrust upon him, as King Henry II is able to maneuver Becket's appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury after the death of the former archbishop. Becket is visibly fearful of this appointment but without knowing the reason. There is a sense that Becket understands the fullness of such an absolute commitment to God if he becomes Archbishop. But as with much of Kierkegaard's philosophy, there are some complexities within the religious sphere.

Kierkegaard's religious state is divided into two parts. The first is religious A, which can be present in any culture, Christian or otherwise. In this stage, the individual is aware of the Divine and strives to fulfill its promptings faithfully. It can be considered an easier state of religiousness, as Becket himself attests through his initial experiences centering on the absolute of God through the giving to the poor as Archbishop.

BECKET: There are no invitations. The great doors will be thrown open and you will go out into the street and tell the poor they are dining with me tonight.

1ST SERVANT: Very good, my Lord.

BECKET: I want the service to be impeccable. The dishes presented to each guest first, with full ceremony, just as for princes. I must say it was all very pretty stuff. A prick of vanity! The mark of an upstart. A truly saintly man would never have done the whole thing in one day. Nobody will ever believe it's genuine. I hope You haven't inspired me with these holy resolutions in order to make me look ridiculous, Lord. It's all so new to me. I'm setting about it a little clumsily perhaps. And you're far too sumptuous too. Precious stones around your bleeding Body...I shall give you to some poor village church. It's like leaving for a holiday. Forgive me, Lord but I never enjoyed myself so much in my whole life. I don't believe You are a sad God. The joy I feel in shedding all my riches must be part of Your divine intentions. There. Farewell, Becket. I wish there had been something I had regretted parting with, so I could offer it to You. Lord, are You not tempting me? It all seems far too easy. (Anouilh 63-4)

But the euphoric religious A can eventually give way to Kierkegaard's religious B. The core of Christ's message to love your neighbor and die to the world characterizes this uniquely Christian stage.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up the cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there

be to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. 16:24-26)

The demand of Christ to die to the self is filled with tension. The world attracts the individual with its pleasure and convenience, while the radical demand of Christ is inherently resigned to the suffering of the individual. In addition, Kierkegaard would suggest through *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety* that this stage encompasses a deep sense of individual sin and dependency on the grace of Christ. For Kierkegaard, this is the beginning of Faith and the "Knight of Infinite Resignation," who is resigned to the suffering of Christ but who may eventually become a "Knight of Faith." In *Fear and Trembling*, focused on the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, Kierkegaard sharpened the distinction between the two Knights. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac – a teleological suspension of the ethical or the Absolute over the ethical – through his Faith. For Abraham climbing Mount Morai, Isaac will be restored to him after his sacrifice. He has such faith in an unseen God that Isaac's restoration is absolute despite the absurdity of such a belief. Thus Abraham is the "Knight of Faith" through the paradox of faith and the virtue of the absurd. This is a bridge too far for Kierkegaard; he suggests in *Fear and Trembling* that he does not have the Faith of Abraham: "I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd.... Be it a duty or whatever, I cannot make the final movement, the paradoxical movement of faith, although there is nothing I wish more" (Kierkegaard 51). To a degree, we can see this movement into religious B in the final scene of the play with Becket as he prepares for evening Vespers service with an innate awareness that he may soon become a martyr after his return to England and Canterbury from a lengthy and contested exile.

BECKET: I'm ready, all adorned for Your festivities, Lord. Do not, in this interval of waiting, let one last doubt enter my soul.

PRIEST: Your Grace! There are four armed men outside! They're breaking the door in! You must go into the back of the church and have the choir gates closed! They're strong enough, they'll hold!

BECKET: It is time for Vespers.

PRIEST: I know, but....

BECKET: Everything must be the way it should be. The choir gates will remain open....Here it comes. The supreme folly. This is its hour. One does not enter armed into God's house. What do you want?

1ST BARON: Your death.

BECKET: It is time for the service.....Oh how difficult You make it all! And how heavy Your honor is to bear! Poor Henry. (Anouilh 114-6)

This, Becket's final line, is followed by his painful death and mutilation by the four knights. To a degree, this begs the question: was Becket a Knight of Infinite Resignation, resigned to the suffering of Christ through faith? Or was Becket a Knight of Faith, believing the paradox of Faith and the virtue of the Absurd? For Kierkegaard, there is no answer since we can't know the secret life of the Knight of Faith. In fact, Kierkegaard suggests that Knights of Faith may be silently walking alongside us, in the world but not of this world. But through the exercise of applying Kierkegaard's Knight of Infinite Resignation/Faith, we gain a deeper understanding of Kierkegaard's religious stage and possibly the depth of personal faith.

THE FINAL STAGE

Indeed, there are several questions that the play asks of its audience regardless of spiritual perspective or religious persuasion. These can be summed up in the dialogue in the play with King Henry's barons, who do not care for the upstart Thomas Becket the Chancellor. They are discussing Becket's character but one of the barons inserts his desire to wait on his decision concerning Becket's character.

4th BARON: I'm waiting.

1st BARON: Waiting for what?

4th BARON: Till he shows himself. Some sorts of games are like that: you follow them all day through the forest, by sounds, or tracks, or smell. But it wouldn't do any good to charge ahead with drawn lance; you'd just spoil everything because you don't know for sure what sort of animal you're dealing with. You have to wait.

1ST BARON: What for?

4th BARON: For whatever it is to show itself. And if you're patient it always does in the end. Animals know more than men do, nearly always, but a man has something in him that an animal hasn't got: he knows how to wait. With this man Becket - I'll wait.

1ST BARON: For what?

4TH BARON: For him to show himself. For him to break cover. The day he does, we'll know who he is. (Anouilh 40-1)

And in the end, this dialogue begs the question of us if we examine Becket through

the lens of Kierkegaard's stages of existence. When we "break cover" and finally show ourselves, who will we be? Where will we be on the spectrum of Kierkegaard's stages of existence? Aesthetic? Ethical? Religious? A Knight of Infinite Resignation? Or a Knight of Faith? And therein lies the real rub of Kierkegaard and the play *Becket*. They both ask the fundamental question of each of us: Who are we really? Even if you don't accept Kierkegaard's categories, the play can provoke an assessment of our personal and spiritual commitments in our lives. And the final result of a reading of the play *Becket* through the lens of Kierkegaard's stages is the didactic ease in which the stages are demonstrated to the reader.

WORKS CITED

- Anouilh, Jean. *Becket or The Honor of God*. Trans. L. Hill. New York: Riverhead, 1995.
- Attwater, Donald, and Catherine Rachel John. *The Penguin Dictionary of the Saints*, 3rd ed. London: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Burns, Paul. *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005.
- The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Evans, C. Stephen. *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Becket*. Dir. Peter Glenville. Perf. Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole, John Gielgud. Paramount Pictures, 1964. Film.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*. Trans. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- . *Either/Or Part I*. Trans. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- . *Either/Or Part II*. Trans. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- . *Stages on Life's Way*. Trans. H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Noddings, Nel. *Philosophy of Education*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995.

Aether

DAY 3

The last thing I'd heard from them was they would come for me, that they would be here in three days. Today was day three. Then a pop and crackle on the radio.

Then a voice.

"Gauthier? Gauthier, come in."

I rush to the radio and respond, "Yes?"

"Do you have any idea what happened to the station?"

"No. No, I have no idea. All I heard was the metal groan and snap apart. I sealed myself in this section. The hatch is locked tight." I suddenly became worried. They asked me the same thing two days ago.

"We're at the station. It appears that your crew is gone. Everything is destroyed. We're not entirely sure what happened there, but we'll continue investigating. Keep your radio sending a signal. We'll try to use that to locate you."

I find a damaged wire and yank it off the wall, tying it around the radio button to keep the signal maintained. "I've got it broadcasting," I said. "I'll see you when you get here."

Then nothing.

All I can hear is my heartbeat, the blood throbbing through my temples, and the sloshing of food in my stomach.

Thomas Wallingford is a Denver-area writer and poet. He is a graduate of the University of Northern Colorado, and has been a featured speaker and writer on topics ranging from social justice and mental health to fiction and poetry. He is a contributor to *303 Magazine*, *The Mighty*, and the Carson J. Spencer Foundation blog, and his work has been featured in *The Crucible*, a publication of the University of Northern Colorado. Wallingford was a runner-up (poetry) for the Rosenberry Prize of the Walter S. Rosenberry III Charitable Trust and honorable mention (fiction) for Galaxy Press' Writers of the Future.

I worry about decompression primarily, but also about how long it is taking to find me. My new home is three rooms, protected from the outside by a large metal door.

I push myself off the wall and move toward one of the several pantries that were once part of the station. Upon inspection I determine I have enough food, water, and oxygen to last even if they can't find me for a few more days.

There is very little to do but wait, so I grab a prepackaged meal with the words "Shrimp Scampi" in big, plain black letters on a foil colored pack. I crave potato chips, but food with crumbs or seasonings that can potentially find their way into the instruments aren't allowed. I place utensils, snacks and juice on a ceil blue tray with Velcro and magnets affixed.

I stare down at the food for a long time. Any onlookers would probably think I am praying before my meal. I am not praying and I am too nervous to be hungry. Frankly, my rescue is out of God's hands and in the hands of those searching for my radio signal.

Is some news program down there broadcasting my plight? I wonder exactly how much of an effect it has on people. I look out the hatch window and see Earth; it appears frozen and staring back at me.

No one acts as if the world is turning. Maybe that means everything is the same.

DAY 4

There's not a sleep module in my section of the station. Floating, I wake whenever my head collides with something. I wake at 0237, again at 0458, and again at 0820. Eventually I stabilize myself by tying my ankles, body, and wrists to a table. My wrists need to be loose enough to tie and untie my body, so they float freely while everything else is tied securely.

I rustle around and become more worried that I have not been found yet.

After some time I untie myself and make my way to the radio console. I ask if anyone is still looking for me. I release the push-to-talk button and listen for a response.

I wait.

And I wait.

And I –

"Gauthier?" A surprised but relaxed voice crackles in. I can tell he doesn't take thoughts of me home with him. Regardless, his voice still calms me.

"Yes. Where are you?"

"We have been trying to find you, but your radio signals seem to be bouncing off of something before they reach us," he said. "We didn't find you where we believed you were transmitting from. It's delaying the process a bit, but we will be there for you."

I wonder if he is being honest, over-anxiously optimistic, or simply trying to comfort me against the inevitable.

"Thank you. Is there anything I should be doing to help? Anything at all?" I ask.

He pauses as if trying to think up a lie. “Just keep transmitting,” he says. “Keep talking, singing, rhythmic noises. Anything we can detect with a quick sweep.”

“Okay. Will do. I’ll see you when you get here.”

Once again, silence.

It becomes more and more difficult to busy myself. I begin the dangerous activity of relaxing and thinking. Because of the low gravity, my body bends itself inward, as if in a swimming pool, approaches a fetal position, and rotates forward, always forward.

With each rotation, the prepared tray of shrimp scampi moves in and out of my vision. The ever-distant Earth does the same.

Earth.

Shrimp scampi.

Earth.

Shrimp scampi.

I realize the irony of food from the depths of the sea drifting into the heights of outer space.

I wonder if the Earth feels as I do: spinning, lost, and distant. A lone sapient planet drifting in the sun’s grasp. I wonder if I am drifting to the whims of the sun’s flame tendrils as well or if I am drifting elsewhere. A satellite or a rogue planet.

I propel myself toward the window to investigate Earth more closely. It appears to have gotten smaller. To ensure it is not a delusion caused by worry, I grab a marker and trace its circumference on the glass. *I’ll know tomorrow where I am going.*

DAY 5

After several days, I finally eat the shrimp scampi. On my tongue it feels like overdone oatmeal. I hold it against my palate until the sodium slowly works its way around my mouth. My gums and the roof of my mouth numb. I swallow.

Pushing my finger between my lips and crooking it upward, I run my finger across the weathered crags, peaks, and valleys of the roof of my mouth. As I approach my teeth, I feel the roots ever so slightly under the gums. I move forward, pressing harder. My tooth feels as if it gives slightly, but that may be the flesh of my finger. So I use the marker to get a more objective indication of whether my teeth are moving or not. I press the marker against the tip of my teeth. They’re steady. I go back to using my finger, press against the front of my teeth, feel a grainy texture, and realize I do not have a toothbrush.

My fingernails scrape up yellowed plaque like an earthmover across a vacant lot. I scrape up plaque until I can run my tongue across smooth teeth.

“Hello?” I say into the radio.

A voice crackles over the radio. “How are you doing up there?”

“I need to brush my teeth.”

A long pause. “That right?”

“Yeah. I might be able to smell my breath.”

Another pause, patronizing this time. “How do you mean?”

“My breath fucking stinks. I’ll see you when you get here,” I secure the radio again.

I wonder if my family is waiting for me to return or are they more interested in the millions they would get from the government if I drifted away forever?

I think, *Maybe I’m more fascinating dead. Maybe more fascinating as conspiracy nut fodder. Maybe my son’s more interesting as the kid with the dead astronaut dad.*

DAY 6

After being inconveniently woken up by my own rumination, I decide to busy myself with the matter of being found. I whistle scales up and down. Up and down. Major scales, minor scales. Up and down. Just trying to send a pattern out into the void.

I’ve been using the bathroom in specially sealed vomit bags. They are stuffed in small compartments throughout my station. I decide to find out whether I can get more use out of one bag. I lock two of them together and push one end toward the other. One edge buckles and a blob of urine floats off toward a wall. Trying to contain it causes more urine and feces to float out across the station. I shove as much of one bag as I can into the other, seal it, and chase the rest down with the second bag.

The old station had a purification system to reconstitute waste for drinkable water. I never understood the mechanics of it.

I look over to the hatch window. I can’t tell if my circle is any larger than Earth, but it appears to be slightly to the right. As I move toward the radio to relay my findings, the circle moves slightly to the left and encircles Earth again.

I grunt to no one in particular.

I float toward the window to get a better view of the circle. Up close the black marker does not show well against the blackness of space. An oversight. I turn the lights off and flick on my LED flashlight. The circle is still sitting perfectly around Earth. I think about using the flashlight to send a Morse code message to humanity.

Instead, I whistle scales. My jaw muscles pinch my cheeks. Like faking a smile at a party, I’m faking niceties for my rescuers and whistling while I work. Whistling is my work.

DAY 7

My jaw is still clenched so I begin to hum songs. Any songs. “The Alphabet Song.” “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep.” Mozart’s “Ah vous dirai-je, Maman.” Anything I can think of. I try to avoid humming “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

I try to figure out how far away from Earth I am. I measure and calculate and eventually give up.

“I think I see Africa,” I say to maybe somebody. I don’t want to open the channel. I

don't know if I am more worried that they'd sweep over my little section of space while the channel wasn't broadcasting or if I am more worried no one would answer.

DAY 8

I spend a large amount of my day tapping a marker against the radio and eating more shrimp scampi.

DAY 9

I hear banging on the outside of my station. I'm sure I'm rescued, so I push myself toward the hatch. I place my hands on the latch but control myself. I don't want to open the hatch too soon.

I look out the hatch window and find that the noise isn't coming from a rescue team. I see my crew by the station, their bodies rolling across metal and drifting into the deep. One of them smacks face-first into the window. His open eyes are glassy from the ice and his lips are parted slightly, as if he is struggling to take one more breath. Lieutenant Bailey.

Suddenly, he snaps his eyes open and pounds on the window. It's impossible to tell if his expression is frightened or enraged or anguished. I imagine the hands under his gloves pulverize to shards, then splinters, then icy dust. He stops pounding as suddenly as he began and drifts away from the window.

I awaken to find the ties had loosened and I'd been kicking clipboards and computers into the sides of my station. I hear the clock buzzing. When the numbers on the display change, the noise stops briefly.

This continues throughout my meals. The buzzing sends vibrations through my skin and my teeth and my forehead. I place my ear close to the clock to listen for patterns. I try to match a humming tone with the buzz. I can't. I wonder if something is wrong with the circuitry. Maybe something is wrong with my circuitry. Maybe something's loose in the clock. *Wait, no. There are no moving parts.*

I disassemble the clock anyway. The noise stops.

"I think something was wrong with my clock," I say into the radio. "It was emitting a small buzz. Maybe that was causing interference. I don't know." I release the microphone. Only static over the airwaves. The throbbing breath of an infinitely large monster.

I leave it on.

DAY 10

I dream of Adam wandering around Eden and sitting near rivers. The animals graze around him, feeding on the grass, on the trees, on everything but each other. I'm sure the self-manicuring grass feels like a down blanket for his toes. A light breeze makes its way through the garden. It doesn't blow so much as flow around the garden.

Adam sighs and sits next to a tree. He falls asleep and his stomach opens like a robe. The skin above his ribs folds back. Blood pours to the ground, the thickness of the liquid makes it pool above the dirt. His exposed muscles twitch. They move further in and out until there is a crack. A bone tears through his flesh. The rib falls to the ground.

Earth swells up into two small hills with the rib in the valley between them. They pour into each other. Rain softens the ground and washes the blood into a throbbing mass. A hand ascends, fingers like a hydra.

A lightning strike. Four people wandering the desert. A bloody rock. A flood. Bloodstained doors and wailing parents. Crucifixions. A moon made of blood. A lamb with howling trumpets. Scrolls opened. A scorched earth. War. A dead world. Stars. Stars. Stars.

My eyes snap open. The walls look more distant than usual. I untie myself and push toward the hatch that leads to the outside. Through the window I see Earth, stars, and distant galaxies. The stars and galaxies may have died and torn everything around them asunder millions of years ago. They may have ruined countless lives.

I caught my hand moving to the latch and jerk away with a start

I move my attention toward the distant Earth. I wish I could watch it turn into an ember. I close my eyes and can almost hear the distant bombs turning continents into oceans of flame. Eventually the planet fades from a glowing red to black. I can't feel where my body ends and everything else begins. Things no longer feel as if they're moving into extremities, but through them. I hear low rumbles and crackles caressing me, giving me contentment I haven't felt in days. My eyes slowly open but the noise continues. The monster in the radio, still breathing.

Faint discussions cut through the din, syllables blending with breathing static. The voices blend so well with the breathing I may have been missing them all along. Maybe it's the monster talking.

I hear a woman speaking deliberately: "5-4-0 5-4-0 6-1 6-1 0-9-0-1-4 0-9-0-1-4 5-3-9-9-3 5-3-9-9-3"

I frantically paddle through the air to the radio. The message repeats. I write what I hear on a clipboard.

As the voice fades away I grab the microphone and scream, "It's Gauthier! Where are you? What are you trying to tell me? Are you coming?"

The monster doesn't breathe anymore when I release the button.

DAY 11

I can't make sense of the code, even after I run the numbers through every cypher I had ever heard of.

Out of frustration, I crumple the papers I had been working on but am careful not to destroy them in case I need them later. In case the numbers mean something. In case

someone is coming.

In my periphery I see a red bug scurry behind monitors mounted on a wall panel. We'd used those monitors for tests we'd been running. No use to me now. With tools from another compartment, I remove the panel. I see a scuttling red figure shoot toward the pantry. I push my way through the station like a rower pushing off rocks. I chase the bug around the pantry for what feels like hours. The idea of touching another life again invigorates me.

The bug and I finally meet on my makeshift bed. He is a fairly large beetle with a glossy red shell, long legs, black underbelly, and a horn on his head. Reaching out to touch him, I find that my fingertips brush against nothing. The beetle hisses at me. Then squeals. Then screams. The penetrating noise follows me as I try to escape. It stays all around me, relentlessly chasing me around the station.

My throat gradually feels increasingly raspy. I cough violently. The screaming stops.

DAY 12

Waking up, I untie my ankles, body, and one wrist, but can't muster the energy to untie the other. I'm surprised I hadn't broken a sweat from the exertion because I somehow felt heavier.

I let my body relax and move around like a windsock in a weak tornado. Nausea sets in and I weep.

DAY 13

A thrilling excitement interrupts my sleep. I swim toward the radio, press the button and ramble off every thought that comes into my head, a memoir for the aliens, whether they be on Earth or in the furthest ends of the galaxy. As I reach the present day in my audio autobiography, I feel a sense of accomplishment. *That, I think, may have been the best radio show ever broadcast.*

I release the radio.

I tear the wires away and sat contented. The joys of surrender begin immediately.

DAY 14

I untie my legs, body, and wrists from the table and make my way to the pantry. I walk myself forward with my hands pressed over my head and my feet below me. The feeling of pressure against my feet brings back memories.

In the pantry, I rummage through the food packets. The "Spicy Green Beans" were retooled by a celebrity chef on Earth and quickly became one of my favorite foods on the station. Another, "Appetizing Appetizer," is a mystery overall, but the spices leave a lasting impression on the tongue. Other foods are too bland to taste in zero gravity. Finally, I find what I've been searching for, "Freeze-Dried Vanilla Ice Cream." I eat excitedly, yet

methodically, savoring every morsel.

For some time, I stare out at Earth and wonder less about civilization and more about the Earth itself. I see the planet reverse its spin, turning faster and faster. The continents begin to shift together, the seas dry, the world glows red, then fades to black. Explosions send chunks of rock shooting into the solar system. I watch the moon heat up, rip apart. The remnants encircle the Earth. Debris bombards the planet. A new planet forms out of the scorched Earth like Athena from the head of Zeus. This new orb drifts away and what remains of the Earth crumbles into dust around the sun.

I blink and the Earth is green and blue again.

Once again, I fiddle with the locks and mechanisms sealing me in. I prepare, closing my eyes. I see the sun expand and shed the cocoon of its outer layers. I grip the handle. Planets drift out of their orbits. I twist the lever. The sun grows brighter. The suction pulls at me. The sun throbs rhythmically and violently, shooting layers of its atmosphere in all directions and fracturing the escaping planets. I fight to pull the door open against the violent vacuum of space and the shrunken sun fades from red to black.

I rip the door open and lean out of my station, open my eyes, and see Earth as it is. Everything in my line of sight reddens. Space rips the air from my lungs. The saliva on my tongue boils.

I push off toward Earth. I have rescued myself.

Steak and Wine

Kate moved as quickly as she could, lifting food from the cart, placing items onto the belt. Several boxes of macaroni and cheese, because she could fill the bellies of the whole family for less than a dollar and fifty cents. Margarine: poison to a healthy body and she knew it, but butter cost ten times as much. Chips because the kids begged for snacks, and chips were cheaper than fruit. Four frozen pizzas, \$2 each on sale. Two loaves of white bread, a quarter the price of whole grain. Expensive soy formula—the stuff made Matty constipated, but breast milk or dairy milk would kill him. Two gorgeous steaks. A bag of russet potatoes. Asparagus. Sour cream. Cheddar cheese. A bottle of wine.

The baby was in his carrier, screaming, as usual. His tummy hurt. His tummy always hurt. Three year old David had yellow crust under his nose. Kate would never have taken him out like this, but there was no food in the house and monthly benefits had been loaded to their EBT card that morning. Their older sister stood at the end of the checkout lane, arms crossed, staring straight ahead.

Kate's stomach seized as she placed the food where the cashier could scan it. Her husband's birthday was the next day, and she'd wanted to surprise him with a special dinner. She'd eaten nothing but pasta and margarine for days, saving up. She couldn't wait to see the look on his face. He hadn't had a high-end steak in longer than she could remember. She prayed the \$12.62 in her wallet would be enough to pay for the wine after tax. If not, she'd have to put it back. The checking account had been overdrawn so long

E.A. Comiskey is an award winning blogger, nationally syndicated columnist and author of the forthcoming novel *More Things in Heaven and Earth* (Nuff Said, 2016).

the bank closed the account and every credit card they had was over the limit and behind in the payments.

The cashier gave her the total and she handed him the bright orange benefits card and cash for the wine, giving thanks that it was only \$12.44. Hopefully the gas in the tank would be enough to last until payday.

Behind her, a woman snorted loud enough for her to hear: "Oh, nice. She's buying steak and alcohol with her food stamps, and I'm scraping together enough to pay for ground beef."

"Maybe she should have another baby so she can get more money from the state," the woman continued. "Then she'd have enough to buy some tissues to wipe her kid's nose."

§§

Freddie's hand slid up her thigh so slowly she'd barely noticed until his fingertips slipped under the hem of her short denim skirt.

"Stop," Kate said.

His kisses trailed down her neck and back up to her ear. "I want you so bad."

Her heart fluttered against the cage of her ribs. Her belly was fire. She wanted him, too, but she'd never been one to let her feelings run away with her. She pushed his hand away and scooted away from him so that her back was pressed against the passenger door of his Ford truck. "We agreed," she said. "Not yet. Babies and college don't go together so well."

He sighed, leaned back, and pulled her leg up into his lap.

"Did you tell your parents?"

"That you got accepted too? Yeah. I think they're worried you'll distract me."

He grinned, all white teeth and dimples. "That's my plan."

"Beast."

"You won't even need your degree," he said. "Why would anyone want to be a teacher when they're married to a successful architect? I'll be making a quarter of a million dollars a year. You'll be ordering the nanny around and getting pedicures."

She laughed. "A nanny, eh? How many heirs do you think I'm going to produce for you, great one?"

"Three," he said.

"You've given this some thought," she said.

"Two boys who will work with me in the family firm, and a little girl who I'm going to spoil into a rotten brat."

"Hey! Girls can work in the family firm."

"Not my girl. She's going to be a horrible little princess who loves her daddy more than anyone else in the world forever and ever."

She rolled her eyes. "Sounds great."

"It will be. You'll see. I'm going to give you the world."

She believed him.

§§

The suit had just about maxed out their credit card, but they agreed it was crucial he make a great first impression. Suit or not, whatever he'd said in that interview worked. He was the youngest architect on staff at the city's largest firm. He'd told her how nervous he'd been at the interview. None of those nerves were present just then as he moved from the bedroom to what they described as "the other room" – the kitchen/living area/dining nook – in their 600-square-foot apartment.

Kate set a plate of bacon and eggs with toast on the table. "Breakfast for the conquering hero," she said.

He kissed her and sat down. "This looks amazing," he said.

She looked up at him. "I'm so proud of you," she said.

"You ain't seen nothing yet. I have a surprise for you," he said.

"Don't keep me in suspense."

"I'm evil that way," he said handing her a piece of paper. "Meet me here at 5:30."

There was an address written on the piece of paper that she did not recognize. "What is this?"

He talked around the bite of eggs he'd stuffed into his mouth. "If I told you it wouldn't be a surprise, would it?"

She thought about that address all day, as she took attendance, explained cell respiration to her students, marked assignments.

After school, she attended a mandatory meeting about watching kids for signs of substance abuse. Time seemed to move slowly. The speaker droned on eternally.

Finally, at 5:05 p.m., she drove her rattling red convertible (ignoring the smell of burning oil coming from the engine) to the address he'd given her. She used directions she'd looked up in an atlas in the school library during the lunch hour.

With five minutes to spare, she pulled up to a two-story house with a two-car garage. There was a red ribbon on the front door, and Freddie sat on the front steps, grinning.

She stepped out of the car and stood on the smooth blacktop of the quiet residential street with her mouth hanging open.

"Come and see," he beckoned.

He held the oak door with the two beveled glass windows open. She stepped inside. A great room melded into the kitchen. It was light and open, spacious and breathtaking. She ran a finger over the smooth, round river rock that outlined the fireplace and chimney. Her heels clicked softly on the hardwood floors.

Standing behind her, Freddie put his hands on her shoulders. "There are four bed-

rooms upstairs. You know, one for us, and one for each of the kids-to-be.” He kissed the top of her head. “Do you like it?”

She turned and sobbed against his chest.

“What’s wrong? We can probably still back out.”

“No!” She managed. “It’s all just so perfect.”

He squeezed her tightly against him. “Well, there is one thing I should tell you.”

He led her through the kitchen to the garage door, and pushed it open. Inside the wide space was a brand new navy blue SUV. “You can’t drive your old beater in a nice neighborhood like this. People will think you’re casing the joint.”

She squealed and raced to sit behind the wheel. “I can’t believe you did this,” she said. “Are you sure we can afford all this?”

“Not only can we afford this,” he said, “but by the time Freddie Jr. arrives, you’ll be able to quit your job and stay home with him.”

§§

The nursery was awash in soft blue light. The baby snored softly in the round white crib.

“God, she’s so beautiful,” Freddie whispered.

“Our perfect little Brooke,” Kate agreed. She smiled at her husband. “I really love you.”

“Good thing, ‘cause you’re stuck with me.”

“I can’t believe I get to spend my days rocking this little angel.”

“Yeah, and wiping her poopy butt, and washing my dirty underwear. It’s a sweet life,” he teased.

“It really is. Thank you for giving me this life.”

He kissed her then, and led her out of the baby’s room.

§§

Kate sat on the edge of the bathtub, grinning like a fool. She could hear Brooke jumping on the bed and singing the ABC song on the other side of the door. After more than a year of trying, she’d almost given up hope that a second baby would come, but the three little sticks on the counter all showed the same pink plus sign. She couldn’t wait to think of an extra special way to tell Freddie. He’d be over-the-moon.

She counted in her head. The baby should come before Christmas. Two little ones with gifts under the tree that year.

§§

Their third child, Matthew, was born with Phenylketonuria, a metabolic issue. “We’ll have to be very careful about his diet,” the doctor said.

Freddie stroked his infant son's head. It seemed the poor baby hadn't had a moment's peace in his two and a half weeks on this earth. The tests and procedures were endless. The baby never seemed to stop crying. "Our other children never had any issues," he said.

"How old are they?" the doctor asked.

"Two and Five," Kate said.

"Genetic issues can skip all over a family. I suspect they'll be fine. Little Matthew, here, is going to be fine, too. We're just going to have to tread carefully with him."

Kate cradled her newborn son against her chest and prayed for him to be well.

§§

"How could they cut your hours? I thought you were supposed to be a partner by now," Kate said.

Freddie set the pan down hard on the counter. "What do you want me to do, Kate? The market crashed. No one can get a loan, so no one can buy a house. If no one is buying, no one is building. If no one is building, architects have no work. I'm the low man on the totem pole over there."

She stood, bouncing Matty on her hip, trying to keep him calm. Trying to keep herself calm. "Are you going to lose your job?"

"I don't know," he said.

"We could sell the house," she said. "We don't need such a big place, really."

He looked at her with frustration clear in his features. "No one is buying. This house isn't worth half of what we owe. We're upside down on both cars. We make the payments on all of it, or we go bankrupt."

"If anything happens I could go back to teaching."

"And who would take care of him?" he gestured to the baby. "You can't put him in daycare. He wouldn't last a week."

Kate sank down into her chair. "What are we going to do?"

He turned away and said nothing.

§§

"I got a job," Freddie announced, closing the door behind him and kicking his shoes off before he stepped off the mat.

"Really?" Maybe everything would be OK.

"Yeah. I can stay at the firm four days a week, and bartend at Finnegan's at night."

He brushed past her on the way up the steps. "It's a job, Kate. If I can make enough in a month of pouring drinks to cover the mortgage, maybe my check from the firm will pay for everything else."

"Mama!" Brooke called down. "David's got booger face again!"

At the sound of his sister's shout, baby Matt began to cry. Kate cried, too.

§§

Kate stood with her back ram-rod straight. The cashmere sweater she'd received for Christmas two years ago suddenly felt much too warm. Her feet, on the other hand, turned to ice inside the leather loafers she'd purchased to celebrate her feet returning to their normal size after David was born.

As she walked away from the register, the woman behind her said, "I bet that coat cost more than my whole wardrobe. Nice to know our tax dollars are going to the needy."

How had it come to this? she thought. They'd done everything right. This was the land of opportunity, right?

On her way out she noticed the "now hiring" sign.

The store was open twenty-four hours. Maybe she could get a job working third shift. It would only be minimum wage, and she'd never see her husband, but that's what Americans did, right? They worked.

She climbed into the car she could no longer afford, and drove home, wishing she had never bought any of the nice things they owned. Wishing she'd never quit teaching. Wishing the economy hadn't crashed and cost them everything. Wishing she'd never have to use that horrible bright orange card again.

