“I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing, Each to Each:”

Modernism, Science, Mythology, and Feminist Narratives

by

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Abstract

"I HAVE HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING, EACH TO EACH:" MODERNISM, SCIENCE, MYTHOLOGY, AND FEMINIST NARRATIVE

by

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Adviser: Distinguished Professor Jane Marcus

This work presents my vision of modernism, which encompasses science, mythology, and SF (science fiction/speculative fiction). I examine lesser-known writers such as Hope Mirrlees, Nancy Cunard, H. P. Lovecraft, and Katherine Burdekin and argue that they should be inducted into the canon of well-known authors such as T. S. Eliot. As well, I position the feminist narratives of authors such as Hope Mirrlees and H.D. against the patriarchal narratives of authors such as C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot. In the latter portion of this work, I examine how modernism has influenced contemporary literature by Margaret Atwood and Caitlin R. Kiernan and discuss women writers within the SF genre. Finally, I compare Virginia Woolf's modernist masterpiece *The Waves* with Caitlin R. Kiernan's contemporary masterpiece *The Drowning Girl.* I contend that Woolf and Kiernan fully unite science and mythology in their respective liberatory feminist narratives. Throughout the course of this work, I use pedagogical theory to propose strategies for bringing these authors and their texts into the classroom and making them relevant for college-level literature students by referring to contemporary popular culture.

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INTRODUCTION: THE IMPERFECT LANTERN

> But in addition, Mr. Cobden-Sanderson felt the inevitable desire to explain the meaning of the word Cosmos to all and sundry…He was not quite certain what he meant…What is the extraordinary ring of harmony within harmony that encircles us…What in short, does the word Cosmos mean? Whereupon the rocket explodes, and the red and gold showers descend, and we look on with sympathy, but feel a little chill about the feet and not very clear as to the direction of the road.
>
> - From "The Cosmos" by Virginia Woolf

> It is so difficult to say just what I mean!
>
> - From *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot

The world did not end on December 21, 2012, as predicted by Hollywood and the internet. Instead, 12/21/12 marked the end of a b'ak'tun, or a "long count" time period in the Mesoamerican calendar. Mayan scholars such as Linda Schele have argued that the end of the thirteenth b'ak'tun meant a new cycle and a change in human consciousness. If literature and literary criticism can be seen as a reflection and expression of human consciousness, I am at least initially inclined to agree with Schele and others, for by the end of 2012 the academic discourse regarding canonical literature had changed drastically.

Current dynamics in the practice of literature and literary study have allowed into the canon works that were not previously included, particularly works of speculative/science fiction. Consider, for example, the wildly popular June 2012 science fiction issue of *The New Yorker* – an issue whose contents page includes shining stars of the genre such as Ursula K. LeGuin, William Gibson, and, in his very last published essay, Ray Bradbury. The cover shows a stereotypical gathering of intelligentsia in a library over cocktails; the reader might suppose it depicts a faculty event for the English department at Columbia or Harvard University. Yet the party is being "crashed" by a spaceman complete with 1950s ray gun, a robot, and a tentacled alien. And so, the issue tells us, has speculative fiction entered the hallowed canon; as Ursula K.

LeGuin writes in her essay "The Golden Age" appearing in that issue, "For a long time, critics and English professors declared that science fiction wasn't literature" (79). In contrast, in May 2004, *PMLA, the* literary journal, published a Special Topics issue on Science Fiction and literary studies. The work of "lost" but much revered SF writer H. P. Lovecraft was not only collected in a Library of America edition in 2005, it also was reviewed by the estimable "Lemony Snickett" (Daniel Handler) in *The New York Times Book Review.* It seemed as if SF had become the "new black" in literature and literary studies, a welcome development for SF aficionados like me who compensated for our forbidden love of time machines and extraterrestrial visitors by too-loudly singing the praises of "acceptable" greats like William Shakespeare and Ernest Hemingway. Finally we were allowed to openly adore *both Othello* and *At the Mountains of Madness*!

Or are we? Take a closer look at that *New Yorker* cover. The party guests are aghast with disapproval at SF's sudden arrival in their midst, as evinced by sidelong worried glances and moues of disapproval. Most tellingly, the spaceman, robot, and alien have knocked several books off the bookshelves, which lie in a haphazard pile on the floor. Here is the true subtext of the supposed respectability of SF: it is against the better judgment of the powers that be and threatens to topple the established literary hierarchy. Even the choice of cover artist becomes a factor in this subtext: Daniel Clowes is an "alternative" graphic novelist best known for counter-culture works such as *Ghost World* and *Art School Confidential*, neither of which falls into the SF genre.

The science fiction issue of *The New Yorker* came under criticism in an article posted on Tor Book's official website; Tor is one of the major publishing houses for SF literature. In "Genre in the Mainstream: *The New Yorker's* Science Fiction Issue," Ryan Britt writes,

"Highbrow culture likes science fiction now. Science fiction…is…cool. But do they really?" Britt points out what many others have remarked about the issue: all the actual fiction in the issue was written by people who are not primarily SF writers. The SF writers appearing in the issue, like Bradbury and LeGuin, are limited to non-fiction essays. Britt says, "the lack of inclusion of an actual honest-to-goodness science fiction (or fantasy!) writer made me feel like we weren't getting a fair shake."

Nor does the *Times* review of Lovecraft give his work a "fair shake." Handler writes of Lovecraft, "he's not read nearly as widely as he is regarded, and frankly it's not difficult to see why…it's tough to venture into a Lovecraft story with a straight face," suggesting that a modern reader of Lovecraft is more likely to laugh in derision than to shudder with fear. Handler extensively quotes from Lovecraft's work seemingly only to belittle him, even saying, "Oh, come on," in response to one passage. By the end of the article Handler admits the "hopeless isolation" in Lovecraft's work and compares him to Samuel Beckett, but it is a case of too little, too late. The entire article has a derisive tone that Handler would hardly have adopted were he writing about canonical modernist and Lovecraft's contemporary T. S. Eliot. I am reminded of LeGuin's words in her *New Yorker* essay: "[writers] (and their publishers, and many reviewers, and most judges of important literary awards) still live in the world where we weren't taught how to read science fiction or were taught not to read science fiction" (79).

In this work I argue that science and speculative fiction/SF texts should both be read and discussed because, along with many other reasons, they serve as a legitimate addition to the standard literary canon as they can provide innovative and fruitful ways to analyze well-known canonical works. They form an important part of the discourse on science, modernism, and mythology and show how these diverse threads weave together into a full and satisfying tapestry.

In the 1950s C. P. Snow wrote of the "two cultures" of literature and the sciences: "I believe the intellectual life of the whole western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups" (3). In the twenty-first century, it is not even that simple; there are vast chasms not only between literature and science but also within literature itself. There is a great deal of critical work on modernism and mythology, but not much about their intersections with science. Despite the current popularity of science fiction, critical discussion still tends to "ghettoize" the genre or considers it in isolation from canonical literature. I propose that we need a new way of thinking about literature and literary criticism that incorporates many different perspectives into the overall discourse: a way in which we can discuss T. S. Eliot and H. P. Lovecraft in the same metaphorical room, using the same literary and critical tools, leading to a richer understanding of both. After all, readers have always read both but have been taught be embarrassed by their "bad taste[1]." I am compelled cross these critical boundaries because of not only from my work in literature but also my extensive background in theoretical physics, not to mention cultural criticism.

The Revolutions of Modern Science

From the late seventeenth century until the late nineteenth century, the primary scientific worldview was the one advanced by Newtonian physics. In his groundbreaking 1687 work *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, Isaac Newton proposed an orderly, empirically

[1] Even the lauded critic Harold Bloom is not immune to the siren spell of SF; in 1979 he wrote a science-fiction novel called *The Flight to Lucifer: A Gnostic Fantasy.* The novel was written as a sequel to the science-fiction classic *The Voyage to Arcturus.* Since then, Bloom has been very openly derisive of science-fiction and has essentially "disowned" his own science-fiction novel. Although his novel is poorly plotted, over-written, and generally confusing, it received positive reviews from many reputable sources like *The New York Times*. Perhaps SF is only "reputable" to the Academy if a "reputable" author writes it.

understandable world bounded by the laws of nature as expressed by his three laws of motion.[2] He also applied his theory of classical mechanics on Earth to celestial bodies, demonstrating that the heavens were governed by the same orderly, simple laws of motion as physical objects on this planet. Newton's work greatly advanced the Scientific Revolution and the heliocentric model of the solar system as well as the law of universal gravitation, which states that every body in the universe attracts other bodies with a force that is directly proportional to their masses and inversely proportional to the distance between them. Even today, the kind of physics taught in high school and introductory undergraduate classes remains Newtonian physics.

Ideologically, Newton's theories led to a sense of an understandable, reasonable universe whose workings, like those of a gigantic clock, could be examined, ordered, and explained. As Sir James Jeans writes in 1934 in *The New Background of Science*, "[man] had accepted a 'common-sense' view of nature, believing that there was no great difference between appearance and reality…Although he may not have realised it, this complex of beliefs constituted a philosophical creed in itself" (1). Newton's scientific method, or the process of forming hypotheses about the workings of the natural world through systematic, empirical, and repeatable observation, experiment, and measurement, seemed to govern both the microverse and the macroverse. It was not only the mechanism by which Newton developed his scientific theories but the methodology of the entire Scientific Revolution. Simply put, the scientific method involves the formulation of hypotheses, or likely explanations of natural phenomena. These hypotheses are tested and amended through repeated testing, examination, observation, and measurement. The results of any experiment must be reproducible before an experiment can be said to validate a hypothesis. Scientists utilizing the scientific method strive to be as objective as

[2] Newton's First Law: An object in motion remains in motion unless acted upon by an outside force.
Newton's Second Law: F = ma (force equals mass times acceleration).
Newton's Third Law: Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction.

possible and conduct observations and experiments in a rationally detached manner. The worldview fostered by the scientific method is sometimes called the "rational-empiricist" perspective. Newtonian science also became an engine of industry and "progress," as the Industrial Revolution was made possible by technological advances in mechanization developed through Newton's mechanics.

As the perceptive Dame Gillian Beer notes in her excellent work *Darwin's Plots*, "In the mid-nineteenth century, scientists still shared a common language with other educated readers and writers of their time" (4). She notes in "Physics, Sound, and Substance: The Later Work" that "wave-particle theory at the end of the 1920s and through the 1930s caught the [popular] imagination" and that "In the late 1920s and early 1930s science – particularly physics – fascinated non-scientists, and the writings of Arthur Eddington and James Jeans were best-sellers" (113). Sir James Jeans, in particular, was an influential British scientist, the founder of British cosmology who discovered the Jeans length, or the critical radius of an interstellar gas cloud below which the cloud will condense to form a star. He also worked to make modern science accessible to the educated layperson, much like contemporary scientific greats Carl Sagan and Neil deGrasse Tyson.

In *The New Background of Science*, Sir James Jeans writes of "the uniformity of nature," or the assertion that "when the same experiment was performed any number of times on exactly similar objects in exactly similar circumstances, the result was necessarily always the same" (38). The assumption of this uniformity led to a "simple mechanical explanation" (38) of nature. By analogy, then, not only natural processes but socio-cultural phenomena could seemingly also be described in simple explanations derived from application of the scientific method. Nineteenth-century literary naturalism is a major example of scientists and writers sharing a

common language. Authors like Emile Zola and Frank Norris directly applied biology and evolutionary theory to their characters' actions, plotting character arcs like a scientist hypothesizing about rat behavior in a laboratory.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the discoveries of modern science shattered Newtonian stability. In *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, Einstein writes, when speaking of Euclidean geometry (an important mathematical framework for Newtonian physics), "this 'truth' is limited" (5). The limitations of the previously-established "truth" of Euclidean geometry can equally well apply to the "truth" of the entire Newtonian worldview and humans' positionality within it.

In his theory of special relativity, Einstein states that there is no preferred frame of reference and the only constant in the universe is the speed at which light travels in a vacuum, approximately 3×10^8 meters/second. Everything else is relative. An observer in an inertial reference frame (a non-accelerating reference frame like the Earth) will see and interpret physical phenomena differently than an observer watching the exact same phenomena from a non-inertial (or accelerating) reference frame. Seemingly constant quantities like distance, velocity (speed), and time are in fact *not* constant at all. For example, as shown by the Lorentz transformation equations, a clock travelling at a very fast speed runs slower than a stationary clock. This is not a theoretical or virtual statement; it is a literal one. There is experimental proof of such relativistic effects. Einstein writes, "the theory of relativity enables us to predict the effects produced on the light reaching us from the fixed stars. These results are obtained in an exceedingly simple fashion" (55); observational astronomy experimentally supports relativity. The famous Michelson-Morley experiment disproved the existence of the "lumiferous ether" theory that scientists had advanced in an attempt to cling to the Newtonian worldview. Yeats'

verse "the centre cannot hold" is the poetic expression of the scientific displacement of the logical Newtonian worldview by the relativistic Einsteinian worldview.

The center slips even further when one considers the general theory of relativity. While special relativity primarily deals with objects moving at advanced velocities, the general theory of relativity deals with gravity and its effects and advances a new theory of gravitation. As I stated in my physics MS thesis, "Just as the special theory of relativity states that one cannot speak of the absolute velocity of a reference frame, only a relative one, from the general theory of relativity it follows that one cannot speak of the absolute acceleration of a reference frame, only a relative one" (6). Once again, the laws of physics are relative depending upon the position of the observer. The general theory of relativity has several profound effects that apply on a cosmological level; the geometry of space-time[3] is linked to gravitation and the geometry required to describe space-time is non-Euclidean (or non-Newtonian) geometry. As I state in my master's thesis, "the presence of a large body of matter with an associated large gravitational field causes space-time to warp…thus, the very curvature of space-time in general relativity replaces the gravitational field of the Newtonian theory" (6-7). In simplest terms, gravity determines the geometry of the universe; a strong gravitational field curves space. Once again, this is not an abstract but a literal statement that has been supported experimentally through observations of curvature of light as it follows curved space-time, creating effects such as gravitational lensing. Extreme examples of space-time curvature caused by a massive gravitational field lead to "science fiction" phenomena such as black holes.

The modernist authors I discuss in this work all had at least a passing familiarity with modernist science and its implications; some, like H. P. Lovecraft, were intimately aware of the

[3] Relativistic physics describes objects and phenomena in terms of four dimensions: the three x, y, z spatial coordinates plus an additional coordinate of time. Einstein stated that the conception of the universe as a four-dimensional space-time continuum was essential to the theory of relativity.

far-reaching consequences of this scientific revolution. Recently there has been increased interest in the intersections between Virginia Woolf's work and modern science, as discussed by scholars such as Ian Ettinger, Holly Henry, and Erica Roebbelen after the initial great insights of Gillian Beer. Yet even the contemporary general public in the 1920s and 1930s must have been aware of the effect these revolutions had on the general conception of reality; for example, James Jeans broadcast on the BBC to explain relativity to the layperson. The intersections between modern science and the destabilizing of the ensconced patriarchal normativity as effected by social movements such as the call for women's rights and rights for people of color, in which many progressive modernist artists were involved, would have been especially interesting to contemporary thought. Nor was relativity theory the only scientific fulcrum for the destabilization of the universe. While relativity theory applies on the largest levels (as large as the universe as a whole), quantum physics (or quantum mechanics), which arose directly from relativity and other aspects of modern physics, applies on the smallest atomic and subatomic level. Quantum mechanics actually dealt a harder blow to the empirical-rational universe than relativity theory. Brian Greene writes in *The Fabric of the Universe:*

> A core principle of classical [Newtonian] physics is that if you know the positions and velocities of all objects at a particular moment [you can determine] their positions and velocities at any other moment, past or future. *Without equivocation, classical physics declares that the past and future are etched into the present* (italics mine). This feature is also shared by both special and general relativity. Although the relativistic concepts of past and future are subtler than their familiar classical counterparts…the equations of relativity, together with a complete assessment of the present, determine them just as completely. (10)

Quantum physics refutes this view as it depends upon *probability*, not certainty. Greene writes, "even if you make the most perfect measurements possible of how things are today, the best you can ever hope to do is predict the *probability* that things will be one way or another at some chosen time in the future." He continues, "the universe, according to quantum mechanics, participates in a game of chance" (11).

One of the best-known examples of that "game of chance" is the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, developed by Werner Heisenberg in 1927. The uncertainty principle states that it is not possible to know *both* the position (location) and momentum (the product of mass times velocity, which may be loosely understood as the force needed to stop or start an object's motion) of a sub-atomic particle with absolute certainty. If one knows the position of an electron precisely, one cannot precisely know the momentum of that electron, and vice versa. The amount of uncertainty in the determination is a very small amount (approximately 6.582×10^{-16} eV·s, where eV = electron volt) called the reduced Planck constant. This uncertainty factor cannot be reduced or eliminated by devising ways to take more accurate measurements. It is a fundamental uncertainty built into the very fabric of the universe on the smallest scales. That fundamental uncertainty is so small that it is not easily discernible on everyday scales, just as the curvature of space-time by gravity is not easily discernible to an Earth-bound observer but it does inescapably exist.

The quantum mechanical observer effect is often conflated or confused with the uncertainty principle and serves as a further illustration of the non-intuitive nature of modern physics. Generally speaking, the theory of the observer effect states that the very act of observation affects the phenomenon being observed. This is easily discernible and comprehensible on a macroscopic level; for example, a voltmeter used to measure the electric

charge in a circuit itself carries a small amount of charge, thus affecting the current through the circuit. On a quantum mechanical level this becomes more significant as it describes the collapse of the wavefunction used to describe the state of a subatomic particle. The wavefunction initially exists as a superposition (or combination) of possible states; observation causes the wave function to collapse and "pick a state."

Perhaps the most (in)famous application of the observer effect is Schrödinger's cat; a thought experiment (*gedankenexperiment*) designed by Ernst Schrödinger to show how quantum mechanics could be applied to macroscopic systems and the ridiculousness of doing so. In the thought experiment, a cat is placed in a sealed container and its life or death depends on the state of a subatomic particle that may or may not release a poison into the container. The reason why the release of the poison is uncertain is that the box is sealed; according to the observer effect, the state of the subatomic particle cannot be determined until an observer is introduced into the system. The presence of an observer causes the collapse of the wavefunction, which determines the state of the subatomic particle and whether or not it will release the poison and kill the cat. Schrödinger presented this thought experiment as a *reductio ad absurdum*; its absurdity perfectly expresses the absurdity many saw in the theories of quantum mechanics. Even Einstein himself refuted some of the tenets of quantum mechanics, famously remarking, "My God does not play with dice."

Einstein stated that when considering the relativistic view of reality, "the non-mathematician is seized by a mysterious shuddering…by a feeling not unlike that awakened by thoughts of the occult" (61). In my MS thesis, I wrote that students who had been trained in Newtonian physics might "instinctively" find the fuller and more accurate relativistic conception of the universe "mysterious and confusing" (8).

While I frequently refer to these theories of modernist science in the following work, the one with which I engage on the most technical level is quantum wave theory and the uncertainty principle. These theories are fundamental to the discussion of the literature in my final chapter: *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and *The Drowning Girl* by Caitlin R. Kiernan. In that final chapter I discuss the recent discovery of the Higgs boson and its significance to my overall methodology – a discovery that could not have happened without the foundation of modernist science.

"You Must Remember This" – Modernist Mythologies and Magic

The modernists had a wealth of ideas at their disposal with which to construct their art and frame the world around them. Not the least of these explanatory world-systems was mythology and magic. Interest in the occult was widespread in the Victorian era; fashionable Victorians threw séance parties and reveled in the contemporary craze for ghost stories and gothic terrors. Prominent public figures and artists flocked to Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy movement. John Keats composed odes with ancient Greece and its deities in mind, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner cursed himself and met the Lady Death-in-Life, and Emily Bronte heard Catherine's ghost calling across the moors. This occult craze continued into the modernist period; W. B. Yeats was a member of the magical secret society the Golden Dawn, which had ties with Aleister Crowley, the self-proclaimed "Great Beast" and "wickedest man in the world." The modernists incorporated these trends into their work just as they incorporated the discoveries of modern science. Recall the cliché "Today's magic is tomorrow's science;" to these modernists, the elaborate ceremonial rituals of the Golden Dawn were no more or less mysterious than the

equations of quantum physics and both were equally magical. Aleister Crowley defined magic as "the art of producing change in accordance with will" – wasn't this, after all, what Einstein and Heisenberg had done to the entire field of physics?

The connection between mythology, magic, and modernism is well-documented; Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* are frequently discussed and cited as major influences upon the modernists. Jane Harrison's work was another major source of inspiration, although the debt the modernists owe her is not as widely recognized. Certainly Eliot's *The Waste Land* would not exist in its present form without these three sources; for example, his Harvard degree was on Jane Harrison. Cleanth Brooks writes in his article "*The Waste Land:* An Analysis," "The basic symbol used, that of the waste land, is taken, of course, from Miss Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*" (185). Faced with profound social, scientific, and cultural changes at the turn of the nineteenth century, many modernists turned to alternative belief structures as another tool to "translate" the mysteries of the modern world into a language that they could understand. In *Epilegomena* Jane Harrison writes, "Is this then the end? Is our twentieth century religion only an 'enlightened consciousness of the impulse that makes for species continuity' and as such is best rechristened Science?" She claims "the ritual of Totemism, of King-Gods, of Initiation Ceremonies, of Fertility Dramas, is dead to-day…It has been driven out inch by inch by science, by 'directed' as opposed to phantasy thinking" (Li). However, a significant portion of the modernist ethos involved a reclamation of the "phantasy thinking" of the old mythologies and the possibilities for understanding offered by these belief systems.

James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* repeatedly refers to pre-Christian worship and belief as "primitive;" ironically, his investigative and critical framework and associated conclusions,

like those of Jessie Weston and (to a lesser extent) Jane Harrison, are now viewed as "primitive" by contemporary anthropologists and historians. Gaster's editorial foreword to *The New Golden Bough* states that the work "remain[s] immortal and as cultural landmark imperishable" but goes on to contend that "the particular theses which [it] advance[s] tend in time to be superseded" (xv). Hence my adoption of the modifier "modernist" to the word "mythologies." I consider these texts and the concepts the modernists derived from them in their contemporary context, not in the context of current scholarly work in anthropology, history, and comparative religion.

Of interest to me is the manner in which various modernists (as well, in my final two chapters, more contemporary authors such as Margaret Atwood and Caitlin R. Kiernan) adopt and adapt the mythologies advanced by writers like Harrison and Weston. Bonnie Kime Smith writes in her introduction to the 2007 edition of her classic anthology *Gender in Modernism* that "canonical modernism had been 'unconsciously gendered masculine' in its selection of privileged authors, and in its style and concerns." Nevertheless, "starting in the late 1970s…we began to acknowledge additional unspoken norms that have favored work that is heterosexual, white, representative of 'high culture'" (1). Canonical male modernists like Eliot have utilized modernist mythologies in a manner that reinforces their ideology of "high culture," whereas feminist modernists Mirrlees and H.D. (and later, Atwood and Kiernan) use the preponderance of female deities and plurality of female-gendered roles and experience present in mythology as part of a feminist narrative that establishes a system of symbols and signs that challenge the dominant patriarchal discourse. For example, in Chapter III I examine how Eliot and Mirrlees use generative mythological and magical symbols in their urban poems *The Waste Land* and *Paris*. Eliot appropriates the feminine generative role for his masculine Fisher King, ideologically symbolizing the way in which male modernists appropriated feminine narratives

into their masculine heteronormative discourse. In *Paris* Mirrlees claims these generative figures within her feminist narrative, embracing the divine feminine in Mary and mocking the patriarchal phallic Prometheus, while Virginia Woolf skillfully entwines the traditional feminine generative symbolism of the ocean and waves with contemporary quantum wave theory. I argue that the prominence of *The Waste Land* within canonical modernism signals the historical dominance of the patriarchal voice; however, writers like Mirrlees and Woolf offer a much-needed alternative, a political critique of the imperialist waves.

In the Classroom – *The Waste Land* or Westeros?

It's no secret that SF is wildly popular, especially among young college-age men and women. A quick look at recent blockbusters shows a list of SF films, many adapted from books: *The Hunger Games,* the *Harry Potter* series, *Prometheus, The Avengers, The Hobbit* – with more, including sequels, in the Hollywood pipeline. George R. R. Martin's speculative fiction epic *Game of Thrones* is both a literary and HBO series hit. The *Hunger Games* trilogy seems to be required reading for most Americans under the age of forty. From a pedagogical perspective, this means that college literature classrooms are filled with students who have a solid background and active interest in the SF genre. At a pedagogical and cultural moment when the academy and the intelligentsia is bemoaning the death of literature and the written word, fans lined up outside stores for the midnight release of the final *Harry Potter* book and mourned Ray Bradbury's death online and with candlelight vigils. The contemporary uber-popular SF writer Neil Gaiman, a friend of Bradbury, blogged about his death the very next day. He wrote, "[Bradbury's death has] knocked me for a loop, and for a second loop because so many people

are asking me to write something about Ray and what he meant, for them, right now. And it's too soon [for me], but they need it." This is not the text-messaging, Twitter-fixated shallow apathy of a new generation of non-readers; this is a deep river of passion for literature and ideas simply overflowing its banks.

Pedagogical theory no longer espouses the concept that students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with the teacher's wisdom. They are not blank slates on which the teacher writes. All students bring their own literacies and competencies into the classroom, which becomes a contact zone for the various literacies of the students and of the instructor. In "Questioning Academic Discourse," Vivian Zamel claims that assumptions about academic discourse and the hierarchy of the academy "prevent faculty from recognizing their students' resources, their students' rich and full histories" (193). A square peg does not fit a round hole and will break if it is forced to fit; we as educators need to examine our ideas about students' competencies "fitting" into the established literary discourse and canon.

The SF genre can serve two very important functions within the literature classroom. First, the students can be encouraged to see their knowledge of SF as a set of practices that can be very useful in understanding literature and the larger culture in which they live. Martin's *Game of Thrones* saga, set in the fictional land of Westeros, is a political epic on the scale of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and his Machiavellian main character Tyrion is an antihero in the best Miltonian tradition. Kazuo Ishiguru's dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go* serves as an example of the *Bildungsroman* as surely as *David Copperfield. The Hunger Games* is a window into the world of George Orwell's *1984*. We need not tell our students to abandon Westeros for Eliot's waste land; we can help them hear what the thunder said by listening to the tale of Westeros. Any reader who is able to follow the complex family trees, chronologies, multiple narrators, and

simultaneous discourses of *A Game of Thrones* should have no trouble tracking down and deciphering Eliot's notes to and references in *The Waste Land.* Thus SF literature becomes a conduit to get readers to eagerly enter into the more academic and canonical discourse of the literature classroom.

Also, SF literature is worth valorizing on its own merits. As I discuss in Chapter II, Lovecraft's mythos is as firmly ensconced within the modernist ethos as Eliot's waste land. I argue that the work of contemporary SF writer Caitlin Kiernan holds up against Woolf's masterpiece *The Waves.* Some aspects of pedagogical theory have already embraced less traditionally canonical modes of literary expression. For example, Princeton professor Cornel West wrote *Never Forget: A Journey of Revelations* in order to argue for the validity of hip-hop as a positive force, both outside and inside the classroom and conducted seminars at Harvard on hip-hop. As of the fall 2012 academic semester, Harvard University's English department offered an entire course on science fiction. The 2004 Special Topics issue of *PMLA* was on Science Fiction and, while *The New Yorker* science fiction issue may have been a disappointment to aficionados, its publication highlights the changing academic and literary climate regarding the SF genre. After all, our students and the community of SF readers already take this literature quite seriously; the professional community is just beginning to follow suit.

I have extensive experience with teaching SF literature, ranging from incorporating SF works into more traditional survey courses to teaching entire classes focusing on the SF genres such as horror and science fiction. In this work I also discuss how re-framing our discussion of literature, science, and mythology can also help us re-frame our pedagogical strategies in ways that are enriching for both the students and ourselves.

The Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant

I have organized my chapter headings for this work in accordance with the sections of the well-known story of the blind men and the elephant. This tale is nearly ubiquitous; it is commonly considered Indian in origin and has been attributed to Buddhist, Sufi, and Hindu sources, among others. The version best-known to the modernists may have been the nineteenth-century poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant" by John Godfrey Saxe. It begins:

> It was six men of Indostan
> To learning much inclined,
> Who went to see the Elephant
> (Though all of them were blind),
> That each by observation
> Might satisfy his mind (1-6).

Each man goes up to touch a different part of the animal: its side, tusk, trunk, knee, ear, and tail. Each believes he has solved the mystery of the identity of the animal. Yet, as the poet says:

> And so these men of Indostan
> Disputed loud and long,
> Each in his own opinion
> Exceeding stiff and strong,
> Though each was partly in the right,
> And all were in the wrong (43-48)!

Of course, the authors I discuss "all were in the wrong" to a greater or lesser extent in terms of their understanding of modernity, reality, and their attempts or lack thereof to establish a

liberatory narrative that would break the walls of established patriarchal discourse. The subtitle of this introduction, "The Imperfect Lantern," was also chosen to illuminate this fact.

I have deliberately assigned chapter headings in accordance with the author's degree of enlightenment; for example, Eliot's phallocentric attitude in *The Waste Land* is echoed in the portion of the elephant I assign to him – the elephant's tail. Similarly, Mirrlees' *Paris* represents a much less narrow and exclusionary narrative; thus I have assigned to her the elephant's head, the symbolic seat of the wisdom and legendary memory associated with that animal.

I have assigned to C. S. Lewis the elephant's trunk in an attempt to not only invoke the phallic symbolism I also associate with Eliot and Lovecraft, but also to make reference to the manner in which his *Space Trilogy*, an early work of speculative fiction, ostensibly quests through the solar system on a voyage of literal and metaphorical discovery. Yet ultimately the questing narrative is inescapably bound not only to the earth but to traditional masculine notions of religion, mythology, gender, and narrative. In the final volume of the trilogy, a fictional British university becomes the central focus of a battle between the forces of cosmic good and evil. The improbability of this narrative climax is a reflection of Lewis' own limited earth-bound worldview. Even in the realm of speculation he cannot conceive of a narrative or discourse that does anything more than reify the patriarchal societal hierarchy as represented by the patriarchal educational hierarchy of the university where the cosmic evil is finally overcome. Interestingly, Lewis may have partially based his fictional university setting on Oxford University, which Woolf attacked as the thinly-veiled Oxbridge in her feminist essay "A Room of One's Own."

Like Lewis' work, Lovecraft's speculative narratives reinscribe patriarchal discourse and are inextricably tied to the established earthly hierarchies they seemingly overturn or disdain. Lovecraft's narratives are perhaps even more staunchly conservative as he attempts to deny the

presence of women altogether. There are only two major female characters in the entire body of Lovecraft's non-collaborative prose works, and of those, one is actually a case of male possession of a female body. I have thus assigned to Lovecraft the less flexible and dexterous elephant's leg. However, Lovecraft and Lewis engage with both modernist science and mythology and use both as a vehicle to deny their female characters a narrative presence and narrative voice.

I have assigned to H. D. the elephant's ear because she has, unlike the canonical male modernists, listened to the discourses of science and mythology and attempted (with great success) to negotiate a felicitous dialogue between the two. H. D.'s treatment of science and mythology may be seen as mediated by her Moravian religious upbringing. H. D. was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, less than ten miles from where I myself was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Like H. D., I was baptized into the Moravian faith although I am currently following other spiritual paths. The origins of Moravianism are in Eastern Europe and the Moravians in Pennsylvania primarily hailed from Germany (the "Pennsylvania Dutch"). They settled in Pennsylvania, in the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth, after unsuccessfully attempting to establish a community in Savannah, Georgia. Unlike many other branches of Christianity, including Anglicanism as practiced by Lewis and Eliot, Moravianism retains direct connections to pre-Christian, goddess-centered belief. These connections can be seen in the pre-eminence of the Choirs of women in the Moravian church and traditions in Moravian practice such as the emphasis on singing, music, and visual arts, and the Lovefeast, a direct descendent of pagan fertility festivals. It is not my intention to delve into biographical analysis of Lewis', Eliot's, and H.D.'s religious background and its influence on their writing; that is a discussion far beyond the scope of this work. However, I note it here briefly to give some framing context for the various

ways in which these modernists understand the nature of the "elephant." In her autobiographical work *The Gift* H. D. talks about the "gift," a spiritual awareness and heightened narrative facility to communicate that awareness. She has inherited the gift through her maternal relatives. Thus her internalization and assumption of her personal mythology has enabled her to navigate the modernist labyrinth of narrative and understanding – as, I hope, my own helps me navigate hers.

I move into more contemporary literature with Margaret Atwood and Caitlin Kiernan. I feel as if Atwood and Kiernan are both the foundation on which much of modern feminist narrative rests and also the natural outgrowth of the earlier foundation established by modernist writers like Mirrlees and H.D. I have entitled Atwood's Chapter "The Elephant's Mind" and Kiernan's chapter "The Elephant's Back." The ears inform the functions of the mind, which in turn is attached to the spinal column and the animal's back on which all burdens are placed. I contend that Atwood and Kiernan have formulated narratives of science and spirituality that are informed by H. D.'s and Mirrlees' work and transcend the limited perspective of supporters of the patriarchal hegemony such as Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot. Atwood and Kiernan do not just have access to contemporary scholarship on science and mythology; they also weave the threads of this new knowledge into an innovative tapestry of feminist and post-modern narrative.

My final chapter on Virginia Woolf and Caitlin Kiernan is entitled "The Beast Entire." It is my contention that Woolf and Kiernan were able to fully unite, both in theme and format, mythology and science in a liberatory feminist narrative. Their respective works *The Waves* and *The Drowning Girl* serve as the perfect conclusion to my own work. Although separated by nearly a century, these two narratives succeed where Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot failed, and where Mirrlees, H. D., and Atwood strove. It is no mere coincidence that Woolf and Mirrlees both use water and waves as an essential symbols in these works. Water is intimately associated

with the archetypal/mythological feminine and the oceans are the symbolic and literal mother of humanity and all life on earth. Wave theory is essential to the modern scientific conception of electromagnetism; the particle/wave duality of light is another aspect of Schrodinger's and Heisenberg's theories about the uncertainties present in the fabric of the universe. Finally, the physical state of water is a liquid; water is without fixed shape yet adapts by taking the shape of whatever contains it. Over time water can wear down and wash away the hardest rock, making it part of its own essence. Ocean waves are a never-ending continuum, one eternally cresting while another eternally breaks against the shore. I would be remiss if I did not mention how much of this work was conceived and written by the water; from poolside at my mother's house in Andover, Massachusetts; to the banks of the Mississippi River in New Orleans; to the seashore at York Beach, Maine; to the Caribbean Ocean off the coast of Cancun, Mexico; to the Hudson River outside my office at BMCC. Even as I type this I am surrounded by images of water; a postcard I purchased on Isla Mujeres, Mexico, and a photograph of the blue-glass waves in Cancun. Water has been the midwife for this work as surely as it is the fulcrum uniting Woolf and Kiernan, mythology and science. I assert that Kiernan's girl is "not drowning but swimming" in Woolf's waves; she is the mermaid who would not sing to Eliot but graciously allowed me to translate a few lines of her song.

CHAPTER 1: THE ELEPHANT'S TRUNK – C. S. LEWIS

> This may be put in the form that the laws of Nature explain everything except the source of events. But this is rather a formidable exception. The laws, in one sense, cover the whole of reality except–well, except that continuous cataract of real events which makes up the actual universe. They explain everything except what we should ordinarily call "everything." The only thing they omit is — the whole universe.
>
> - From *God in the Dock* by C. S. Lewis

Until the so-called "Golden Age of Science Fiction" in the 1940s, few writers actively engaged with theories of modern science such as cosmology and space travel, relativity theory, and quantum physics. H. P. Lovecraft and C. S. Lewis are two less-canonical modernists who made a conscious effort to address modernist science in many of their works. These two authors form an interesting juxtaposition, for while Lovecraft was extensively self-educated in modern science, Lewis' scientific expertise was more commensurate with that of the average layperson. Lovecraft's horrific "mythos" leads to an atheist scientific wasteland, while Lewis uses science, specifically astrophysics, to recast and reify Judeo-Christian dogma.

There has not been much literary critique of Lewis' science fiction works since the 1970s. Unlike Lovecraft, Lewis is not primarily known as an SF writer. He is best known in academic circles for theological writings such as the Christian apologist work *Mere Christianity* as well as his Christian allegory for children, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The latter is a staple of children's literature discourse and Anglophone children's libraries and bedtime reading lists. The *Narnia* stories have lately risen to greater public prominence with the release of the big-budget movies based on the series. At the time of this writing, the film adaptions of the first three books – *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* – are easily available on video. The next film is stuck in development limbo due to studio and property rights issues. Nevertheless, an entire C. S. Lewis fan contingent waits

with bated breath on a plethora of websites and discussion boards dedicated to the books and the films.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this means contemporary college students are likely to recognize the name C. S. Lewis and be at least passingly familiar with and interested in his work. Peter Jackson's blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and his current adaption of *The Hobbit* will also pique student interest in Lewis. Tolkien and Lewis were close personal friends and sometime collaborators; Middle-Earth with its orcs, elves, and hobbits is a next-door neighbor to Narnia with its fauns, centaurs, and dwarves. All these can easily serve as a "magic wardrobe" into *The Space Trilogy*. Lewis populates Mars and Venus with the same fantastical characters and backgrounds as he did his Narnia tales. Moreover, popular interest in solar system exploration is high, due to the Mars *Curiosity* and NASA's late 2012 discovery of water ice at the poles of Mercury. Even the least scientifically-inclined student should find it interesting to compare Lewis' fantastical Christian version of the solar system with the current scientific reality.

I am proposing a new approach to reading and teaching Lewis by drawing connections between the science and religion/mythology in his book and by framing the related discourse in terms of contemporary (both modernist and current) science. I contend that Lewis' *Space Trilogy* is worth discussing both in the light of its relation to contemporary modernist science and the way his engagement with science informs his presentation of gender roles. Feminist critiques of Lewis abound; less common scientific critiques by scholars such as Lionel Adey and Donald Glover also exist. Yet there is a dearth of critical discourse on the connections between Lewis' attitudes regarding science and his attitudes regarding gender roles.

I mainly focus on *Perelandra*, the second book in *The Space Trilogy*, and the fragment *The Dark Tower* in my discussion of C. S. Lewis. However, *The Dark Tower* is a controversial work within the Lewis oeuvre. Its composition is difficult to gauge exactly, as it was discovered and published posthumously in 1977. In his introduction to the 1977 edition, Lewis scholar Walter Hooper claims that after C. S. Lewis' death in 1963 his brothers consigned several of Lewis' papers to be burnt in a bonfire "which burned steadily for three days" (7). According to Hooper, within these papers was the fragment *The Dark Tower*. Since its 1977 publication, some scholars have denounced *The Dark Tower* as an elaborate literary hoax. The major challenge to *The Dark Tower* comes from Kathryn Lindskoog's book *Sleuthing C. S. Lewis: More Light in the Shadowlands* (first published in 1994 and revised and expanded in 2001). Yet the majority of Lewis scholars accept *The Dark* Tower as authentic. In his 2007 article, *Shedding Light on the Dark Tower: A C. S. Lewis Mystery is Solved,* Harry Lee Poe reports that Alistair Fowler, who was a doctoral student of Lewis', recalls Lewis discussing *The Dark Tower*. Therefore I, like the vast majority of contemporary Lewis scholars, consider *The Dark Tower* as part of the Lewis canon.

Lewis and Modernist Science

Turning from the question of authorship to the texts themselves, in *The Space Trilogy* Lewis displays a markedly Christianized approach to modernist science. As has been extensively noted by Lewis scholars such as Lindskoog, Lewis derived his inspiration for *The Space Trilogy* from David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*. Lewis even said of the *Trilogy* that "My real model was David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*, wh. first suggested to me that the form of "'science fiction'

cd. be filled by spiritual experiences" (qtd. Glover 75). Upon reading *Voyage to Arcturus*, Tolkien commented upon the heavily moralistic tone of the book, which Lewis seized upon for his *Space Trilogy*. Lewis saw the technology of science as a tool (albeit a flawed one) with the potential to open the literal Heavens and be the ultimate savior of our human species. As he says near the close of *Out of the Silent Planet*, "If we could even effect in one per cent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning" (154).

By connecting science, spirituality, and morality, Lewis is simultaneously breaking with traditional scientific theory and anticipating current scientific discourse. The scientific method, as conceived by Isaac Newton, is absolutely amoral and non-spiritual. The scientist's purpose is to make observations and collect data. There is no room for personal interpretations or predilections. As Newton wrote in the second edition of the *Principia*, "I feign no hypotheses." He elaborates:

> For whatever is not deduced from the phenomena must be called a hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, or based on occult qualities, or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy. In this philosophy particular propositions are inferred from the phenomena, and afterwards rendered general by induction.

Newton even removes the scientist/observer from the equation by using the passive voice; instead of writing "whatever the scientist does not deduce" he says "whatever is not deduced;" therefore he is narratively as well as phenomenologically denying the scientist's own biases about and participation in the "phenomena" s/he is studying. Both modern science and current critical theory refute Newton by saying the scientist-observer cannot be so neatly "removed"

from the equation. The observer effect in quantum mechanics, as I have discussed, says that the presence of an observer changes what that observer sees. On a more pedestrian level, it is almost impossible to eliminate "human error," which ranges from a scientist incorrectly reading a measurement to that scientist allowing his/her personal beliefs to color her/his interpretation of data, from any scientific experiment. The very term "human error," which is common scientific usage, suggests something undesirable about the subjective, fallible human condition.

Contemporary critical discourse exposes how science has effectively served to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony. For example, in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Sandra Harding deconstructs the cultural myth that science is a rational, impartial force in society. In dialogue with other cultural theorists such as Gillian Beer, she claims that science reinforces dominant hegemonies as effectively as deliberate propaganda. She says "science is politics by other means" (10) and discusses the many ways in which science has served to promote political agendas from Nazi Germany to the current United States' military-industrial complex. The supposed impartiality of science makes its actual very-present agenda even more insidious and subversive.

The way that Lewis uses the background of science to reinforce his conservative ideology is far from subtle. The protagonist of all three of Lewis' books is a philologist significantly named Elwin Ransom, for over the course of the trilogy it becomes incumbent upon him to "ransom" the Earth from dark forces that have taken hold upon it. In the first book, *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom is kidnapped by the supposedly-great physicist Professor Weston and the industrialist entrepreneur Devine, a fellow schoolmate of Ransom's. They take Ransom to Mars via interplanetary spacecraft, where they plan to offer him as a sacrifice to the beings residing

there. Through his despicable portrayals of Weston and Devine, Lewis overtly demonizes the fields of modern science and industry.

Ransom escapes and learns the language (Old Solar) of the native residents of Mars (called *Malacandra* in this language) as well as the rest of the Solar System, and makes contact with the residents, who prove to be intelligent and peaceful. A good deal of the tale is devoted to linguistics, and, in fact, Lindskoog claims that Ransom's character was partially based upon Lewis' friend, the philologist and author J. R. R. Tolkien, and that the two agreed that "Lewis would write of space travel and Tolkien of time travel" (14).

By the close of *Out of the Silent Planet*, Ransom learns that his arrival has been orchestrated by a higher power. The *Oyarsa* or ruler of Mars, a spirit-like angelic being made of light, has summoned him and used Devine and Weston as its instruments to bring him to Mars. Apparently each planet in the Solar System possesses its own Oyarsa, or ruling spirit, which is also an *eldil*, or angel. In the concluding chapter of *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis (serving as a character in his own novel to whom Ransom entrusts his story), writes in a letter to Ransom that "an *Oyarses* seems to be the 'intelligence' or tutelary spirit of a heavenly sphere, i.e. in our language, of a planet" (152).

In the tales, the Oyarsa of Earth has become "bent" or corrupted with evil. The parallel between the Earth's Oyarsa and Lucifer in Judeo-Christian belief is immediately evident. Like Lucifer among the angels, the Oyarsa of earth was once "brighter" than the other Oyarsa, but then he became bent (or "fell") and war in the heavens ensued. Adey writes, "the averted fall of Eve forms the central motif of *Perelandra*…in *Out of the Silent Planet* the fall of Satan is narrated by Oyarsa to Ransom to explain the 'silence' of Thulcandra (Earth), its isolation from the divinely governed solar system" (118-119). Throughout the following two books of the

trilogy, Ransom battles the forces of the bent Oyarsa of Earth. I focus primarily on the second book of the trilogy, *Perelandra,* in which Ransom is sent to Venus to battle the bent Oyarsa, who has taken possession of Weston's body, and literally prevent a second Fall of humankind.

Lewis' attitude regarding science is essentially conservative but not uncomplicated. The scientists and scholars in the *Trilogy* are all male; women have no scientific agency in his cosmos. No female character even utilizes advanced technology; while the philologist Ransom has no understanding of the technique by which he is transported from Earth to other planets, he nevertheless engages with the necessary technology to make the voyage. Like the canonical modernist T. S. Eliot, Lewis seems to condemn the applications of science more than the theory itself. Consider, for example, the scientist Weston. He is presented as a highly contemptible character and almost a caricature of the unscrupulous scientist. Weston is reminiscent of actual scientists such as Oppenheim, who used applied science to irresponsibly cause destruction. It is possible that Lewis may have partially based Weston on Oppenheim, for the Manhattan Project, which culminated in the atomic bomb, had its roots in research conducted in the late 1930s. At the end of *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis (as narrator) says "'Weston,' or the force or forces behind 'Weston,' will play a very important part in the events of the next few centuries, and, unless we prevent them, a very disastrous one" (153). However, Glover reports that "Weston was a composite picture, though others have suggested that he is a portrait of Professor [C. H.] Waddington or of [Olaf] Stapledon" (77). As Lewis wrote:

> Look at Stapledon (*Star Gazer* ends in sheer devil worship)…and Waddington's *Science & Ethics*. I agree technology is per se neutral: but a race devoted to the increase of its own power by technology with complete indifference to ethics does seem to me a cancer in the universe. (qtd. Glover 76)

Weston's character offers the literature instructor an opportunity for fruitful classroom discourse that will also help illuminate Lewis' narrative agenda in the *Space Trilogy*. The "mad" or evil scientist is a recurring figure in science-fiction literature and one of the major tropes of the genre. In *From Faust to Strangelove: Representations of the Scientist in Western Literature*, the author Rosalynn Haynes identifies a "deep-rooted suspicion about scientists" (2) – and, by extension, science – mirrored in the mad or evil scientist in Western literature. Haynes discusses the "widespread…fear of science and scientists in Western society" (4). Certainly Lewis' *Space Trilogy* contains this fear. Haynes' analysis helps us understand not only Weston's purpose in *The Space Trilogy* but the mad/evil scientist SF trope as well. During the fall 2012 semester I taught a course on science fiction literature at BMCC. My students and I found ourselves constantly struggling with why so many of the scientists portrayed in the texts we read neatly fit into the mold of the evil/mad scientist, beginning with Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's classic *Frankenstein*. We finally concluded that, despite SF's potential as the literature of imagination, much of it is essentially *conservative* and *moralistic*. As Haynes writes, "the traditional fear of too much knowledge and the belief that some things should remain hidden have an ancestry far older than the printed word" (4). Thus, much of SF literature is properly seen as a cautionary morality play, a blueprint for what *not* to do. Many of my students, when confronted with these ideas, responded with the tired cliché, "ignorance is bliss" – a sentiment they were unlikely to echo in their biology labs but felt completely comfortable recognizing and responding to in SF literature. Lewis not only adopts this seemingly contradictory SF trope in his overall plot, he applies it directly to the Green Lady in *Perelandra*, as we shall shortly see.

If "ignorance is bliss," Lewis must have felt bliss indeed while attempting to explain the science in *The Space Trilogy*. Lewis "explains" the mechanism of Weston's spacecraft by

having Weston refuse to explain it to Ransom, saying, "how the space-ship works – there's no good your asking that. Unless you were one of the four or five real physicists now living you wouldn't understand…you may say we work by exploiting the less observed properties of solar radiation" (25-26). Although some spacecraft and satellites have employed solar panels to generate energy, it seems generally ludicrous from the perspective of contemporary physics to assert that a vessel could launch and maintain trajectory by "exploiting the less observed properties of solar radiation." Additionally, Lewis depicts the flight in the spacecraft as taking place under "a tyranny of light and heat" (29) due to the sun, when in fact the complete opposite would be true.

Adey discusses the books' scientific failings (such as the fictitious canals or *handramits*) but does mention "the trouble Lewis took to make *Out of the Silent Planet* a credible, scientific romance" (120). As proof, Adey cites that in the book "the breathable air on Malacandra lingers in the…depressions corresponding to the 'canals' of Mars" (120). He also notes the care Lewis took to create a consistent language and ecosystem for Malacandra. Incidentally, Lewis himself said following the book's publication, "When I…put canals on Mars I believe I already knew that better telescopes had dissipated that old optical delusion…[that is] part of the Martin myth…in the common mind" (qtd. Adey 120, note).

With these words Lewis shows himself far more concerned with the ideology than the actuality of technology; early in the *Trilogy* he sets scientific Weston in opposition to humanistic Ransom. When Weston attempts to defend the "great" work of science, Ransom replies by saying, "'I happen to disagree…and I always have disagreed, even about vivisection'" (27), to which Weston later responds, "'all educated opinion – for I do not call classics and history and such trash education – is entirely on my side'" (27). Of course, as a philologist, Ransom's milieu

would be "classics and history and such trash," as, indeed, would Lewis'. Glover directly says that "*Out of the Silent Planet*…was an attack on contemporary scientific theory" (93).

Lewis essentially abandons all attempts at even pseudo-science in *Perelandra*. He gives a nod to contemporary astronomy when Ransom says:

> Our astronomers don't know anything about the surface of Perelandra at all. The outer layer of her atmosphere is too thick. The main problem, apparently, is whether she revolves on her own axis or not, and at what speed…there's a man called Schiaparelli who thinks she revolves once on herself in the time it takes her to go once round..the Sun. The other people think she revolves on her own axis once in every twenty-three hours. (26)

Giovanni Schiaparelli was a nineteenth-century Italian astronomer who observed and named many structures on Mars, including the infamous Martin canals. He had originally termed them "channels," but the Italian for channels was translated into English as "canals," leading to the notion of the "canals" as artificial constructs. Schiaparelli himself was devoted to the concept of intelligent life on other planets, and through his observations tried to prove this hypothesis. However, despite Lewis' claims, Schiaparelli's main work did not include the planet Venus, and Lewis may be confusing some of Schiaparelli's theories regarding Mercury's orbit and applying them to Venus instead.

In this vein, much of the "science" of *Perelandra* is fuzzy or ludicrous. Ransom travels to the planet in "a large coffin-shaped casket…made of…white material, like ice, but more cloudy and less shining" (21). Ransom tells Lewis in his role as narrator that the "Oyarsa of Malacandra himself…shall simply move it to Venus. Don't ask me how" (27). Ransom has

summoned Lewis-the-narrator to keep watch for his eventual return, and to record his story when he returns. Adey writes,

> [Lewis] neither describes the voyage nor attempts plausibility. On Venus…Ransom is not troubled by problems with breathing or temperature…Without explanation, Weston's pidgin English [in *Out of the Silent Planet*] has been replaced by fluent Old Solar, the language Ransom learned to speak on Malacandra. (125)

From a pedagogical standpoint, it could be scientifically instructive and potentially amusing to guide students through a "what Lewis got wrong" reading of the *Trilogy*. However, there is a more profound question to address: *why* did Lewis get it wrong? Lewis, while not a scientific expert, was far from uneducated. Many great modernist artists such as Virginia Woolf attended scientific lectures and had at least an educated layperson's familiarity with contemporary science. Sir James Jeans' *The Mysterious Universe* was published in 1931, previous to Lewis' *Space Trilogy.* Lewis makes obvious scientific mistakes, such as his mistake regarding the Martin canals, that one would not expect of a contemporary grammar-school student. The answer, of course, is as Lewis himself states: he did not *care* to "get it right." His concern for modernist science is strictly ideological, not technical. I might even suppose that Lewis *preferred* to present "fictional science" in his *Space Trilogy*; were he to present the scientific underpinning of the plot of the novels accurately, his readers might spend "too much" time engaging with the actual science and not enough attending to Lewis' religious and moralistic subtext.

Lewis' attitudes towards modernist science are perfectly illustrated in a dialogue between Ransom and Weston, or the Un-Man as he is called at this point in *Perelandra,* once he has been completely possessed by the Bent Oyarsa of Earth. During their penultimate conflict, the Bent

Oyarsa "releases" Weston from his control so he can speak honestly to Ransom. Weston attacks Ransom's faith, saying

> Perhaps your God does exist – but it makes no difference whether he does or not…I don't think you've got the idea of the rind – the thin outer skin which we call life – really clear…reasoning itself is only valid as long as you stay in the rind. It has nothing to do with the real universe. Even the ordinary scientists…are beginning to find that out. Haven't you seen the real meaning of all this modern stuff about the dangers of …bent space and the indeterminacy of the atom? They don't say it in so many words, but what they're getting to…is what all men get to when they're dead – the knowledge that reality is neither rational nor consistent nor anything else. (168-169)

By "the indeterminacy of the atom" Lewis seems to be referring to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle; his comment regarding "the dangers…of bent space" references relativity theory. By Lewis' time, Karl Schwarzschild had proposed a solution to Einstein's general relativistic field equations that described the gravitational field of a point mass; that solution was the beginning of black hole physics. A black hole can roughly be described as a region of spacetime where the gravitational field is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape. Black holes are formed by stars that have collapsed into a gravitational singularity, at which gravity and the curvature of space-time becomes infinite. By the 1930s, physicists such as Subrahmanyan Chandrasekar and Arthur Eddington further advanced the physics of black holes, leading to our current conception of the phenomenon. The peril of black holes continues to be a staple of SF, from the 1997 film *Event Horizon* to the contemporary popular television series *Futurama.*

Unlike elsewhere in the *Trilogy,* Lewis displays some genuine and thoughtful scientific erudition here. Yet this erudition is filtered through the words of the Un-Man; at this point in the

narrative Weston has been supplanted by the bent Oyarsa who is strongly associated with Satan, the Father of Lies. Thus Lewis is not only disregarding modern scientific theory as lies but quite literally demonizing the scientists that pioneered it. By engaging with actual theory, he makes his conclusion even bleaker; living one's life under the aegis of modern science is to live a desolate life devoid of religious faith – which is, after all, supposedly meaningless to the scientist – and suffer a meaningless, hopeless death.

Myth, Religion, and Narrative

Lewis inscribes Christian dogma upon modernist science in order to thwart scientific chaos. In *Perelandra*, Ransom has been called to Venus to prevent a second "fall" of the sort that occurred on Earth, in accordance with the Biblical story of *Genesis*[4]. Adey says *Perelandra* is "explicitly more Christian than *Out of the Silent Planet*" (125) and Glover writes "The myth in *Perelandra*…is also the myth of the Fall, or of the risks of commitment to a new world, of moral choice, of the pursuit of knowledge, or obedience, of evil" (93). However, Lewis conflates the Biblical story with elements of pre-Christian mythology that undermine the older mythologies in order to re-cast them in Judeo-Christian terms. When Ransom arrives on Venus, he finds an idyllic paradise, primarily composed of water with numerous floating "islands," yet seemingly uninhabited. Ransom is "naked yet warm…[wandering] among summer fruits and [lying] in sweet heather" (43). Among these fruits is a "yellow fruit" whose taste is like "the discovery of a totally new *genus* of pleasures, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning" (42), and "shimmering globes" that when touched burst into "an ice-cold shower-bath" that fills

[4] It is worth noting that Lewis was an outspoken opponent of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Ransom's nostrils "with a sharp, shrill, exquisite scent that somehow brought to mind the verse in Pope, 'die of a rose in aromatic pain'"(47). To complete the Edenic allegory, a dragon-like "golden beast" (47) attaches itself affectionately to Ransom.

Lewis tempers this paradise with the Puritanical concept of self-denial and forbearance. After eating the orgiastic yellow fruit, Ransom refrains from plucking another, for "to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do" but "perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity" (42, 43). Ransom finally concludes that "often in his life on earth he had reiterated pleasures not through desire, but in the teeth of desire and in obedience to a spurious rationalism" (43). For the same reasons he abstains from repeating, or intensifying, the shower-bath. The word "rationalism" again recalls modernist science but is used here in a moralistic context. Just as the "rationalism" of science is spurious and dangerous, the "rationalism" of pleasure is a perilous temptation. Ransom's self-initiated temperance in this Edenic paradise mirrors the imperialist physical and mental colonization undertaken by European missionaries in African and Asia. In fact, narratively Lewis is setting himself up as a textual "missionary:" in *Perelandra* he presents a scientific setting within a mythological framework and imposes his own hegemonic ideology upon it in a fairly crude manner.

Even the least sensitive reader could hardly fail to understand that *Perelandra* is an SF equivalent of *Genesis*. Lewis used the exact same rhetorical strategy in the *Narnia* novels; Aslan the lion is an obvious Christ figure, Edmund the Judas who betrays him, and the White Witch a stand-in for Satan. While the recent films toned down some of the Christian allegory, it is so integral a part of the narrative it is impossible to completely remove. Instructors teaching *Perelandra* can help students unravel Lewis' narrative agenda by comparing it to the familiar

Narnia stories and films. This can lead to some interesting discussion of how authors may advance their own motives within a narrative; writing a book can be an act of colonization and control.

In *In the Hollow of the Wave*, Bonnie Kime Smith writes that T. S. Eliot and T. E. Hulme "[seek] to make more of the human condition through cultural control" (18). I argue that her words can also be applied to C. S. Lewis and *Perelandra*, although it is not immediately obvious why. Ransom deplores the agenda of industrialists like Devine in *Out of the Silent Planet.* In fact, his reverence for the "unspoiled" extraterrestrial landscapes recalls Tolkien's idealization of the English countryside in *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet Ransom's wish to keep other planets unspoiled does not mean he has no wish to assert cultural control over them. As Smith writes, "capitalist patriarchy and the scientific establishment have already [assigned women to nature]…using this as an excuse for the domination of both women and nature" (3). In *The Space Trilogy*, Ransom wants no part of the "domination of nature" for either financial or scientific gain, as illustrated in his constant opposition to Weston and Devine. Yet he does want to dominate women and nature by "cultural control," as illustrated in his interactions with the only main female character in the first two books of the *Trilogy:* the "Green Lady."

In Ransom's first sight of her, the Green Lady appears as "a goddess carved apparently out of green stone, yet alive" (54) whose "face that was like the sudden coldness and stillness of a church when we enter it from a hot street…made her a Madonna" (64). Lewis spoke of the Green Lady as "the 'Eve' of that world" noting that "this woman has got to combine characteristics which the Fall has put poles apart – she's got to be in some ways like a Pagan goddess and in other ways like the Blessed Virgin" (qtd. Glover, 93). Lewis may have felt that he was uniting feminist mythology with Judeo-Christian dogma, but ultimately he, like many of

the early Christian conquerors, subsumed older mythologies in the Biblical stereotype of submissive womanhood.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Eve was not the first wife of Adam. Instead, according to *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the *Midrash*, he was formed back-to-back with his equal female opposite, Lilith. The medieval Judeo-Christian story of Lilith depicts her as a disobedient woman who was thrown out of the Garden of Eden because she refused to lie beneath Adam in the subservient position during sexual intercourse. After leaving the Garden, she became a malevolent being, a succubus who preyed sexually upon men in their sleep and killed infants in their cradles. In fact, there are numerous ancient and contemporary European charms and amulets with the purpose of protecting young children from Lilith's depredations. Yet other sources such as texts on Kabbalistic mysticism, including the *Treatise on the Left Emanation*, while contradictory, tell a very different story. Some say that she refused to submit to Adam's authority (of which her position during sex is only a metaphor) because she was created of the same flesh and blood and at the same time as him and was thus his equal. Adam would not consent to taking a mate who would not obey him. According to many of the stories, Lilith left the Garden of her own volition and went to a desolate place by the Red Sea where she learned wisdom. Other tales tell of her becoming the consort of Leviathan, or Sammael. In some versions of the story Lilith speaks the secret forbidden name of God and flies into the air, thus escaping the Garden, which raises interesting implications about her own power and agency even over the Judeo-Christian deity. There are some scholars who even believe that she appears in the pre-Christian *Epic of Gilgamesh* as living in the trunk of the world-tree with the owl above her and the snake below her as her animal avatars, which obviously ties her mythos to the serpent in

the Garden of Eden[5]. Many contemporary feminist groups have adopted Lilith as a symbol of liberated womanhood and there is even a long-running all-female American musical festival called *Lilith Fair.*

This archetype of powerful and autonomous feminine agency is completely opposed to Lewis' conception of the Lady in *Perelandra*. The Green Lady is the spiritual sister of Eve, who was created from Adam's flesh and blood to be his subservient helpmeet. Like the Christian God upon Eve in the Garden, in *Perelandra* Maleldil has placed a seemingly obtuse prohibition upon the Lady. His prohibition upon the Lady mirrors Ransom's own attempts to exert control over her, which in turn mirror the contemporary societal oppression of women. Lewis was familiar with the mythology of Lilith; in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* he refers to the White Witch as a daughter of Lilith and he was openly critical of George McDonald's contemporary novel *Lilith.*

Bonnie Kime Scott notes in *In the Hollow of the Wave* that "feminists of the later second and recent third waves…are alert to ways that racism and homophobia have traditionally been "naturalized" or accepted as normal in nature" (3). If I add "sexism" I can directly apply this remark to Maleldil's prohibition on the Lady. On Venus there are regions of "fixed land" that do not move upon the waves like the floating islands. The Green Lady has been forbidden by Maleldil to sleep upon the fixed lands. She may venture onto the fixed land for temporary visits, but she may not sleep there or, by extension, live there. When speaking of this to Ransom, she says, "He [Maleldil] is not telling me why He has forbidden it to us" (75). Upon discovering that all the inhabitants of Earth live on fixed land and being asked if the prohibition is not a hardship for her, the Green Lady replies,

[5] Please note that the inclusion of Lilith in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* depends upon a translation from the Sumerian text, on which contemporary scholars do not agree.

> Who thought of it being hard? The beasts would not think it hard if I told them to walk on their heads. It would become their delight to walk on their heads. *I am His beast, and all His biddings are joys.* (76, italics mine)

Both she and Ransom accept the restriction as natural; after all, it is enforced by the eldil of Perelandra. Yet the Lady's agency and very existence are prescribed by an external masculine authority, as Lewis always associates the masculine pronoun with Maleldil. The appellation "beast" also suggests troublesome sexual overtones, in keeping with the sexual subtext imposed by patriarchal Judeo-Christianity on the Lilith/Eve story. When the Lady and Ransom cannot come to a mutual understanding regarding the prohibition regarding the Fixed Land, she abdicates her own agency as Lady by suggesting they find the King and ask him, for he might understand more clearly. In contrast, Ransom's behavior may be indirectly dictated by an abstract morality set forth by Maleldil but he is directly master of his own actions and possesses personal (masculine) agency. This distinction becomes even clearer when later in the novel Ransom is compelled through circumstance to spend large amounts of time upon the fixed land.

Just as in the story of Genesis, there is a snake in this garden. Weston has also made the trip to Venus, and clearly for a malevolent purpose. Just as Ransom is an agent of Maleldil upon Venus, Weston is an agent of the bent eldil, sent to tempt the Green Lady to a second Fall. As he says:

> I've become conscious that I'm a man set apart. Why did I do physics? Why did I discover the Weston rays? [the solar rays that propel Weston's spacecraft] I'm being guided. I know now I am the greatest scientist the world has yet produced. I've been made so for a purpose. It is through me that Spirit itself is at this moment pushing on to its goal. (93)

The correlation between "scientist" and "Satan" is so obvious as to be laughable. When Ransom takes up the definition of this "Spirit," Weston retorts, "The Devil is a spirit" (93). Lewis himself laid out the Biblical correspondences of the various "spirits" in the *Space Trilogy* as follows: "eldila = angels, Maleldil = Christ, Old One = Father, Bent One = Satan" (qtd. Glover 79). The serpent has now come to the Garden of Eden via interplanetary spacecraft.

In *Genesis,* the serpent corrupts Eve through language. In *The Space Trilogy,* Weston corrupts the solar system through science. However, the two are not far distant. Science is just another form of language: a system of equations and rules that describes the world around us. In fact, science and mathematics has sometimes been described as the "universal language." No matter what language a scientist speaks, s/he uses the exact same set of equations as a scientist across the globe[6]. Contemporary neurobiology shows that the brain centers that control mathematical skill also control language acquisition. In Ben Marcus' superlative SF novel, *The Flame Alphabet,* he writes, "Menace them with language" (6). Lewis is "menacing" the Lady *and* the reader with language; Weston or the "Un-Man" menaces the Lady by tempting her to "fall," just as the serpent did to Eve. Lewis also views the language of science as "menacing" the human species. Lewis as the author is a real-life Weston. He menaces the readers of *The Space Trilogy* by showing them his version of the chaos that will erupt if his patriarchal morality fails.

It is significant that Lewis used this exact same strategy in the *Narnia* chronicles, including using a female character as an object-lesson. This comparison with his more popular work might also serve as a very good way to help students understand Lewis' agenda and attitudes towards women. In the *Narnia* tales, a select group of people – the Pevensie (the very

[6] In fact, when I was a physics graduate student, I attended class with brilliant international students who could barely communicate in English. However, when solving equations or engaging with mathematical theory, they were infinitely more "literate" than I was.

word bears a resemblance to "pensive") children and their family and friends – get to travel to the paradise of Narnia and meet Aslan, Lewis' allegorical Jesus. However, in the final book in the series (*The Last Battle*), the eldest Pevensie sister, Susan, is excluded from returning to Narnia and ascending to an even greater paradise (Heaven) that Aslan has obtained for his followers. The reason for her exclusion is that she is "no longer a friend of Narnia" (169) and, as her younger sister Lucy (whose name is tellingly derived from the word "light") explains, she has become corrupted by "worldly" things like parties and stockings and boys.[7] Once again Lewis is "menacing" the reader – and, in fact, women in general – with a bleak portrait of their fate should they reject his conservative ideology. C. S. Lewis himself, in a 1957 letter, said, "[Susan] is left alive in this world at the end, having turned into a rather silly, conceited young woman" (qtd. Buck). Buck goes on to quote Charles McGrath: "there's the unfortunate business with Susan, the second-oldest of the Pevensies, who near the end of the last volume is denied salvation merely because of her fondness for nylons and lipstick - because she has reached puberty, in other words, and has become sexualized." It is worth noting that in the first book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,* Edmund betrays his siblings, Aslan, and Narnia to the White Witch and is forgiven by Aslan and his brothers and sisters. However, Susan, who has committed a much lesser offense by daring to be "grown-up" (169) and "silly" (169), is exiled from Narnia. Lewis, like many other male writers and historians, is far more forgiving of Judas than Mary Magdalene, despite the fact that Mary Magdalene, like Susan, committed a much lesser "sin."

These sexist hegemonies are also present in *Perelandra.* Lewis allows the Green Lady a narrative voice. This initially seems at odds with his menacing agenda. However, Lewis

[7] The contemporary and very feminist-positive SF writer Neil Gaiman has said that he was always troubled by Susan's exclusion from paradise. He has written an interesting short story "The Problem of Susan" to explain it, which casts Aslan in the role of a bloodthirsty villain and Susan as the neglected hero.

is not granting the Lady narrative agency by acknowledging her voice; it is her voice that makes her vulnerable to Weston's temptations. The characters' personal agency is predicated on narrative authority; Weston (or the "Un-man") tries to convince the Lady that her reasons and logic for obeying Maleldil are flawed, which recalls Harding's claims that the patriarchal power structure does not view women as having the intellectual capacity to be scientists. The Un-man maintains that the Lady would be much happier and "older" (as she calls the increase of wisdom, reminiscent of Susan's desire to be "grown-up") were she to defy Maleldil. The Un-Man uses his patriarchal narrative discourse to dominate the Lady and overcome her narrative voice. He claims that he is making her "older" at Maleldil's wishes and that thusly Maleldil "is making you a full woman, for up to now you were only half made – like the beasts who do nothing of themselves" (108). Once again, Lewis presents the sexually problematic concept of "beasts;" it is notable that Lilith, Eve's liberated opposite, is often associated with "beasts" such as the owl and serpent. Some versions of her tale even say that after leaving the garden she went forth among the beasts of the wild. The phrase "half made" even seems to reference the Lilith myth by referring to the "unacceptable" way Lilith was created.

Clearly, through his narrative voice, Weston is attempting to make the Lady a "full woman" by devaluing her own female narrative. The Un-man is not only overshadowing the Lady's voice[8] but is actively attempting to *transform* her identity and discourse through his "dominant" male narrative. As Jeffrey J. Folks notes, "Within Western culture, narrative literature has always been the means by which people have understood the nature of the human condition and the shape of their lives" (107). Ransom's narrative within Lewis' narrative

[8] Just as Lilith's story has been overshadowed by Eve's

functions as a praxis by which Lewis' views regarding the "nature of the human condition" is presented within Perelandra's "paradise."

Inscribing Patriarchy Through Layers of Narrative

The layers of narrative within *Perelandra* serve to construct two opposing realities: one advanced by Ransom and the other by the Un-man. However, both these narratives re-inscribe the narrative of patriarchal dominance. For example, the Un-man tells the Lady stories about "women who had stood forth alone and braved a terrible risk for her child, her lover, or her people. Each had been misunderstood, reviled, and persecuted: but each also magnificently vindicated by the event" (125). Lewis does not give specific details of these stories nor of the women in them, but he states that, listening "Ransom had more than a suspicion that many of these noble pioneers had been what in ordinary terrestrial speech we call witches or perverts" (126). Of course, many of the women throughout history who were persecuted as witches were, like Jeanne d'Arc, a threat to the masculine power structure. They were accused of witchcraft in order to silence them. During the "Burning Times" in the Middle Ages, the witches who were tortured and killed were often in actuality healers, learned women of their villages, or followers of pre-Christian religions. As such they represented a significant challenge to the hegemony of the Christian church. It also seems likely that the female "perverts" in these stories were lesbians (or "inverts" in terminology contemporary to Lewis) and represent Lewis' desire to impose heteronormative values within his text. Lewis has re-created the heteronormative *heirogamos* on Venus with the Lady and her King; there is no room for homosexuality/Queerness in his cosmos. (Interestingly, there is blatant homosexual symbolism in *The Dark Tower*, but even that is based

around *male* supremacy, as I shall shortly discuss.) At the time of *Perelandra*'s writing, lesbianism was not widely accepted socially. Even prominent and talented women were attacked as "perverts" for their sexual orientation.

Lewis gives one slight hint about the identity of one of the "menacing" women in the Un-man's tales: "'And another time,' began the Un-man at once, 'there was a queen in our world who ruled over a little land' – " (127). The "little land" suggests England, and the "queen" seems to refer to Queen Elizabeth I, the so-called "Virgin Queen" and one of the most celebrated British monarchs. Here, Lewis is once again expressing his patriarchal ideology. Queen Elizabeth I never married or had children and used her unmarried state to aid her in political alliances. Under her reign, England became a world economic and cultural power. Why would the British writer Lewis include the legendary queen among the Un-man's dubious heroines? It seems likely that Lewis was tacitly condemning Queen Elizabeth for not "fulfilling" her duties as a wife and a mother, which is the role that Ransom, unlike the Un-man, encourages the lady to fill. Lewis, Ransom, and the Un-man are all presenting a patriarchal, oppressive view of the "human condition" and the Lady must be prevented from exercising her narrative authority to propose an alternate view.

Adey disagrees with this analysis, noting that "in the Un-Man's appeal to incipient feminism against cosmic male dominance the novel was in advance of its time. An impediment to its continuing reception is the prospect that present and future readers, especially female, may endorse what it condemns. Why should a masculine deity deny the Lady her heroines…?" (131). Why, indeed? The blindingly obvious answer is *because* he is a masculine deity. Queen Elizabeth I was more powerful and effective than many male monarchs and a threat to other male leaders of her day. By limiting the Lady to the role of subservient wife and mother, Lewis is

demoting her to an inferior status, below Maleldil, Ransom, and her "King." Indeed, Adey's own slightly sarcastic tone when he notes the objection is likely to come from "female" readers seems dismissive of the entire question, just as in *Perelandra* Lewis is dismissive of these unnamed women of history – so dismissive he does not even bother to name them.

Significantly, Adey does not answer his own question. However, his agenda is transparent when he states that Ransom's chagrin when the lady appears in a king-like robe may stem from the fact that the robe is made from the feathers of slaughtered birds, and Lewis himself was a passionate champion of animal rights (131-132). Once again, this is a flash of the blindingly obvious: not only does this echo the "fall" in *Genesis* when Eve and Adam clothe themselves, the feathers are metaphorically anathema to both Lewis and Adey. The Lady cannot fly; she is confined to the fixed land. It is, indeed, a sin for her to even associate herself with the concept of flight and freedom. She must remain like the birds who have given their feathers to her unacceptable cloak: flightless, speechless, helpless.

Just as Adey ridiculously attempts to impose his flawed narrative of feminist liberation on *Perelandra,* Ransom imposes his own oppressive domestic narrative upon the Lady. When she expresses the fear that "[her] life might be wasted, some great opportunity let slip," Ransom responds with "children are fruit enough" (131). The Un-Man counters Ransom's remarks by "explaining that men like Ransom in his own world – men of that intensely male and backward-looking type who always shrank away from the new good – had continuously labored to keep women down to mere childbearing and ignore [their] high destiny (131-132). Of course, within Lewis' mythos, any "good" espoused by the Un-Man must actually be evil. This whole portion of the narrative reads like a sneaky criticism of feminism and women's rights. Ransom ardently tries to convince the Lady that the women of whom the Un-Man speaks are actually akin to

"Agrippina and…Lady Macbeth" (132). These two women, while violent and murderous, were also commanding and powerful, possessed of personal agency and volition. Also, like the Lady, their stories are told through the filter of male narrative dominance.

Ransom, desperate to "contain" female power, thinks, "What the Un-Man said was always very nearly true. Certainly it must be part of the Divine Plan that this happy creature…should become, in a sense, more distinct from God and her husband in order thereby to be at one with them in a richer fashion" (131). Ransom condemns the Un-Man for leading the Lady into "terrible slavery" (133) with his talk of self-determination and women's roles outside prescribed patriarchal guidelines, but in fact it is Lewis' own ideology thus expressed that is really leading the Lady into a deeper and more subtly terrible slavery. Any independence or self-actualization she achieves must always be solely for the purpose of more deeply reinscribing her life within the closed patriarchal loop of wife and mother.

Lewis, through Ransom's narrative, seems to be in dialogue with what Ronald T. Takaki calls "the cult of true womanhood" that arose in the mid-nineteenth century (204). As with Lovecraft, many of Lewis' sensibilities seem essentially Victorian. The Green Lady of Perelandra is a perfect example of the sort of "true womanhood" espoused by this cultish ideology. Takaki writes that "[women] were exalted as moral guardians of the hearth and radiant sources of purity" (204), just like the Green Lady. In order to constrain the Lady within this archetype, Ransom has to physically defend her from the undesirable ideologies of the Un-man (who of course is not a "proper" man himself, for he encourages and literally "un-does" normative gender roles). Takaki gives the example of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the dean of Harvard University at the time when the school began to admit women into their medical program, and his wife Amelia. Quoting one of Holmes' biographers, Takaki says that in the eyes

of the conservative hegemony, Amelia Holmes was "'a *helpmate* the most useful, whose abilities seemed to have been arranged by happy foresight for the express purpose of satisfying *his* wants" (qtd. 204), reminiscent of the Green Lady's statement of her subservience to Maleldil. Takaki further reports that the Harvard Professor Ware, commenting upon the admission of women to the medical school, said:

> [It was] difficult to conceive that [women] should go through all that we have to encounter in the various departments of the study of medicine, without tarnishing that *delicate* surface of the female mind, which can hardly be imagined even to reflect what is gross without some defilement. (qtd. 205)

Like Professor Ware, Ransom is determined to preserve the Green Lady's "delicate" purity by shielding her from knowledge that would "tarnish" her mind. It is notable that, as a man, Ransom is not corrupted by the concepts of which the Un-man speaks; he is able to exercise his masculine moral judgment and thus avoid the Un-man's temptations. He does not trust the Lady to do the same; her "true womanhood" must be maintained by keeping her ignorant and sheltered.

The Lady is being robbed of her narrative voice on many different levels. The Un-man, while engaging in verbal exchanges with her, is increasingly successful in attempting to dominate her feminine discourse with his own. Ransom is a part of this ongoing debate, as he continually interjects his comments in an attempt to discredit the Un-man's remarks. However, by doing so he is *also* dominating the discourse; Ransom wants to defeat the Un-man's narrative temptations and convince the Lady that his own narrative discourse is superior. Interestingly, the Un-man also attempts to silence Ransom's own discourse as a challenge to his own; yet his method of dominance over Ransom is much more forceful and direct. The Un-man, who

apparently does not need sleep himself, does not allow Ransom to sleep. He calls out Ransom's name repeatedly, cries out loudly, and "had a whole repertory of obscenities to perform with its own – or rather with Weston's – body" (129). Not only does the mention of "obscenities" suggest a homosexual or auto-erotic element that would fit perfectly with Ransom's concept of lesbianism as perversion, the Un-man's actions show that he considers Ransom a more significant challenger than the Lady. As a result of being constantly deprived of sleep, Ransom cannot think clearly or effectively dispute the Un-man's arguments. At several points in the tale he lapses involuntarily into sleep and the Un-man can address the Lady uninterrupted. It is enough for the Un-man to tempt or trick the lady; Ransom's "superior" masculine powers of reason and discourse require the Un-Man to completely *incapacitate* him.

Lewis, as an author, also effectively robs the Lady of her narrative voice. Although at several points he directly includes her dialogue, the entire discussion between the Un-man and the Lady is seen from Ransom's perspective. Ransom's and the Un-man's directly reported utterances largely outnumber those of the Lady. The narrative structure of *Perelandra* is free indirect discourse, which prioritizes Ransom's perceptions. Lewis himself is silencing the Lady just as Ransom and the Un-man are silencing her. Her feminine discourse is a threat and a menace to the patriarchal hegemony. Even within the fictional narrative Lewis must suppress her words just as, historically, Lilith has been suppressed in favor of the more normative and "acceptable" Eve.

It is noteworthy that neither Ransom nor the Un-Man is ultimately able to overwhelm the Lady with their masculine discourse. In the end Ransom must resort to sheer brute force to overcome the Un-man. He grudgingly admits to himself, "Up to this point the Lady had repelled her assailant…she had stood" (145). Nevertheless, Ransom is adamant that "This can't go on"

(145), mistrusting the Lady's power of will and discourse, and "Here in Perelandra the temptation would be stopped by Ransom, or it would not be stopped at all" (147), displaying a complete and total lack of faith in the Lady's narrative and personal agency.

The climactic scene in the novel is a prolonged fight to the death between the naked Ransom and the Un-man, a fight described in both grisly and arguably homoerotic prose:

> [The Un-man] had caught [Ransom] tightly to its chest, with its arms around him, and its nails were ripping great strips off his back. His own arms were inside the embrace and, pummeling wildly, he could get no blow at all…He could hear through its open mouth the great gusts of breath that he was knocking out of it. Then its hands came up again…He grabbed at its arms. More than by luck than by skill he got it held by both wrists…this effort [sent] streams of sweat down the backs of both combatants…A second later – he did not know how it happened – they were standing apart, their chests heaving in great gasps, each staring at the other. (153-154)

Masculine physical force has completely supplanted reasoned discourse and Ransom has moved the conflict to an arena in which the Lady cannot participate; nor one in which, it seems, she is necessary. Especially in light of the Freudian aspects of *The Dark Tower*, I wonder to what extent the whole discourse between the Ransom, the Un-man, and the Lady might not be simply a tool or an excuse to bring the Un-man and Ransom into physical contact. The simultaneously violent yet erotic description of their fight may mirror Lewis' own ambiguities about masculine power and sexuality.

Of course, by the end of the novel, the Un-man is defeated and normalization restored. The Lady is reunited with her King, and once again, her narrative voice is almost completely subsumed by that of the King, the Oyarsa of Mars and Venus, the eldila, and Ransom himself.

Her longest speech at this point is to thank Ransom for destroying the Un-man possessing Weston's body. She says, "As soon as [Ransom] had taken away the Evil One…and I awoke from sleep, my mind was cleared" (208). She has been restored as the consort of the King and as the Mother. The King now commands the narrative and explains Ransom's work on Venus and his future battles against the "Black Oyarsa" of Earth. And, of course, the Lady's mind has not been "cleared" but rather "brainwashed" into accepting Ransom's and Lewis' patriarchal narrative.

Science, Morality, and Homophobia in *The Dark Tower*

Chronologically, although its actual date of composition remains uncertain, *The Dark Tower* takes place between *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. Many Lewis scholars such as Lindskoog find *The Dark Tower* problematic for the very same reasons that, I argue, it helps illuminate Lewis' ideology regarding science, gender, and narrative to inscribe heteronormative ideologies.

The very last sentence of *Out of the Silent Planet* is "Now that 'Weston' has shut the door, the way to the planets lies through the past; if there is to be any more space-travelling, it will have to be time-travelling as well…!" (160). Lewis has obviously abandoned this idea in *Perelandra*, but seized upon it for *The Dark Tower*. The scientist Dr. Orfieu has invented a time machine, called a "chronoscope," which apparently opens a viewing window into "Othertime." At the beginning of the story, Orfieu, his assistant Scudamour,[9] the "inveterate sceptic" (17) MacPhee, Ransom, and Lewis himself, acting once again as narrator, have gathered in Orfieu's

[9] Scudamour is the name of a character from *The Faerie Queen.* By choosing this name, Lewis is heralding his medieval and mythological over the modern and scientific.

study for a demonstration of the chronoscope. The machine, apparently, can only orient upon a future edifice that Orfieu and Scudamour have dubbed the "Dark Tower" and its inhabitants. At the top of the tower dwells a man-like being Lewis names the "Stingingman," who apparently "stings" normal human beings and turns them into zombie or drone-like workers called "Jerkies" due to their uncoordinated physical movements. The Jerkies are constructing the unfinished Tower. Some of the inhabitants of Lewis' contemporary world have "doubles" in the world glimpsed through the chronoscope; for example, the Stingingman is Scudamour's double. Upon seeing a double who resembles his fiancée, Camilla Bembridge, Scudamour jumps into the chronoscope's projected image and somehow enters the world of the Dark Tower, where he finds himself inhabiting the body of the Stingingman.

The Dark Tower is notable in several respects, despite Adey's claim that it "has of late received undeserved attention" (256). Firstly, it engages much more directly with modernist science than the other works in Lewis' *Space Trilogy*. Glover notes that Lewis in *The Dark Tower* "mention[s] Dunne's book [*An Experiment with Time*, 1927]" (85) and continues to say "the interest [in *The Dark Tower* seems more scientific and mechanical than imaginative" (89). Lewis, through Orfieu, negates physical time travel loosely on the basis of the Pauli Exclusion Principle[10] and the law of conservation of mass, saying:

> You will grant me that two pieces of matter can't be in the same place at the same time…Now, suppose that the particles which at present make up the tip of your nose by the year 3000 form part of a chair. If you could travel to the year 3000 and…take your present body with you, that would mean at the same moment in 3000 the very same particles would have to be both in your nose and in the chair – which is absurd. (18)

[10] Generally speaking, the Pauli Exclusion Principle states that no two particles may occupy the same space at the same time.

As usual, Lewis garbles his scientific terms somewhat; the law of conservation of matter is actually the law of conservation of matter and *energy,* as Einstein described in his famous equation $E = mc^2$ (energy equals mass times the speed of light). Moreover, it would be possible that the particles in question would have been transformed into energy by the year 3000 so that there would be no physical doubling. However, this explanation represents a more rigorous exegesis than Lewis attempted in *Out of the Silent Planet* or *Perelandra*.

Negating physical time travel, Orfieu continues, "If [time travel] is possible, it must consist in looking at another time while we ourselves remain here – as we look at the stars through telescopes while we remain on the earth. What one wants, in fact, is not a sort of time flying-machine but something which does to time what the telescope does to space" (19). Although this is certainly fuzzy science, its basis is sounder than that of Lewis' other scientific forays. Orfieu takes up "the enormous difficulties in any physiological explanation of memory" and explains "there is a good deal to be said for the theory that memory is direct perception of the past. I came to the conclusion that this theory was right – that when we remember, we are not simply getting the result of something that goes on inside our heads. We are directly experiencing the past" (20). Orfieu says that he has isolated "the Z substance...the organ of memory and prevision. And, starting from that, I have been able to construct my chronoscope" (24).[11] Einstein's special theory of relativity states that space and *time* both are relative and thus, depending on their position and acceleration, one observer might indeed appear to be observing the future or past relative to another observer. In his theory of general relativity, Einstein explained how strong gravitational fields such as those generated near the center of a black hole can also warp and even seemingly stop time. Lewis' theories also prefigure some of the

[11] H. G. Wells used a similar rationale when explaining the mechanism of the time traveler's machine in his 1895 novel *The Time Machine*, but in that case the time traveler *was* able to bodily travel into both the future and the past.

contemporary post-modern notions about the simultaneity of time and the everlastingness of the past, particularly in relation to the narrative past.

Near the end of the unfinished novel, after being transported physically into the Stingingman's body, Scudamour visits the Dark Tower's library in order to learn something about the world he has entered. He discovers that "this race had specialized in the knowledge of time, and ours in the knowledge of space" (84). While there are several books in the Othertime library ludicrously postulating a "saucer earth and airy stars" (84), Scudamour also finds many nearly-impenetrable treatises on time. Contrary to his habit in the other volumes of *The Space Trilogy*, Lewis provides the reader with extensive blocks of text from these books, full of apparently technical jargon and complete with an actual diagram of varying time-lines. In style and diction, this portion of Lewis' text resembles Einstein's writings on relativity theory. Lewis even provides diagrams in the text that resemble the diagrams appearing in Einstein's 1920 work *Relativity*.

Scudamour is completely unable to understand some of the more advanced books on time, from which Lewis quotes only briefly, but then find a simpler book titled *First Principles*, which title is a scientific term for the a basic, foundational assumption that underlies a theory. Lewis provides the following opening text:

> It was anciently believed…that space had three dimensions and time but one, and our fathers commonly pictured time as a stream or thin cord…The direction backward from the present was called the past, as it still is, and the direction forward the future. What is a little more remarkable is that only one such stream or cord was believed to exist, and that the universe was thought to contain no other events or states than those which occupied, at some point or other, the stream or cord along which our own present is

> travelling…we could give no reason why time had time had only one dimension and why there was only a single time; indeed more than one of the early chronologists hazarded the idea that time might itself be a dimension of space – an idea which will seem almost fantastically perverse to us. (85)

The "stream or cord" of which Lewis speaks is called a *worldline* in Einstein's terms and represents a body's progress through space and time. When Lewis says "time might itself be a dimension of space," he is directly referring to what Einstein called space-time; a body's worldline is the graph of its progress through space-time on a four-dimensional x-y-z-t axis incorporating the three dimensions of space and the time dimension. Lewis is therefore postulating a world that has scientifically advanced beyond Einstein's conception of time – one in which time has multiple simultaneous dimensions. In Lewis' Othertime,

> the time in which we live has lateral fluctuations…the cord or stream is not to be represented by a straight but by a wavy line…we read of thinkers who could not conceive such fluctuation. They inquired in *what*, or into *what*, the time cord deviated when it deviated from the straight; and their reluctance to allow the obvious answer (that it deviated in, or into, time, in an eckwards or andwards direction) gave a whole new lease of life to the perverse doctrine we have already noted, which was now called the doctrine of Space Time. (86)

The idea of the "wavy" time line seems analogous to the particle/wave duality and the Schrodinger wave equation in quantum physics. In the theory of quantum physics, all matter exhibits properties *both* of particles and waves on the subatomic length scale. Ergo, the characteristics of a subatomic particle such as an election can be probabilistically described by a wave equation developed by the physicist Erwin Schrodinger. Scudamour's "distaste" for the

Othertimers' theories mirrors the distaste many modernist scientists, Einstein included, felt for the theories of quantum mechanics. It was in response to quantum mechanics that Einstein uttered his famous remark, "God does not play dice," a sentiment with which Lewis would almost certainly have agreed. Additionally, the "thinkers" who "inquired in *what*…the time cord deviated" recalls the opposition to Maxwell's equations that showed that all electromagnetic waves (roughly, light) propagate through a vacuum at a fixed speed *c*, approximately 3×10^8 meters per second. Many scientists found it impossible to believe that light could travel through the vacuum of space and postulated a mysterious substance called "ether" that was the medium through which light travelled. The ether hypothesis was solidly and repeatedly disproven and the constant speed of light in a vacuum served as the foundation for Einstein's theory of special relativity.

Lewis introduces "K's law that 'Any two time-lines approximate in the exact degree to which their material contents are alike'" (90) in order to begin to explain the "doubling" between the ordinary world of the story and Othertime (unfortunately the manuscript ends soon after this introduction). In his explanation of the graphic he calls the "Time Square," Lewis comments that "a consciousness which succeeded in passing [from one time-line to another] would attain to endless time, and the Time Square, though finite, would be endless or perpetual" (87), essentially postulating a mechanism for immortality.

The degree of scientific engagement and relative rigor in *The Dark Tower* may seem anomalous in contrast to the fuzzy science in the rest of Lewis' *Space Trilogy*. In fact, this was one of the points of evidence that Lindskoog used to attempt to discredit *The Dark Tower* as a fraud. However, as noted earlier, Lewis himself admitted that he was not necessary ignorant of the mechanics of contemporary science when writing *The Space Trilogy*; rather, he was largely

unconcerned with it. Lewis may also have had different ideological approaches to the sciences of time and space travel. In *The Space Trilogy* space travel is employed by unscrupulous individuals from the Dark Planet who wish to contaminate and exploit otherwise unspoiled worlds. In *The Dark Tower* the chronoscope offers a potential way for the inhabitants of Earth to redeem an otherwise spoiled and corrupt Othertime. Lewis once again is imposing his patriarchal morality upon science.

Nor has Lewis completely changed his general attitudes towards science or religion in *The Dark Tower*. In his essay "A Note on the Dark Tower," Hooper writes, "There are, doubtless, others besides myself who were puzzled not to find in the fragment a high theological theme such as that which runs through the other books" (95). Yet the theological element is far from absent and it is possible that Lewis had intended to further develop this theme later in the completed book. After his first sight of the Dark Tower and its inhabitants, Ransom says bluntly, "'I think that Dark Tower is in hell'" (38). Scudamour, upon seeing his double in the Stingingman, proclaims:

> Of course, I oughtn't to complain. This is science. And who ever heard of a new scientific discovery which didn't show that the real universe was even fouler and meaner and more dangerous than you had supposed? I never went in for religion, but I begin to think that Dr. Ransom was right. I think we have tapped whatever reality is behind all the old stories about hell and devils and witches. (48)

When faced with the Othertime's advanced theory of time and immortality near the end of *The Dark Tower*, Scudamour thinks "'I'd sooner go to a heaven of harps and angels like what they used to tell me about when I was a boy'" (88). I postulate that Lewis had intended to introduce a more dominant religious theme in the non-existent portion of the narrative. The fact that the

characters eventually recognize the Dark Tower as an unfinished duplicate of the Cambridge University library, to me, further supports this idea. Cambridge University plays a pivotal role as a battleground between good and evil in the final volume of *The Space Trilogy*, *That Hideous Strength*. It seems likely that Lewis had intended for Ransom and the others to overcome the Othertimers and their nightmarish mirror-world from the ideological ground of Christian hegemony and morality, just as Ransom partially overcomes Weston and Devine in *Out of the Silent Planet* and totally destroys the Un-Man in *Perelandra.*

The Dark Tower displays the same sort of patriarchal hegemony present in *Perelandra*. This is transparently obvious in the person of Scudamour's fiancée, the "Bembridge woman," (61) or Camilla Bembridge. Her first name is very similar to Carmilla, the female vampire seductress of LeFanu's 1872 novella. Lewis portrays Camilla Bembridge as a negative and even parasitic element in Bembridge's life and in society.

Lewis' negative portrayal of Camilla is very similar to Ransom's attitude towards the "great women" the Un-man cites in *Perelandra.* Lewis writes that Camilla "was what is called 'modern.' She was so free to talk about the things her grandmother could not mention that Ransom once said he wondered if she were free to talk about anything else" (76). At the time Lewis composed *The Dark Tower*, a "modern" woman would have been attempting to cast off the patriarchal chains of her mother's and grandmother's generation. She would have spoken her mind, been interested in working outside the home, exercised her right to vote, and not have seen herself as the property of or appendage to a man – in other words, she would have been a woman who was claiming her own narrative voice. While Lewis is not specific about the things that Camilla's "grandmother could not mention," one might suppose that he refers to sexual matters. Ergo, he is also condemning sexual freedom and self-expression in women. In the context of the

quote, a resident of the Othertime is inquiring if Scudamour intends to make Camilla's double his mistress.

Camilla does not possess the necessary "feminine" and self-sacrificing qualities Lewis venerates in women (such as the Lady's willingness to sacrifice her free will to Maleldil) and thus may be seen as a sort of "object lesson" for the female reader. Lewis writes, "The rest of us [the narrator and other characters in the book], who had opportunities during [Scudamour's] absence to get to know the real Camilla pretty well, [would say] she was not the sort of young woman who was likely to risk her life, or even her comfort, for the sake of truth in love or in anything else" (68). Elsewhere, one of the other characters dismissively calls her, "that infernal woman" (61).

Juxtaposed against the "real-life" and undesirable Camilla is Camilla's double in the Othertime, also called Camilla. With these two women Lewis is creating a facile moral juxtaposition between "correct" and "incorrect" female behaviors. The Camilla of the Othertime acts much more in accordance with the stereotypical code of female behavior; for example, when addressed directly by Scudamour in the body of the Stingingman, she faints. She faces her fate in the Othertime – to be stung by the Stingingman and turned into a Jerky – unquestioningly. Knowing this, she nevertheless gladly offers herself as sacrifice, just as the Lady accepts the doctrines of Maleldil. Echoing the Lady's remarks about being Maleldil's beast, Camilla says of the Jerkies, "We are told that one moment of their life is such bliss that it surpasses all the best and sweetest that we others could experience in a thousand years" (70). Just as in *Perelandra*, the Othertime Camilla needs the male Scudamour to rescue her from downfall. To his urging to resist the "Big Brain" and the "White Riders" that serve the Unicorn and the authorities of Otherworld, Camilla says, "You are teaching me all the time to say things that we do not dare to

think" (73). Scudamour is instructing her in the hegemonically "correct" narrative mode of life and thought, just as the teaching of Ransom in *Perelandra* made the Lady "older."

It transpires that the Camilla of the Othertime had loved the Stingingman before he was changed into the Stingingman (or Unicorn, as she calls him) and his name was Michael. However, when Scudamour says that he loves her and that "'You are Camilla and I am Michael, for ever and ever…we don't belong here, we come from a better world and have got to go back there if we can,'" Camilla responds, "'It is very hard…but I will believe it if you tell me'" (68). Unlike his real-life fiancée Camilla, the Camilla of the Othertime submits her agency and decision-making to Scudamour. She even asks him to speak for her, relinquishing her narrative voice, when she tells him, "'If you tell them I am not fit to be made a servant of the Big Brain they will put me into the fire'" (73). It is necessary for Scudamour to assume responsibility for her protection and very existence.

Scudamour finds this new Camilla more appealing than the real-life Camilla. He thinks, "[the real-life] Camilla had not loved him so well in the old world" (70) and acknowledges to himself that "Perhaps he had never been so very 'modern' in his heart" (76). Although the novel is unfinished, I can easily imagine an ending in which Scudamour brings the Othertime Camilla into the real world to supplant the other, less-desirable Camilla. Perhaps the real-world Camilla's "punishment" for being a modern woman would be to take her double's place in the Othertime to be tortured or killed. In his *A Note on the Dark Tower*, Walter Hooper agrees, writing:

> The character of the Othertime Camilla is never properly developed, but the one of earth tells us a great deal about Lewis's view of the 'liberated' woman and furnishes us with what is possibly the best little character-study in the book…I think it likely that, by

> whatever means Scudamour is returned to earth, Lewis would have managed to switch the two women so that the nice one goes home with Scudamour and the 'modern' one ends up in Othertime. (98)

I disagree that the 'modern' Camilla is a good character-study. In her character I see a stereotypical presentation of Lewis' concept of the "flaws" that "modern" women possessed that made them undesirable and unsuited to be wives in his eyes. Hooper's remark, to me, seems like the exact response Lewis is attempting to provoke with his narrative. It recalls Adey's sexist comment that "female readers" would be most likely to find flaws in *Perelandra.* As a female reader myself, I do indeed find those flaws and expect that Adey's remark was more prophetic than he may have intended. However, I agree with Hooper when he says the "modern" Camilla reveals Lewis' viewpoint on female rights and liberation. Just as Lewis is essentially conservative and traditional in his attitudes towards science, so does he seem to be in his attitudes towards gender.

The character of the Stingingman introduces a problematizing heteronormative element into Lewis' treatment of gender roles. I have previously mentioned the subtextual homoerotic elements in Ransom's physical fight with the Un-Man in *Perelandra*. These elements are overt in *The Dark Tower*. The Stingingman's (or Unicorn's) sting is described as follows:

> It was in his forehead, like a unicorn's horn. The flesh of his forehead was humped and puckered in the middle, just below the hair, and out of it stuck the sting. It was not very big. It was broad at the base and narrowed quickly at its point…It was hard and horny, but not like bone. It was red, like most of the things in a man, and apparently lubricated by some sort of saliva (33).

The comparisons between the sting and a phallus are inevitable. Moreover, the process by which the Stingingman "stings" his victims reads like a negative description of a male homosexual sex:

> [The victim assumed] a position in which his calves almost touched the knees of the Stingingman…the Stingingman had shot out his arms and gripped the other by the elbows; and at the same time he put down his head. I suppose it was the sting which made this movement seem so grotesquely animal…he was putting [the sting] into position like a goat that means to butt…A frightful convulsion passed through the victim's body when he felt himself seized; and as the point of the sting entered his back we saw him writhe in torture, and the sweat gleamed on his suddenly whitened face. The Man had stung him apparently in the spine, pressing in the needle-point of the sting, neither quickly nor slowly…the struggles of his victim did not last long; his limbs relaxed and he hung limp in the grip of the operator. (34-35)

The animal metaphors suggest Lewis' distaste with the process this interlude symbolically represents, yet the detail with which he describes it suggests an underlying fascination. The male sexual symbolism is further highlighted by the fact that Lewis notes that it is primarily men, not women, who come to the Stingingman to be "stung."

The analogy to the phallus and male sexual power is further developed when Scudamour finds himself possessing the body of the Stingingman in the presence of Camilla. He feels a nearly overpowering desire to sting her. "He found his whole mind reeling under the effort of resisting a desire which horrified him both by its content and by its almost maniacal strength" (63). Scudamour even thinks, "It seemed to him that to sting Camilla would be the most natural thing in the world. For what other purpose was she there?" (63). Read as sexual metaphor, this statement introduces a very troubling position regarding gender roles and relations. The primary

function of the Lady of *Perelandra* is tacitly sexual; she is Lewis' archetype of the ever-fertile wife and mother. Here the female sexual role is blatant. Although Scudamour may mentally seemingly recoil from his desire for Camilla, he cannot escape or deny it.

In Lewis' text, the solution to this unwanted desire is correspondingly symbolic. Scudamour engages in a parody of masturbation. He "groaned and put his hand to his head. A second later he drew it away with a scream of agony…Only a tiny drop of blood appeared on his hand, but he was dizzy with the pain and he felt the poison tingling under his skin" (67). Scudamour has inadvertently stung himself and "the accident had one result which he counted cheap at the price of the pain. The tension in his head was relaxed, the throbbing grew less, and the desire to sting disappeared. He felt once more master of himself" (67). The entire episode is a sexual pastiche, even down to the traditional "harmful" effects of masturbation: "his hand was sore and swollen for several days" (67). In fact, the entire set-up of a desire-maddened Stingingman performing non-heteronormative sexual acts with primarily male partners, leaving them in a mindless, will-less state, can be seen as an especially overt and castigating critique of non-heteronormative sexual actions and practices. Scudamour must shelter the female Camilla from his "deviant" desires, even though doing so leads him to engage in a deviant act of self-stimulation. The Othertime Camilla is correspondingly more desirable than her terrestrial double; the "modern" Camilla is open regarding her sexuality and is thus juxtaposed against Lewis' more desirable female praxis as represented by the Othertime Camilla. Camilla, like the Green Lady, falls into the patriarchal virgin/whore archetype. While she is a figure of sexual attraction for the protagonist, that attraction depends upon her "unsullied" status. The real-life Camilla is undesirable because she is sexually experienced. Ransom's veneration of the Green Lady depends upon her sexual innocence. Ransom, during his fight with the Un-Man,

symbolically has sex with him in order to "protect" the Lady from the Un-Man's and her own desires. Once again Lewis is espousing the conservative ideology of Eve and explicitly rejecting Lilith's more liberatory narrative.

The sexual elements of *The Dark Tower* have caused a great deal of consternation amongst Lewis critics. In the text, Lewis writes of Scudamour's desire to sting Camilla: "Of course Scudamour had read his psychoanalysis. He is perfectly well aware that under abnormal conditions a much more natural desire might manifest itself in this grotesque form. But he is pretty sure that this was not what was happening" (63). Hopper cites this passage as "proof" that Lewis intended no sexual imagery. He writes, "Another important point…concerned the Stingingman's 'unicorn horn' or 'sting,' which Lewis' friends [to which Hopper postulates he read the manuscript] thought suggested unpleasant sexual implications. I do not think Lewis, consciously or unconsciously, intended any such implication" (96). Yet the obvious sexual symbolism belies Scudamour's mental protests and Hopper's analysis. In the very same paragraph, Lewis writes of Scudamour, "he was full of poison and ached to discharge it." In view of the psycho-sexual nature of Lewis' other works, Hopper's protests seem pathetically naive.

As well, Adey barely mentions *The Dark Tower* in his discussion of Lewis, and Glover completely avoids the sexual interpretation, saying "Lewis may perhaps have intended the sting to represent the poisonous infection of a debased philosophy of any sort" (90). These apologist male critics seem, to me, unable or unwilling to accept the fact that Lewis was desperately and unsuccessfully trying to re-inscribe a patriarchal heteronormative narrative.

Lindskoog, one of Lewis' female critics, bases a large amount of her "discrediting" of *The Dark Tower* on its sexual implications. She refers to the "embarrassingly naive sexual

overtones" (19) in the book and "the unpleasant sexual implications of the sting" (21), concluding that the "almost unrelieved nastiness of the book seems a blemish on Lewis' character" (22). As I stated earlier, Lindskoog, like Hooper and Adey, cannot accept that Lewis would produce a book with such complicated and ambiguous sexual symbolism. However, I find myself more in agreement with Ursula K. LeGuin's 1977 analysis of *The Dark Tower*: "Nobody who draws upon deep unconscious material can be blamed for getting swamped by it at times; and this is one of Lewis's nearest approaches to a venture into the outer (or inner?) dark" (qtd. Lindskoog 19). I maintain that this is a venture *both* into the outer and inner dark; Lewis is revealing his own ideologies about sex and gender, as well as reflecting the restrictive hegemonies of contemporary society as a whole. In *The Space Trilogy* Lewis has established a conservative, heteronormative narrative structure in which competing narrative voices and thus other ideologies are systematically silenced. Yet, despite his attempt to establish a dominant exclusionary narrative, his own narrative voice and the narrative itself betrays him.

CHAPTER 2: THE ELEPHANT'S LEG – H. P. LOVECRAFT

> "…Man must be prepared to accept notions of the cosmos, and of his own place in the seething vortex of time, whose merest mention is paralyzing."
>
> - From "The Shadow Out of Time by H. P. Lovecraft

H. P. Lovecraft is cultural catnip; however, the culture in this case is not "high" but rather popular culture. As I write this I have a stuffed plush Cthulhu, Lovecraft's seminal monstrous creation, wearing a miniature Mexican sombrero and sitting on the shelf above me. There is a popular table-top role-playing game called *The Call of Cthulhu* and an endless multitude of Lovecraft-themed t-shirts and figurines. One website offers chocolate versions of Lovecraft's monsters and stuffed plush versions of Cthulhu (like mine) abound in all sizes and colors, including ones with Santa hats for Christmas. Lovecraft has been a significant influence on graphic novelists such as Alan Moore and Mike Mignola, as well as hard-rock bands such as *Metallica, Black Sabbath,* and *Cradle of Filth.* During the last presidential election, Lovecraft fans could buy "Elect Cthulhu" bumper stickers. There is even a "Hello Cathulhu" version of Hello Kitty as Cthulhu. However, while Lovecraft fans may abound in role-playing stores and horror websites, H. P. Lovecraft remains largely ignored by the academy and literary scholars. One of my science fiction students sagely remarked that SF was "the ghetto of the literary world." Lovecraft is in the gutter of that ghetto, less-regarded than even non-canonical writers like Asimov and Bradbury. I argue that Lovecraft deserves serious critical attention, not only within the SF genre, but within modernism as a whole.

In his introduction to *The Annotated H. P. Lovecraft,* Lovecraft scholar S. T. Joshi writes, "Lovecraft is by no means well ensconced as a legitimate American writer" (1). In fact, Joshi is one of the very few critics who has consistently published any serious scholarly work on Lovecraft. The well-known critic Edmund Wilson was one of the few of Lovecraft's

contemporaries who deigned to review his work. In his (in)famous article "Tales of the Marvelous and the Ridiculous," first published in a 1945 edition of *The New Yorker,* Wilson dismisses Lovecraft's fiction as low-brow and says "I had read some of Lovecraft's stories and had not cared much for them." Yet Lovecraft's fiction engages with many of the same "high modernist" themes as canonical modernists such as T. S. Eliot, only expressed through the lens of modern science. Despite a lack of formal education, Lovecraft was more familiar with the paradigm-challenging revolutions in science in the early twentieth century than many of his more "canonical" contemporaries. Lovecraft's scientific expertise led him to see the modern world not just as a bleak wasteland, but also as a dangerous place populated with unknown, incomprehensible monsters. Due to this perception, Lovecraft's fiction is solidly rooted in the horror genre, a fact that may partially account for its ill-deserved neglect by the academic community. Nevertheless, his stories, "The Colour Out of Space," "The Thing on the Doorstep," and "Dreams in the Witch-House," are supreme examples of literature fully treating and engaging with scientific themes.

The Mad Scientist of Providence

In the critical essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature," Lovecraft writes, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (365). In the early twentieth century, the "unknown" was, to many, the new discoveries of science. In *The Annotated H. P. Lovecraft,* Joshi claims that Lovecraft was familiar with Einstein's theories and notes that in 1936 Lovecraft is recorded to have attended a lecture by the scholar Professor Dayton C. Miller who attempted to discuss the outmoded

"aether" theory of the universe in terms of Einstein's new theories (270-271, footnotes). Lovecraft was better versed in the new science than many of his contemporaries. Due to a combination of physical and mental ailments, he did not even finish high school, dropping out after his third year and putting an end to his anticipated career at Brown University. Yet Lovecraft thought of himself as the archetypal "gentleman-scholar," and, according to Joshi, Lovecraft's thirst for knowledge even prevented him from committing suicide during a period of teenage depression (4). Joshi notes that Lovecraft regularly read scientific publications such as *The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy* and *The Scientific Gazette*, and even for a time wrote astronomy columns for local newspapers, the *Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner* and the *Providence Tribune* (5). Lovecraft's family house had an extensive library and he was a voracious reader.

Despite his reclusive tendencies, Lovecraft maintained an extensive circle of correspondents from all over the world, to whom he wrote discussing current literary and scientific issues. Lovecraft's correspondences alone fill several printed volumes. In fact, Lovecraft's circle of correspondents became known as "The Lovecraft Circle," a rough American analog of the "Bloomsbury Circle." Like Virginia Woolf, Lovecraft was intensely interested by the discoveries of modern science and actively sought out opportunities to learn about them.

Correspondingly, the vast majority of Lovecraft's tales engage with scientific themes. One of the premiere examples of his scientific writing is "The Colour Out of Space," written and published in the horror pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1927. The "Colour Out of Space" is one of the masterpieces of his oeuvre. In discussing his engagement with Einstein's theories in his correspondence, Lovecraft wrote,

> The truth is, that with the discovery of matter's identity with energy – and of its consequent lack of vital intrinsic difference from empty space – is *an absolute coup de grace to the primitive and irresponsible myth of "spirit." For matter, it appears, really is exactly what "spirit" was always supposed to be*. Thus it is proved *that wandering energy always has a detectable form* – that if it doesn't take the form of waves or electron-streams, *it becomes matter itself*; and that the absence of matter or any other detectable energy-form indicates *not the presence of spirit, but the absence of anything whatever* (*Selected Letters*, II, 266-67, qtd. Joshi 12).

This cosmic nihilism found perfect expression in "The Colour Out of Space," a tale that, while published in 1927, anticipates the horrors of nuclear fallout and radiation poisoning in Japan in WWII. Unlike some of Lovecraft's other stories where the conflict arises from a specific, definable – if mysterious and incomprehensible – menace, the source of the horror in "The Colour Out of Space" is nothing more than "just a colour out of space"(99), but still capable of causing great destruction and dread. Lovecraft's "cosmic nihilism" is at its apex in this tale.

The setting for "The Colour Out of Space" is the rural west of Lovecraft's invented, aged Massachusetts town of Arkham[12], juxtaposing, as he often does, the ancient with the contemporary. Modern technology has come to the pastoral ancestral New England landscape, for the narrator is a surveyor for the new, modern reservoir that is to be built in the town. However, upon learning that the site for the reservoir is an oddly decimated patch of land the locals call the "blasted heath," the unnamed narrator probes deeper into the origin of the

[12] Lovecraft was one of the first American writers to create an entire cosmology for his work. Not only did he set his stories in fictional New England locations (some of which were roughly based on actual geography), but he also concocted an entire mythos of "Other" and "Elder" gods like Cthulhu. Lovecraft invented several magical texts to back up his fictional mythos; the most famous is *The Necronomicon.* Lovecraft even "quoted" several passages from this book in his stories; several contemporary version of *The Necronomicon* exist and some of Lovecraft's fans remain firmly convinced of the reality of his fictional book. Lovecraft's fictional cosmos pre-dated Lewis', Tolkien's, and even popular writer Stephen King's creations by decades.

phenomenon, uncovering "the deep's secrets…the hidden lore of old ocean, and all the mystery of primal earth" (60). In many of Lovecraft's stories the object of horror has menaced the world for eons or, alternately, plagued a particular family line in Darwinian or naturalistic Zola-esque fashion. However, in "The Colour Out of Space" the blasted heath and its cause is modern, "within the lifetime" (62) of those living in the village. This further connects the tale to the discoveries of modern science that, within one human lifetime, completely changed our conception of the world.

Lovecraft's narrator discovers that the source of the blasted heath is a meteorite that fell from the sky onto Nahum Gardner's farm. Immediately the forces of reason, scientists from Lovecraft's fictional Miskantonic University are called to look at the stone. At once they display the skepticism of the Newtonian scientist confronted with the perplexing new science; for example, they totally refuse to credit the Gardner family's claim that the meteorite is shrinking, for it is not logical that stones would shrink. And, in the "well-ordered" (66) scientific laboratory, the bits of meteorite the scientists chipped from the main stone continue to defy their understanding. Here Lovecraft clearly displays his scientific erudition, for he writes of the scientists subjecting the stone to several analyses that were part of contemporary physical chemistry. He mentions tests involving a spectroscope, or a scientific instrument that separates light into its constituent wavelengths. Joshi, in the annotated "The Colour Out of Space," notes that Lovecraft had been a chemistry enthusiast when young, and even owned an inexpensive spectroscope himself (67). In the story, the stone is tested with chemical agents: hydrochloric acid, nitric acid, and others. The stone is also found to display the Widmannstatten figures, or patterns of intersecting bands appearing when iron meteorites are etched with nitric acid.

Lovecraft's description of the scientist's work with the meteorite clearly displays his own breadth of scientific familiarity.

Obviously Lovecraft's literary purpose goes beyond just showcasing his own erudition, for all the combined might of modern science cannot come to any conclusion about the source, properties, or nature of the meteorite. The scientists can only, as Lovecraft derisively writes, "[breathlessly] talk of new elements, bizarre optical properties, and other things which puzzled men of science are wont to say when confronted with the unknown" (67). It is notable that the stone is a *meteorite* and not an object that had been dug out of the earth for Einstein's theories, already published and available at the time that *"*The Colour Out of Space*"* was written, primarily deal with cosmological, extra-terrestrial science. Whatever Lovecraft's meteorite might be (something he never fully explains in the story), it is certainly no part of a stable, earth-centered Newtonian world. Lovecraft writes that finally the scientists are forced to admit that "it was nothing of this earth, but a piece of the great outside; and as such dowered with outside properties and obedient to outside laws" (69-70).

Not only is the meteorite mysterious, it is also dangerous. Despite the fact that the story was written and published almost two decades before the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is almost impossible to ignore the similarities between that tragedy and the events of Lovecraft's story. Like the atomic bomb, the meteorite brings horrendous, painful, death from above – death not only to the living things in the area, but also to the earth itself, hence the "blasted heath." At first, the meteorite seems to have a stimulating effect on the environment; for example, the crops on the Gardner farm grow in unusual size and profusion. However, it becomes clear that the unprecedented surplus is poisonous. What is more, the flora and fauna of the area are changing; taking on the odd colour of the spherical globules imbedded

in the meteorite, an unearthly shade, a "diseased, underlying primary tone without a place among the known tints of earth" (75), a colour so strange that "it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all" (69). Not only have the vegetation and the animals taken on the colour of the meteorite, but they have been deformed physically as well. The local insects, for example, "seemed not quite usual in their aspects and motions, and their nocturnal habits contradicted all former experience" (75). The spring plants such as the skunk-cabbages appeared "monstrous" (73) and the "Dutchman's Breeches [a type of herb native to the Northeast] became a thing of singular menace" (75). At this point in the story the scientists are again summoned, but impotent before, they refuse to credit the new developments.

The next stage in the poisoning is an odd desiccation and decay that strangely mirrors some of the advanced stages of radiation poisoning. For example, the swine on the Gardner farm "grew inordinately fat, then suddenly began to undergo loathsome changes…growing grey and brittle and falling to pieces before they died, and their eyes and muzzles developed singular alterations" (79). Nor is the effect of the meteorite limited to the animals and plants. It also works on the members of the Gardener family. First Mrs. Gardener appears to go insane, crying that "she was being drained of something – something was fastening on her that ought not to be" (77). One of the two sons also goes insane, and the other appears to have thrown himself into the family well, which has apparently been poisoned by the meteorite. Upon Pierce's final visit to the farm, he discovers the still-present family members subject to the same grey, brittle death as the livestock. Before dying, Nahum Gardner whispers that the menace is "jest a colour" and "a kind o' smoke," yet it "pizened [poisoned] the whole place" and it "burns ye up…it burns an' sucks" (86). The burning also seems to suggest radiation poisoning, an effect known even before the development of the atomic bomb. Gardner suggests the fatalistic quality of the story,

explaining why his family never moved away from the poisoned land, by saying "it [the colour] beats down your mind an' then gets ye…can't git away…ye know summ'at's [something's] comin', but 'tain't no use" (86). The fatalism of the Gardner family in succumbing to their fate suggests the inexorable truth of modern science, no matter how unpalatable or frightening it might be.

Nor is it a truth that can be dismissed. Even at the climax of the story, after the colour has departed into the space from whence it came, the menace is not completely departed. A "last faint remnant must still lurk down there in the well" (96) and, before his death, Gardner cautioned, "it'll do sunthin' [something] more" (86). At the close of the story the narrator resigns his post as surveyor, for the reservoir is to be built over the poisoned well and the blasted heath. The narrator reports that "the rural tales [of the region] are queer. They might be even queerer if city men and college chemists could be interested enough to analyze the water from that disused well, or the grey dust that no wind seems ever to disperse" (97). Once again, traditional Newtonian science is helpless in the face of a greater scientific force. The narrator says that "it [the colour] is still down the well…the rustics say the blight [of the blasted heath] creeps an inch a year, so perhaps there is a kind of growth or nourishment even now" (98). Lovecraft seems to be alluding to, if not the nuclear winter after an atomic blast, the industrial pollution caused by modern technology. And, too, the people in the region are helpless before the menace. "Mental influences are very bad, too. Numbers went queer in the years after Nahum's taking, and always they lacked the power to get away" (98). The narrator himself is able to leave, and says "I hope the water [of the new reservoir] will always be very deep – but even so, I will never drink it" (97). With the coming of the new technology of the reservoir, the poison of the meteorite can perhaps be spread from the small rural town to the (invented) city of

Arkham, and the world beyond. Moreover, there is an unpleasant suggestion that Amni Pierce, the friendly local from whom the narrator hears the tale of the meteorite, may be slowly succumbing to the same grey death that claimed the Gardners.

In the conclusion, Lovecraft offers no explanation for the nature of the meteorite or the death it brought. He writes:

> What it is, only God knows. I suppose in terms of matter the thing…would be called a gas, but this gas obeyed laws that are not of our cosmos. This was no fruit of such worlds and suns as shine on the telescopes and photographic plates of our observatories. This was no breath from the skies whose motions and dimensions our astronomers measure or deem too vast to measure. It was just a colour out of space – a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it; from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes. (99)

To many people in the early twentieth century, the new scientific discoveries must have seemed just as alien, just as extra-terrestrial and threatening, as Lovecraft's meteorite. The theories of relativity and quantum gravity were controversial upon their publication, and, as Lovecraft wrote, their "existence stuns the brain and numbs us." Even now, there are factions within the scientific community that partially deny Einstein's theories and quantum physics, despite the preponderance of experimental evidence for those theories. Within the general public, numerous large groups refute the scientifically sound concepts of evolution, global climate change, and even (on the lunatic fringe) the 1969 moon landing and a spherical Earth. Similarly, Lewis and Eliot are "stunned" by modern science. Yet unlike Eliot, who sees some sort of possible

redemption from the modern wasteland, or Lewis, who seeks safety in Judeo-Christian dogma, Lovecraft sees no escape from the cold facts of an inimical science.

Sadly, Lovecraft is hardly a canonical writer. In his lifetime he was barely known outside his circle of correspondents, and primarily made his living by submitting short stories to the horror and fantasy "pulp" magazines popular in the early twentieth century. His "pop-culture" popularity primarily exists within the "geek-chic" subculture that is suddenly so trendy. While all these stuffed Cthulhus and chocolate Yog-Sothoths may serve to popularize Lovecraft's image, it is also important to realize how *few* of Lovecraft's geek disciples have actually read his work and know him only as "that guy who wrote those horror stories about the monster with tentacles." Stephen King's Lovecraft-inspired works are much better known than the texts that inspired them. Lovecraft has been effectively lost, not only to the academy, but also within the popular culture that claims to embrace him. It is interesting that this continuing state of affairs was one of Edmund Wilson's objections to Lovecraft over half a century ago; he wrote "Lovecraft, since his death in 1937, has rapidly been becoming a cult" and goes on to mock his "disciples."

The standard canon of modern literature has always viewed horror fiction as somewhat questionable. However, I assert that Lovecraft's writing merits attention not only due to the amount of scientific discourse it contains, but also because of the way he evokes a mood of horror and hopelessness in the modern scientific world. In his article "H. P. Lovecraft and an American Literary Tradition," Phillip A. Shreffler writes, "when T. S. Eliot admitted us to the wasteland of the twentieth century, we found ourselves moving through a landscape that was at once strange and familiar…it would be… erroneous to suggest that Lovecraft was not affected

by the mainstream's currents" (156-157). And, even now, the mainstream currents continue to be affected by Lovecraft.

Lovecraft and Women

In *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Sandra Harding writes, "A 'woman scientist' appeared to be a contradiction in terms; the reason for this was that 'man scientist' named far too perfect a union" (19). Like Lewis' protagonists in *The Space Trilogy*, Lovecraft's protagonists, scholars and men of science, are entirely in keeping with the hegemony of the "man scientist." In Lovecraft's entire oeuvre (excluding only collaborations), which consists of well over fifty works, there are exactly two main female characters. They are Asenath Waite in "The Thing on the Doorstep" and Keziah Mason in "The Dreams in the Witch-House." In all his other tales the female characters are background personages such as landladies, wives, or family members. There are a few main female characters in Lovecraft's collaborations (most notably in "Poetry of the Gods") but these works were written in conjunction with other, often female, writers, and Lovecraft often acted as editor rather than primary writer.

In this work I am primarily concerned with "The Dreams in the Witch-House" because the science of that story is more explicit than in "The Thing on the Doorstep;" the latter is primarily concerned with magic, while in the former Lovecraft merges science and magic. However, "The Thing on the Doorstep" presents a very convoluted and ambiguous portrait of gender identity. In "The Thing on the Doorstep," the talented yet weak-willed Edward Derby is captivated by the fascinating Asenath Mason, who leads him into a world of dark magic and cosmic secrets. The narrator of the story, a friend of Edward's, becomes increasingly agitated

and concerned by his friend's puzzling and erratic behavior during his relationship with Asenath. Over the course of the story it becomes clear that Asenath is switching bodies with Edward with the intent of performing rites that will keep her consciousness in his body permanently. However, the gender confusion is not yet complete; Asenath is not truly "female" herself. Lovecraft alludes to the many similarities between Asenath and her dead father Ephraim. At the end of the story Edward reveals to his friend that Asenath's father actually switched bodies with his daughter, saying "*What devilish exchange was perpetrated in the house of horror where that blasphemous monster had his trusting, weak-willed half-human child at his mercy?* Didn't he make it permanent – as she'll do in the end with me?" (235).

Of course, this conflation of gender leads to all sorts of ambiguous interpretations. The switching of the father and daughter has obviously incestuous and sadistic overtones; "Asenath," once the switch is complete, locks her "father" up in a padded attic room as a madman. The father has not only confined his daughter in an aging male body, he has physically imprisoned her in the attic. Additionally, he very well may have murdered her. When revealing Asenath's actual identity, Edward says, "Why did they half-think there was poison in old Ephraim's stomach?" (234-235). There are also homosexual implications. Edward married Asenath (or, rather, Ephraim in Asenath's body). While Lovecraft assiduously avoids any overt mention of sex or romance in his tales, one might assume that Edward and Asenath as a married couple had sexual relations. Edward finds her very attractive; he "was wildly taken with her appearance" and "their intimacy was beyond untangling" (229).

Due to the dearth of Lovecraft scholarship, there has been little critical discussion of this story or the gender ambiguities within. However, during the mid to late 1990s when I was an astrophysics student, I was also a member of the internet Usenet H. P. Lovecraft group

(*alt.horror.cthulhu*), which included a number of serious Lovecraft aficionados as well as casual enthusiasts, including the Lovecraft archivist Donovan K. Loucks, who now maintains *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*. During discussions of "The Thing on the Doorstep," some other members of the internet group became very uncomfortable when I raised the question of whether or not Edward had sex with Asenath. A few group members were very stalwart in their opinion that the two had never consummated their marriage, going to great lengths to insist upon a heteronormative reading of the story. I argue that by highlighting Asenath's appearance and Edward's attraction to her, Lovecraft *was* hinting at a sexual relationship between the two. In fact, the very act of physical possession between the two is symbolic of the sex act; Asenath (or, rather, Ephraim) "penetrates" Edward and forces his consciousness from his own body into that of a woman. Lovecraft writes that Asenath as possessed by Ephraim "would frighten her schoolmates with leers and winks of an inexplicable kind, and would seem to extract a certain zestful irony from her present situation" (228). Here there is also a hint of lesbianism in Asenath's relation with her classmates. Gender is further conflated as Edward is revealed as stereotypically "feminine" during the story; not only is he weak-willed, which is why Asenath can successfully possess his body, his friend reflects on how much more masterful and "confident" (231) Edward appears when possessed by Asenath. For example, Edward never learned to drive, but Asenath is a skilled driver, as she demonstrates when possessing his body. In fact, when in possession of Edward's body, Asenath often leaves on long trips and leaves Edward locked up in their home in the female body.

I have taught Lovecraft's work in a variety of my college classes, ranging from literature survey courses to Queer Literature. Almost without exception, students are profoundly disturbed by "The Thing on the Doorstep" and, like many of the Usenet members, sometimes propose

elaborate explanations to defend the viewpoint that Edward never had sexual relations with Asenath. What is so troubling about the tale that even open-minded students in a Queer Literature class would feel compelled to refute it? Well, in Lovecraft's text, the gender conflation goes far beyond physical sex. Edward does not merely have sex with a man in a woman's body – he is *possessed* by a man who is deeply enraged by his sexual identity. In contemporary terms Ephraim as imprisoned in Asenath's body could be termed transgender or a transman. Moreover, while both Edward and Ephraim desperately seek to deny Asenath, they cannot escape her. At different points in the story they are both "trapped" inside the woman's body. Even the physical decay of Asenath's body cannot release Edward. From a feminist perspective, Lovecraft's tale directly taps into a very deep patriarchal fear; the men inevitably lose power and agency once they are "immersed" in the woman's body and identity. Once again, this analysis has come full circle to the absent presence of sex in Lovecraft's tale; Ephraim and Edward cannot maintain their masculine autonomy and are enveloped in Asenath's identity, just as, physically, they would be enveloped during the heterosexual intercourse they so desperately deny.

In keeping with misogynist discourse, Asenath's inferiority as a woman is made clear throughout the story. According to Lovecraft, she is "not quite human" (228) for she is from a marine/human hybrid Innsmouth family (Lovecraft tells the full tale of the Innsmouth inhabitants in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"). Moreover, apparently a woman's brain is inferior to a man's for magical work. Lovecraft writes, "[Asenath's] crowning rage…was that she was not a man; since she believed a man's brain had certain unique and far-reaching cosmic powers. Given a man's brain, she declared, she could not only equal but surpass her father in mastery of unknown forces" (228-229). Here Lovecraft is in close dialogue with conservative Victorian nineteenth

century theories of women's intelligence, as discussed by Ronald T. Takaki in his article "Asclepius Was a White Man: Race and the Cult of True Womanhood." Takaki writes, "mind was masculine. This belief was an important underpinning of the ethos of American white male society" (203). While Lovecraft was writing in the twentieth century, his personal sensibilities were largely Victorian in nature. Takaki notes the connection between the "male claims of female intellectual inferiority" and the "racist [nineteenth century] theory of Doctor Morton: It 'was almost universally believed that a woman's brain was smaller in capacity and therefore inferior in quality to that of a man'" (203). The inferiority of a woman's brain is a belief firmly held by all the male characters in "The Thing on the Doorstep." Although in Asenath's body Ephraim can perform some astounding feats of magic, her female brain keeps him from the mastery that would lead to true transcendence and power. By seizing his daughter's body, Ephraim is quite literally emasculated on several levels, and is doing the same to the less-masculine Edward.

For Lovecraft, science and magic were closely linked, as he makes clear in "The Thing on the Doorstep" and "The Dreams in the Witch-House." Of female scientists, Harding writes:

> Indeed, even a *woman's* consciousness could hardly be permitted [within the fields of science] if the fiction were to be maintained that a woman scientist must be a contradiction in terms. In order to succeed as scientists, these women usually had to force their lives as closely as possible into life cycles designed to accommodate the lives of men in patriarchal societies (23).

With Asenath Waite, Lovecraft has done one better; the woman's consciousness is completely removed from the story, and all that remains for Ephraim to be a powerful magician/scientist is to discard "the female shell" (234) by forcing it upon a less "masculine" man. Lovecraft draws a

parallel between the actual female Asenath Waite and Edward Derby by saying that possession can only be effected by finding someone "with a fine mind and a weak will" (235). Like Asenath, Edward is effeminate and weak-willed, but possesses the all-important male body. However, he is not "masculine" enough to retain his masculine body. At the end of the story, when the narrator is himself menaced, he thinks "I may be the next. But my will is not weak…I *will not* be driven out of my body" (243). While Lovecraft does not reveal the narrator's ultimate fate, the reader seems encouraged to believe that the narrator's sufficiently masculine will kept his soul safe where Edward succumbed to the spiritual rape. There is no place for women in the world of this story, except to be despised, subjugated, or feared. Lovecraft's focus on the male body can lead to some interesting Queer readings of the tale; however, he not only prioritizes the male form (as many canonical Queer writers have done) but, unfortunately, despises the female form. He is in dialogue with Lewis and many other male modernists by doing so – the archetypal woman is a source of fear and disappointment. Asenath fails to fulfill Ephraim's needs just as Eve fails to fulfill the needs of a patriarchal narrative that demands a masculine-determined mode of behavior from her. Fictional women fail Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot because they, as artists who embrace the patriarchal bias of "high" modernism, find any other ideology threatening and unacceptable. The worst part is the manner in which Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot attempt to *deny* their bias; in Lewis and Eliot's case, they attempt to present portraits of women (the Green Lady, the Hyacinth Girl) to defy sexist stereotypes. Yet these female characters are actually the gender/sexual other who is still part of a sexist system. Lovecraft tries to evade the entire issue by avoiding female characters almost altogether. While I argue that Lovecraft's work is undeservedly ignored, I still maintain that an important part of the

critical attention he so deserves should focus upon the misogyny present in his work and read against the text to expose his lamentable biases.

Given Asenath's ambiguous gender identity, it is then not unreasonable to say that the *only* primary female character in all of H. P. Lovecraft's original work is Keziah Mason in "The Dreams in the Witch-House." Keziah's character is not unambiguous, however. She is a witch from the days of the New England witch trials.

> There was much in the Essex County records about Keziah Mason's trial, and what she had admitted under pressure to the Courter of Oyer and Terminer had fascinated Gilman beyond all reason. She had told Judge Hawthorne of lines and curves that could be made to point out directions leading through the walls of space to other spaces beyond…Then she had drawn those devices on the walls of her cell and vanished. (297)

Rather like Ephraim, who means to "live on, body to body forever" (244), Keziah has achieved a sort of immortality through her mastery of spacetime, from her trial in 1692 to the early twentieth century. Initially this may seem to invest Keziah with a power neither Lovecraft nor Lewis grants to their other female characters. In fact, the protagonist of the story, Walter Gilman, is a student at Lovecraft's fictional Miskantonic University who "managed to get [rent] the eastern attic room [in the Witch-House] where Keziah was held to have practiced her spells" (297). Gilman rents the room deliberately with the intent of penetrating into Keziah's secrets himself. Even though he is a male and she a female, initially she is far his superior in magical and scientific knowledge. At first it seems as if Keziah's female brain has not limited her powers the way Asenath's did in "The Thing on the Doorstep."

Yet Keziah does not have complete autonomous agency within the story. Lovecraft writes, "Gilman …knew he wanted to be in the building where some circumstance had more or

less suddenly given a *mediocre old woman* of the seventeenth century an insight into mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delving of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein, and de Sitter" (297, italics mine). By his phrasing Lovecraft seems to be suggesting that Keziah Mason is actually not extraordinarily gifted or talented and her powers due primarily to "circumstance." The names he lists are those of prominent contemporary male scientists and mathematicians; I have already discussed Heisenberg and Einstein. Max Planck was a physicist who revolutionized thermodynamic (heat) theory and was one of the founders of quantum mechanics. Willem de Sitter was an astrophysicist whose greatest work was a solution of Einstein's general field equations, including the contentious cosmological constant, leading to a model for a universe containing dark matter. Einstein and de Sitter collaborated on the formulae for the "Einstein-de Sitter model of the universe," which is still pertinent today in dark matter research. Lovecraft is not only displaying his scientific erudition, but is suggesting that Keziah is essentially an "idiot savant" compared to these male scientists and even Gilman himself, a brilliant student of mathematics and folklore, whose powers by the end of the story outstrip her own.

Nor is Keziah's "circumstantial" expertise wholly her own. Lovecraft writes that Keziah Mason had been "guided by some influence past all conjecture" in her penetration of "the vague reasons which…must lay beyond the three dimensions we know" (299). One of these influences is Brown Jenkin. Brown Jenkin is Keziah's witch's familiar, or a demon or spirit in animal form that serves the witch and gives her power. Lovecraft describes Brown Jenkin as having "long hair and the shape of a rat" whose "sharp-toothed, bearded face was evilly human while its paws were like tiny human hands" (299). This entity appears to be at least nominally male with its "bearded face." Lovecraft hints at a non-normative sexual relationship between the witch and

her familiar: "[Brown Jenkin] was nursed on the witch's blood, which it sucked like a vampire" (299). The potential sexual subtext is made further ambiguous when Gilman notes that Brown Jenkin's face "bore such a shocking, mocking resemblance to old Keziah's" (317).

The prevailing folklore concerning witches during the time of the New England witch trials stated that witches gained their powers by becoming "brides of Satan" and having sexual intercourse with the devil. And, indeed, Keziah has pledged her loyalty to a being seemingly representing the devil. During her trial "she had spoken also of the Black Man, her oath, and of her new secret name of Nahab" (297). Lovecraft also says that Brown Jenkin "took messages between Keziah and the devil" (299).

This religious element in "The Dreams in the Witch-House" is uncommon among Lovecraft's stories. Lovecraft was a scrupulous atheist, and the terrors that menace his characters are primarily of the scientific and/or magical variety. For example, unknown science is the source of fear and death in "The Colour Out of Space," and the "Great Old One" Cthulhu, a non-human aeons-old monster, is the center of his seminal tale "The Call of Cthulhu." Although many of his stories contain cults or individuals who worship these non-human forces, they do so more in the manner of ancient Pagan worship than Christian dogma. However, just like Gilman who "mixes [non-Euclidian calculus and quantum physics] with folklore, and tries to trace a strange background of multi-dimensional reality behind the ghoulish hints of the Gothic tales and the wild whispers of the chimney-corner" (296), Lovecraft is re-framing religion and folklore in terms of modern science. The "Black Man" in the tale is only ostensibly the Christian devil. As Gilman lives in the Witch-House he has increasingly vivid and frequent dreams in which Keziah Mason and Brown Jenkin contact him – which, of course, are not actually dreams at all, and which cause him to question his sanity. In one of these episodes Keziah takes him to

meet the Black Man and sign his book. Lovecraft writes that the Black Man is "a tall, lean man of dead black coloration but without the slightest hint of negroid features; wholly devoid of either hair or beard…and bore no trace of expression on his small, regular features" (310). Although his physical appearance does not correspond with most common descriptions of the devil, Lovecraft creates some likeness with dogma, for "His feet were indistinguishable…but he must have been shod, since there was a clicking whenever he changed position" (310). This suggests the traditional hoofed feet of the devil, more so because Gilman finds "smaller, almost round markings – such as the legs of a large chair or table might make, except that most of them tended to be divided into halves" (315) – i.e., hoof-prints – on his floor after a subsequent encounter with the Black Man.

While Lewis imposes a Christian hierarchy and framework on older mythologies, Lovecraft imposes older mythologies on Christian hierarchy. Gilman and a friend and fellow lodger discuss the "immemorial figure of the deputy or messenger of hidden and terrible powers – the 'Black Man' of the witch-cult and the 'Nyarlathotep' of the *Necronomicon* (314). Nyarlathotep, in Lovecraft's mythos, is the servant of all the inhuman Great Old Ones, but primarily that of Azathoth. According to Lovecraft, Azathoth is a "primal evil too terrible for description" (304) and "the mindless entity…who rules all time and space from a black throne at the center of Chaos" (311). Elsewhere Azathoth is also described as the "nuclear chaos" at the center of all existence, returning to scientific parlance. Just as Einstein rejected the theory of quantum physics, to Lovecraft nuclear chaos is the greatest possible fear and evil – once again prefiguring the Manhattan Project and the atom bomb.

It is from this Black Man and, by analogy, Azathoth, that Keziah has obtained her magical/mathematical skill. Her position is comparable to the women Naomi Wolf in

Promiscuities calls "intellectual handmaidens" (197); young talented women who are essentially being taught by society and the academy to "gaze dewy-eyed" (198) at men of knowledge and learning. She herself does not disseminate magical or mathematical knowledge; she is merely a conduit for it, a vessel, while its source is ultimately masculine. Even though he has refused to sign the Black Man's book, Gilman's expertise surpasses hers. In fact, she repeatedly attempts to lead Gilman into the same sort of bondage under which she serves; "He must sign the book of Azathoth in his own blood and take a new secret name now that his independent delvings had gone so far" (304), yet Gilman ultimately resists where Keziah did not, without giving up his occult knowledge.

Harding discusses the paradox of "women the knower…women as agents of knowledge," commenting that this "appears to be a contradiction in terms" (47). Historically, women persecuted as witches during the times of the trials *were* often "women knowers" – midwives, priestesses, or wise women who were making use of technologies and sciences that the dominant masculine paradigm labeled witchcraft. In Lovecraft's mythos, knowledge is handed down from men to women in return for pledges of loyalty and service, perhaps of a sexual nature. Walter Gilman, as a man, is able to gain Keziah's transcendent knowledge through his own intellectual delvings and without any pacts with the Black Man.

Brown Jenkin's apparent likeness to Keziah may be taken to suggest that it is an aspect of her self. If that is so, then rather than disseminating knowledge to Keziah like the Black Man does, Brown Jenkin would be the "knowing" portion of Keziah. I see Brown Jenkin as representative of Jung's animus, or the masculine principle he claimed was present in women. This masculine "self" would then be capable of autonomous power and knowledge. Yet since it is physically distinct from Keziah it is not actually an aspect of her self. It is rather a projection

of her possible masculine self; the "she" that would be capable of independently acquiring knowledge, were she a man. The "mocking resemblance" (317) it bears to her may then be seen as satirizing Keziah's inherent inability as a woman to gain autonomous knowledge, while Gilman as a man can independently know.

Specifically, as Gilman's mathematical skill increases he is increasingly able to negotiate the other dimensions of space and time. "He was getting an intuitive knack for solving Riemannian equations, and astonished Professor Upham by his comprehension of fourth-dimensional and other problems which had floored all the rest of the class" (301). Riemann equations are differential equations with real and imaginary complex function solutions, which are useful in relativity theory in the solution to the Einstein field equations. These equations are involved in determining the structure of the universe and spacetime. Gilman posits that "a man might – given mathematical knowledge admittedly beyond all likelihood of human acquirement – step deliberately from the earth to any other celestial body which might lie at one of an infinity of specific points in the cosmic patter" (301) and is convinced of "the kinship of higher mathematics to certain phases of magical lore transmitted down the ages from an ineffable antiquity – human or pre-human – whose knowledge of the cosmos and its laws was greater than ours" (302). Although believing himself only dreaming during most of the story, Gilman travels between dimensions and worlds, even visiting a strange alien city inhabited by non-human creatures.

Although Keziah and Brown Jenkin are usually present during these journeys, they appear to be midwifing his esoteric skills rather than actually disseminating knowledge. In fact, after a final struggle with the witch (during which he fends her off with a crucifix given to him by a fellow-lodger, another example of her bondage to less-sophisticated and less-rational belief

systems), "he believed his subconscious mind held the *angles* which he needed to guide him back to the normal world alone and unaided for the first time" (319). Of course he is successful, kills the witch, and escapes. At the close of the story, Brown Jenkin visits Gilman in his sleep and attacks him. "There had been virtually a tunnel through his body – something had eaten his heart out" (321). As with Lewis' Stingingman, the sexual symbolism is obvious. Brown Jenkin is a homophobic nightmare; a creature with no fixed gender identity who kills in a grotesque, twisted parody of anal sex. It is almost as if Lovecraft has projected all his own patriarchal fears and hatreds (along with his notorious racism, for it is *Brown*, not white, Jenkin) onto this demoniac creature.

Even in death Gilman's masculine agency overpowers Keziah's. When the Witch House is eventually torn down, Keziah's skeleton is found in the attic space, along with "a veritable ossuary of the bones of small children – some fairly modern, but others extending back in infinite gradations to a period so remote that crumbling was almost complete" (323) – Keziah's victims throughout the centuries. Thus, in an essentially conservative patriarchal narrative, Gilman has used his superior mental and physical faculties to defeat Keziah just as Edward kills Asenath's body (but not Ephraim's masculine spirit) at the end of "The Thing on the Doorstep" – as Ransom and his masculine agency ultimately triumphs in Lewis' *Space Trilogy*.

There are other ways in which Lovecraft renders gender roles and sexuality ambiguous as they relate to Keziah Mason, just as they were in relation to Asenath Waite. Keziah is very old and described as a "beldame" (301) and an "evil old woman" with "bent back, long nose, and shriveled chin" (304). She would look right at home on a Halloween poster and is the exact caricature of the ugly witch, which makes her effectively asexual and de-feminized, especially as compared to Asenath Waite. Keziah perverts normative gender roles, for in the story she steals

and sacrifices children to the Dark Man. Lovecraft is in dialogue with traditional folklore about witches stealing and killing babies but he is also establishing that Keziah, like Asenath, has a non-normative gender identity and thus a figure of menace and horror. Like the warped patriarchal concepts of Lilith, Keziah murderously inverts the traditional figure of woman as mother. The image of Brown Jenkin sucking blood from her breast alludes recalls the iconic Christian image of Mary nursing the infant Jesus; Keziah is the absolute antithesis of the patriarchal heternormativity of Mary, the "perfect" wife and mother, and, within the discourse of sexism, therefore the perfect woman.

Unlike Lewis, who sets the Green Lady and the Othertime Camilla as exemplars against the undesirable "modern" Camilla, Lovecraft presents no feminine ideal to contrast with Keziah and Asenath, unless one considers the rare protagonist's wives who serve mainly as barely-mentioned background in some of his stories. This is in keeping with Lovecraft's more nihilistic worldview. Just as Gilman cannot ultimately fight the cosmic forces to which he has been introduced, and dies despite his refusal to sign the book of Azathoth, there is no vision of ultimate redemption in Lovecraft's universe. In most of his tales the protagonists cannot defeat the cosmic horrors with which they are faced. At best they manage to gain a little time before the ultimate and unavoidable end when the Great Old Ones and cosmic chaos will dominate and overcome humanity – just as, by his analogy, modern "science… will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species." And, of course, the women get to be exterminated first; they cannot even hope for that little time Lovecraft's male protagonists win with their "superior brains." Lovecraft has literally written women out of his world; if men are less than insects to the Great Old Ones of his stories, women are correspondingly that much lower in his male gaze.

Lovecraft does not even deign to "convert" them to oppressive patriarchal role like Lewis does. He simply ignores them.

I wonder if this is at the heart of Lovecraft's appeal to the geek-chic contingent. Geek culture is a notorious "boys only" club. For example, Anita Sarkeesian, the creator of the video webseries *Feminist Frequency*, has received death threats. Why? She uses *Feminist Frequency* to discuss how women are represented in popular culture. Her most recent video, which explores the "damsel in distress" trope in videogames, has generated an immense amount of rage within the male geek community, despite the fact that it is not even directly critical of video games. She had to disable comments on the YouTube video because of the harassment directed at her. On popular geek-oriented social networking sites where the video appeared, like *I Can Has Cheezburger* and *reddit,* it was met with a storm of angry, often vulgar and sexually explicit, comments. Sarkeesian was accused of being a man-hater and even criticized for wearing make-up in the video. Many commenters (a large portion of whom identified both as men) ridiculed her scholarship and said she was simply flat-out wrong, despite the reality that the factual information she presents in the video is accurate. The general tone of the overwhelmingly hostile reaction seemed to be that, not only was it wrong for her to expose potentially sexist elements of video games, it was *especially* wrong because she was a woman. She is not needed or wanted in the boy's club of video gamers and geek culture and the club members are devoted to silencing her by any means necessary. Many of them, I suspect, would feel right at home in Lovecraft's world. While they would have to worry about cosmos and sanity-destroying monsters like Cthulhu, at least they would not have to deal with women.

The Waste Land and "Waste Paper"

Waste Paper is a little-known curiosity that can be used to draw a direct line between Lovecraft and Eliot and "high modernism" in the classroom. In 1922 or 1923 H. P. Lovecraft penned a very broad satire of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, entitled "Waste Paper: a Poem of Profound Insignificance." While the literary merits of Lovecraft's poem are extremely dubious, it is proof that Lovecraft was actively aware of and engaged with the modernist literary ethos. It also demonstrates that Lovecraft was extensively familiar with Eliot's poem. Moreover, while crudely, it also draws attention to the flaws of many of Eliot's modernist conceits. Finally, it may simply be amusing to students.

On *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, Donovan Loucks writes, "Like Poe, Lovecraft began writing significantly more poetry than fiction, and considered himself primarily a poet." The collected volume of his poems, *The Ancient Track: The Complete Poetical Work of H. P. Lovecraft,* contains more than 400 complete poems. Ironically, S. T. Joshi notes in the Introduction, "Lovecraft's poetry must be regarded as a far lesser facet of his literary output than his fiction, essays, and letters" (vi). Joshi continues, "it merits collection precisely because it is an important ancillary to these other bodies of his work…it may yield some insights into the man and his work that have heretofore remained obscure" (vi). While "Waste Paper" is far from one of the poems that Joshi claims "have substantial merits of their own that deserve recognition" (vi), it serves as an interesting companion piece to both *The Waste Land* and *Paris*. To the best of my knowledge, no critical work to date has ever discussed "Waste Paper." The very fact that it has been utterly forgotten may pique students' interest.

"Waste Paper" is written in couplets and is essentially doggerel. Lovecraft largely relies upon absurd juxtapositions between the "serious" and the vulgar, as demonstrated in the poem's opening:

Out of the reaches of illimitable light
The blazing planet grew, and forc'd to life
Unending cycles of progressive strife
And strange mutations of undying light (1-4)

These initial lines are characteristic of Lovecraft's florid style and seem to be the introduction to an epic poem. However, the next lines completely dispel that idea:

And boresome books, than hell's own self more trite
And thoughts repeated and become a blight,
And cheap rum-hounds with moonshine hootch made tight (5-7)

Lovecraft was an antiquarian who romanticized bygone days and classical tradition. He explicitly satirizes Eliot's incorporation of commonplace and popular cultural elements into *The Waste Land*. The phrase "boresome books" also brings to mind Pound's "few thousand battered books" in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly*. Lovecraft's venomous assault upon Eliot may have had roots in his personal circumstances. Lovecraft was a devoted Anglophile who considered himself an old-fashioned gentleman and adopted nearly Victorian manners and conduct. In reality, Lovecraft was unable to pursue higher education due to his poor health and his family labored under reduced social and economic circumstances. While Eliot was a member of modernism's prestigious inner circle, Lovecraft's work was virtually unknown beyond his correspondents and "pulp" fiction readers.

Later in the poem, Lovecraft writes:

"Shantih, shantih, shantih"…*Shanty House*

Was the name of a novel by I forget whom

Published serially in the *All-Story Weekly*

Before it was a weekly. Advt. (30-33)

Lovecraft is jeering at Eliot's use of the triple shantih prayer by punning on the word "shanty," or a poorly-built hut or shack. However, the very next line seems to interject a note of gravity: "Disillusionment is wonderful, I've been told" (34). An initial reading suggests that Lovecraft is disillusioned with Eliot and, potentially, the entire modernist aesthetic. Yet Lovecraft may also be referring to himself and his literary career. Later in the poem he says, "Sophistication! Sophistication!/You are the idol of our nation" (49-50). If the "you" in these lines is T. S. Eliot, Lovecraft is bitterly comparing Eliot's own literary position with his own. This notion is supported by the subtitle of the poem: "A Poem of Profound Insignificance." While Lovecraft is mocking Eliot, he is also mocking his own poetic skill.

As the poem progresses, Lovecraft continues to lambast Eliot and *The Waste Land*: "And all my days I'll sing the praise/Of Ivory Soap/Have you a little T. S. Eliot in your home?" (96-98). Near the end of the poem, Lovecraft slips into dada-esque word associations, perhaps unsurprisingly as another of his satires attacked futurist art. He writes, "Rat, bat, cat, hat, flat, plat, fat/Fry the fat, fat the fry/You'll be a drug-store by and by" (113-115). The rhyming and syncopation also invoke jazz rhythms, a form of music he mocks earlier in the poem and Eliot uses in *The Waste Land*. The final lines of "Waste Paper" seem to express Lovecraft's own sense of disgust, directed outwards as well as at himself: "Farewell, farewell, O go to hell/Nobody home/In the shantih" (132- 134). Like Eliot, Lovecraft ends his poem with the

word “shantih.” While these final lines are ostensibly mocking, they also conceal a deeper desperation; the “peace that passeth understanding” is ultimately empty and uninhabited.

If the satiric mood of “Waste Paper” is occasionally broken by moments of genuine insight and reflection, one line in particular may serve as a final statement. Lovecraft says, “I never quote things straight except by accident” (48), referring to Eliot. Eliot was certainly less than “straight” regarding Mirrlees’ *Paris* as a source of inspiration for his poem and, more broadly, regarding the female generative figures in many of the modernist myths so central to *The Waste Land*. Moreover, subsequent discussion and criticism of Eliot has also been less than “straight” regarding Mirrlees’ important contributions and place within *The Waste Land* and modernism as a whole. As educators, it is our job to be pedagogically (but not theoretically or culturally!) “straight” with our students and not condemn them to stumble across lesser-known masterpieces of modernism and SF “by accident.”

CHAPTER 3: THE ELEPHANT'S HEAD (HOPE MIRRLEES) AND THE ELEPHANT'S TAIL (T. S. ELIOT)

These are the poems of Eliot
By the Uranian Muse begot;
A Man their Mother was,
A Muse their Sire.

- From *Sage Homme*
  Letter from Ezra Pound to T. S. Eliot, 21 December 1921

T. S. Eliot may have wished to believe that *The Waste Land*, the work by which much of modernism is still judged, sprang like Athena full-blown from his head. However, he owes a substantial and largely unpaid debt to Hope Mirrlees' long poem *Paris. The Waste Land* is considered one of the major poems of the twentieth century. Its development, with Ezra Pound acting as editor and collaborator, is well known, as is the identity of many sources that Eliot wishes to claim as influences, such as Jesse Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the tarot, and the Grail legend. Despite the masculine genesis of the poem described in the lines from *Sage Homme*, there is indeed a female "Mother" of *The Waste Land* – Hope Mirrlees.

Mirrlees published her long poem *Paris* in 1919, before the composition and publication of *The Waste Land*, and the two poems are strikingly similar in both form and content. Yet Mirrlees' poem has been largely underappreciated save by a few scholars such as Julia Briggs, Jean Mills, and Sandeep Parmar, while Eliot's has been the source of extensive critical study. Mirrlees' role in the composition of *The Waste Land* has been overlooked in, I argue, the same manner that Eliot ignored the female generative figures in many of the modernist myths he incorporated into his poem. Eliot neglects to mention the role of the mythic feminine in the rejuvenation of, for example, his Fisher King in just the same way that Mirrlees' poem has been neglected as an inspiration for the genesis of *The Waste Land*.

Both Eliot and the Fisher King are hollow men desperately trying to deny the importance of women in their respective waste lands. Pound's chauvinistic statement "A Man their Mother was/A Muse their Sire" thus becomes doubly ironic, a fact compounded by a letter he wrote to Eliot congratulating him upon the publication of *The Waste Land* containing the sentiment, "May your erection never grow less." Both Pound and Eliot are stubbornly determined to firmly inscribe the poem and its sources as masculine cultural property existing solely within the realm of patriarchal discourse. In "The Textual Politics of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway," Patricia Matson says "writing in and of itself is an act of resistance: that is, the authority of the 'patriarchs and pedagogues' is undercut and challenged" (168). Not only do I maintain that Mirrlees' poem challenges Eliot's wasteland, I also question *The Waste Land's* absolute preeminence within the modernist canon.

Eliot and Mirrlees – Bosom Buddies?

Paris was published by Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1919. Eliot was acquainted with the Woolfs, and his volume *Poems*, including *Sweeney Erect* and *Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleinstein with a Cigar*, was also published by the Hogarth Press in 1919. It seems certain that Eliot was aware of and familiar with Mirrlees' poem. Peter Ackroyd, in his biography of Eliot, states that in the 1940s Eliot "had known the writer Hope Mirrlees for some years, at first through her friendship with the Woolfs" (258) and implies that the acquaintance was due to the publication of *Paris*. Certainly Mirrlees was a close enough friend to visit Eliot's wife Vivienne during their separation in the 1930s. In her biography of Vivienne Eliot, Carole Seymour-Jones states that "without doubt" Mirrlees "reported back to Eliot on Vivienne's

condition" (522). In Virginia Woolf's diary entry of 12 November 1934, she describes having tea that day with both Mirrlees and Vivienne, and notes that Mirrlees met with Vivienne regularly (qtd. Seymour-Jones 522). Ackroyd also notes that Mirrlees "superintended" (207) Vivienne for Eliot during their early separation. In October 1940, Mirrlees lived in Shamley Green with her mother and aunt, and Eliot became "a kind of paying guest" (Ackroyd 258) in the Mirrlees home and, in her introduction to Mirrlees' *Collected Poems*, Sandeep Parmar notes that Eliot was practically a member of the Mirrlees family. Mirrlees' friendship with Eliot was significant enough that on 3 January 1971 she appeared on the BBC program "The Mysterious Mr. Eliot," a tribute to and retrospective of T. S. Eliot's life and work (Seymour-Jones, note 65, 658). In her article "The Poet and the Ghosts Are Walking the Streets: Hope Mirrlees – Life and Poetry," Melissa Boyde reports:

> Mirrlees writes that during all this time she and Eliot had never discussed *Paris* adding that "I am unaware if he ever saw it." But since the Hogarth Press published Eliot's epic poem *The Waste Land* only two years after they printed *Paris* it is probable that Eliot may have read it. Certainly there are similarities between the two poems in structure, inclusion of textual fragments, references to classical and historical sources and their concern with the modern city. (32)

In her Introduction to Mirrlees' *Collected* Poems, Sandeep Parmar notes that Julia Briggs "has theorised that Eliot may have read Paris before writing his poem, and as a Hogarth author…he surely would have known of its existence" (xxxvii).

It is certain that the actual composition of *The Waste Land* followed the publication of Mirrlees' poem. The first mention of Eliot's poem is in his letter to John Quinn on 5 November 1919, which he concludes by saying, "I hope to get started on a poem that I have in mind" (344),

referring to *The Waste Land*. As Lyndall Gordan notes, "it is not easy to follow the sequence of *The Waste Land*'s composition" (67), but after his letter to Quinn Eliot did not work on the poem in 1920 and only began writing it in 1921 through both his own and Vivienne's breakdown that year, finishing it by October. In his letter of 22 May 1921 to Dorothy Pound, Eliot mentions "a little poem which I am at present engaged upon" (456). Gordon maintains that Eliot showed Pound a copy of the poem by November 1921 and Pound's letter to Eliot of 24 January 1921 contains lengthy commentary and editorial suggestions for *The Waste Land*, including the dedicatory poem *Sage Homme*. *The Waste Land* was published in 1922 by the Hogarth Press, *The Criterion,* and *The Dial*.

Hope Springs Eternal – A Textual Comparison of *Paris* and *The Waste Land*

The Waste Land owes a great deal of its content and its genius to various borrowed source materials. With the exception of Mirrlees' poem, these sources have been extensively critically discussed, beginning with Eliot's own notes to the poem. It is almost impossible to imagine the landscape of modernism without *The Waste Land* looming like Mount Doom over it all. The 2012 MLA convention had an entire panel devoted to Eliot ("Eliot, H. D., and New England") and a quick JSTOR search turns up over 3,000 articles that reference *The Waste Land,* over 300 of which alone come from *PMLA*, widely considered the most "prestigious" literary journal. *The Waste Land* appears in W. W. Norton's anthologies of English, American, AND World literature. The Norton anthologies remain some of the most popular textbook choices for the college literature classroom. Re-thinking our critical examination of Eliot's poem in light of

Mirrlees' work will also lead to new pedagogical strategies for teaching Eliot and modernism in the classroom.

Paris is ostensibly a tale of the *flaneur* (or, in this case, *flaneuse*): the walker through the city. The narrator of *Paris* begins her journey on the Paris Metro, and travels through the city, recording her impressions as she travels[13]. Eliot's poem, while ostensibly lacking the coherent singular narrator of *Paris*, also discusses a journey through and associated impressions of London, tied together by the observations of the arguably central figure Tiresias. In both cases, the walker encounters an "unreal" city whose inhabitants have been touched by the effects of WWI. Mirrlees' poem opens with the line, "I want a holophrase" (1). While the literal meaning of the word "holophrase" is a single word standing for a phrase or sentence, it obviously puns on the words "hollow phrase" and "I want" can also be interpreted to mean "I lack." Boyde writes:

> [It] almost certainly alludes to Harrison's discussion of early language in *Themis* in which she demonstrates linguistic instances where subject and object become indistinguishable. This concept describes an articulation of reality which supersedes/deconstructs conventional binary divisions of mind/body, subject/object. (32)

She later quotes Harrison, who says, "Language, after the purely emotional interjection, began with whole sentences, holophrases, utterances of a relation in which subject and object have not got their heads above water but are submerged in a situation" (39). In that same spirit it is not my intention to set Eliot and Mirrlees as an opposite-binary pair; rather, I am investigating the discourses formed between the two poems and the ambiguities present within and between those discourses.

[13] I am indebted to Julia Briggs' commentary on Mirrlees' *Paris* as well as Jean Mills' excellent work in my discussion of the poem.

Harrison and Mirrlees' concept of the holophrase is utterly in accord with feminist narratology. In *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, Janet Wolff references the literary critic Elaine Showalter and the anthropologist Edwin Ardener when she writes:

> In many cultures, areas of women's lives and experience are marginalized by the dominant culture. Where the experiences and perspectives of men and women overlap, then the dominant culture and language will be adequate to describe them. But since cultures are all patriarchal, those areas of experience which are specific to women are excluded, and cannot be articulated or shared within the available discourse. This is the "wild zone." (69)

The "wild zone" is like Harrison's holophrase; it is like Woolf's "women's writing." Mirrlees is acknowledging the absence of such feminist discourse when she says "I want a holophrase" – she both *wants* and *lacks* one. *Paris* is her attempt to create such a discourse of her own. In her 5 April 2010 talk *Consigned to Memory: The Archive of Hope Mirrlees* at the CSGS Center at NYU, Mirrlees scholar Sandeep Parmar spoke of the "rediscovered voice of lost literary mothers" in relation to Mirrlees' work, and noted that the coordinates of male greatness disconnected women from other women and led them to speak in the language of loss.

Therefore, Eliot's appropriation of *Paris* becomes a doubly colonizing act. He is appropriating her formalism – her symbolism, poetic format, and subject – as well as her discourse. According to Woolf, the language for Eliot's patriarchal discourse already existed, as Eliot and Pound both proved abundantly true with their pre-*Paris* modernist poems and consistent references to ancient Asian cultures and languages (as in "What the Thunder Said" in *The Waste Land* and in Pound's *Cantos*). The world of the modernists was one in which patriarchal dominance was slowly, but inevitably, slipping. When Pound urged "Make it new!"

he was urging sympathetic modernists both to find a new discourse by taking over feminist narratives *and* subtly undermining those feminist narratives and associated socio-cultural revolutions by using the semiotics of feminism to re-tell conservative patriarchal narratives. Nevertheless, Eliot's attempt in *The Waste Land* may have worked better (or worse) than he intended, as displayed in the many ambiguities and contradictions present within the male-dominated symbology of the poem.

There are many ways in which Eliot appropriates elements from *Paris.* The initial introduction of lack and hollowness in Mirrlees' *Paris* is echoed in the emptiness and hollowness of Eliot's London. On a formal level, both poems utilize the so-called "broken line" of modernist poetry, incorporating both traditional rhyme and free verse, and both poems make use of "found objects" in describing the urban environment. Both Mirrlees and Eliot employ non-standard diction and language and, visually, lines and single words of the poem are often off-set or irregularly spaced on the page for poetic effect.[14] Mirrlees frequently uses French words and phrases throughout her poem and Eliot also wrote parts of *The Waste Land* in other languages, including French.

Critics such as Julia Briggs, Jean Mills, and Sandeep Parmar have discussed the presence of signs and symbols in Mirrlees' poem, as well as its overall structure. In her article "'Printing Hope:' Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees, and the iconic imagery of *Paris*" Briggs notes that "Mirrlees wrote her poem in the language of international modernism" (32) and that in the poem "perception takes a variety of forms" (34). The element of perception also takes a variety of forms in *The Waste Land*, most notably with the pageant of observers and characters drawn from different sources and environments, from the Sibyl to Lil's friend, to Tiresias, for example. Like Mirrlees, Eliot depended upon signs and symbols, such as the Tarot deck, the Chapel Perilous,

[14] *Paris*, due to its complicated format and spacing, represented a major printing challenge for the Woolfs.

the Fisher King, and the water that both drowns Phlebas the Phoenician and rejuvenates the waste land. Both poems are centered around a river: the Seine in Mirrlees' poem and the Thames in Eliot's poem.

On a more explicit level of analysis, there are specific similar elements that appear in both *Paris* and *The Waste Land*. Eliot opens his poem with the lines "April is the cruelest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land" (1-2), and Mirrlees wrote of "Great bunches of lilacs among siphons, vermouth,/Bocks, tobacco" (155-156) on bar-tables in Paris. Both poems take place in the spring; Mirrlees refers to "The wicked April moon" (262), inevitably recalling Eliot's oft-quoted opening lines. In lines 342-345, Mirrlees includes a portion of the actual sheet music from Handel's opera *Rinaldo*, while Eliot uses a few of the actual lyrics, but not the score, from the contemporary popular song *That Shakespearean Rag* as well as the children's song *London Bridge*. In *The Waste Land* Eliot's narrator has a possibly homosexual encounter with "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant" (209) who speaks "demotic French" (212) and in Mirrlees' poem the narrator encounters a statue of Leon Gambetta, the French radical and the Minister of War during the 1870 German siege of Paris. The poem hints at a possible homosexual relationship between Gambetta and his Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau.

The likenesses between the two poems continue. In Eliot's poem, a cock's crow heralds the rain that fertilizes the waste land and rejuvenates the Fisher King. He writes, "Only a cock stood on the rooftree/ Co co rico co co rico" (391-392). In Mirrlees' poem, in "secret valleys where little gods are born/One often hears a cock/*do do do mii*" (76-78). In her commentary on *Paris*, Briggs notes that the Gallic cock was a French national symbol and its crow was believed to banish ghosts – just as, in *The Waste Land*, the cock's crow banishes the ghosts in the Chapel Perilous. Mirrlees' lines "During the cyclic Grand Guignol of

Catholicism/Shrieks,/Lacerations,/Bloody sweat – " (131-134) recall "the agony in stony places/The shouting and the crying/Prison and palace and reverberation" (324-326) in "What the Thunder Said" in Eliot's poem. Mirrlees' lines "They are not like us, who, ghoul-like, bury our friends/a score of times before they're dead" (194-195) foreshadows Eliot's "Stetson" who planted "that corpse…last year in [his] garden" (69, 71). Moreover the "Dog…that's friend to man" (74) that may dig up the planted corpse finds reflection in Mirrlees' "blind dogs/The only things they can see are ghosts" (349-350). In *Paris*, Mirrlees writes:

> The Seine, old egotist, meanders imperturbably to –
>
> wards the sea,
>
> Ruminating on weeds and rain…
>
> If through his sluggish sleep come dreams
>
> They are the blue ghosts of king-fishers. (269-272)

The "sluggish water" is reminiscent of Eliot's polluted Thames in "The Fire Sermon," and the watery dreams that are "ghosts of king-fishers" recall the absent Fisher King in Eliot's poem. The nymphs are also suggestive of Wagner's Rhine Maiden and mermaids in general, which links *Paris* and *The Waste Land* to my discussion of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and Caitlin Kiernan's *The Drowning Girl* in the final chapter of this work.

As well, in "The Fire Sermon" Eliot twice repeats the refrain "The nymphs are departed" (175, 179), contrasting their classic beauty to the polluted river and unreal city. Early in her poem, Mirrlees writes "These nymphs are harmless./Fear not their soft mouths – /some Pasteur made the Gauls immune/Against the bite of nymphs" (30-33), possibly alluding to venereal disease in the image of the nymphs' bites.

Mirrlees' poem ends with the words "JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE" (445) or "I salute you Paris full of grace," which echoes the prayer, "I salute you Mary full of grace." Eliot's poem as well, ends with a prayer: the triple repetition of "Shantih," or "the peace that passeth understanding." On the final page of the published edition of *Paris*, Mirrlees included a set of explanatory notes and Briggs notes that this inclusion anticipates Eliot's own notes to *The Waste Land*.

Upon a close reading of the two poems, I find it significant that both Mirrlees and Eliot connect the image of a taxi's engine with sexuality and thus draw parallels between the human and the machine, the ancient and the modern. This particular correlation deserves particular attention. In *Paris*, Mirrlees writes:

> Freud has dredged the river and, grinning horribly,
>
> waves his garbage in a glare of electricity.
>
> Taxis,
>
> Taxis,
>
> Taxis,
>
> They moan and yell and squeak
>
> Like a thousand tom-cats in rut. (414-420)

In Mirrlees' poem, the thrice-repeated word "taxis" is each set on a different line and centered on the page in order to suggest the throbbing rhythm of a taxi motor. Similarly, in *The Waste Land*, Eliot writes, "At the violet hour, when the eyes and back/Turn upwards from the desk, when the human engine waits/Like a taxi throbbing waiting" (215-218) to introduce the sexual encounter between the typist and "the young man carbuncular" (231). It is notable that, while Eliot was referring to twilight in the line "the violet hour," electricity is often described as violet in color.

This marks one of the oblique and negative references to modern science in *The Waste Land*. The 19th century saw the invention of the electric light bulb and the development of electrical science, one of the things that facilitated the Industrial Revolution, which helped create Eliot's despised modern wasteland. The first modern automobile was built by Karl Benz in Germany in 1885 and Ransom Olds pioneered the assembly-line for the production of automobiles at his Oldsmobile factory in 1902. Motorized London taxis represented a fairly new technology at the time Eliot wrote *The Waste Land.*

By likening the "human engine," the "typist" (typewriters also representing modern technology) and the "young man carbuncular" to the taxicabs, Eliot is in discourse with contemporary scientific theories like Darwin's concept of evolution and Freud's psychoanalysis, which tried to codify and quantify human nature and existence in accordance with positivism and the deterministic empirical scientific method. Two stanzas earlier Eliot speaks of "The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring/Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring" (197-198), a reference to both the classical story of Actaeon and Diana and the related 17th-century allegorical masque *The Parliament of Bees* (incidentally, Sweeney re-appears in Eliot's *Sweeney Erect* and *Sweeney Among the Nightingales* and "seems…to have been [Eliot's] idea of an urban lout" (12, note)). Once again, modern technology has degraded the classic narrative and turned it, in Eliot's eyes, ludicrous. The story of the goddess and her worshipper has become "degraded" to the level of a squalid sexual encounter in the waste land of modern London.

Modern science and technology intrudes again to illustrate the degradation of the modern when, after their brief tryst, the typist "smoothes her hair with automatic hand [the "automatic" once again recalling the mechanical] And puts a record on the gramophone" (255-256). The first phonograph (or gramophone) was invented by Edison in 1877 and was widely popular in both

Britain and America at the time of Eliot's poem. The gramophone literally heralds the vast difference Eliot creates between the typist and the goddess Diana; in the classical tale, Diana turns Actaeon into a stag for daring to behold her naked body. In the modern world, the typist indifferently submits to sex in a quasi-rape ("she is bored and tired,/[He] endeavours to engage her in caresses/Which still are unreproved, if undesired…His vanity requires no response" (236-237, 241)). Afterwards she cannot even fully elucidate her tragedy: "Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:/'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over'" (251-252). There are multiple similarities to Lewis' Green Lady here. Not only does Eliot rob the typist of her narrative voice by allowing her only one "'half-formed' thought," he is negatively juxtaposing the goddess of mythology with a modern woman in a manner that leaves no doubt as to his own judgment upon the contemporary woman's actions and "worth." This is just how Lewis juxtaposes the undesirable modern Camilla with her Othertime double and how Ransom attempts to preserve the Green Lady in her identity as subordinate wife and mother and "protect" her from the Un-Man's tales of liberated women.

Eliot's remaining scientific/technological allusions continue to draw a sharp distinction between modern blight and his classical paradise. The Thames "sweats/Oil and tar" (266-267), an obvious reference to pollution arising from modern machines and ships. In the very next stanza he invokes the historical romance of "Elizabeth and Leicester" who, instead of taking a contemporary gas-powered boat, ride in a classic device in which "The stern was formed/A gilded shell/Red and gold" (279, 281-283). Not only does this recall a bygone era, it also brings to mind Botticelli's famous painting *The Birth of Venus* and the idealization of woman as an aesthetic object. Once again Eliot insidiously compares the traditional conception of the ideal female with the "degraded" women who populate his waste land.

While Mirrlees is also critical of modern science and technology in *Paris*, her general ideology differs significantly from Eliot's. She is highly disapproving of Freud when she writes, "Freud has dredged the river and, grinning horribly,/waves his garbage in a glare of electricity" (414-415). This may appear odd, considering that Jane Harrison extensively engaged with Freudian theory in her own works such as *Epilegomena & Themis*. It is important to consider the context in which Mirrlees makes this statement. Freudian theory is infamous for its marginalization of women, from the Oedipal complex to Freud's theory of hysteria to "penis envy." These lines become especially significant if the river is seen as an archetypal feminine symbol. Freud has "dredged the river," or the depths of the female psyche and "waves his garbage." Note that Mirrlees does not write "*the* garbage" but rather "*his* garbage" as if the Freud's "garbage" theories about women do not actually come from the female psyche but rather Freud himself – a distinction especially poignant in the light of Freud's famous utterance, "What does a woman want?" His horrible grin likens him to the bogeymen of sexism and patriarchal oppression. It is especially interesting that Eliot's river, the Thames, is systemically filthy and oily, while Mirrlees' river is polluted from without by patriarchal influences.

However, that modern pollution is ambiguous as Mirrlees problematizes the role of modernist science. Her Paris is most emphatically *not* a complete waste land, as can be seen in the recurring references to flowers and growing things throughout the entire poem: crocuses, dog-roses, Lyon's roses, poplar buds, lilac, weeds, fields of hay, plums, apricots, and white violets. She is far better able to engage with the ambiguities of modern society than Eliot. Boyde writes about Mirrlees herself: "she can be seen as a kind of intellectual flaneuse, working across literary genres, exploring and commenting on both the past and the present" (30). The narrator and structure of the poem follow the portrait of the artist. There is both life and death in

Mirrlees' Paris; beauty and urban desolation co-exist side by side. Boyde writes: "above these images of regeneration the 'April moon' is 'wicked'…casting shadowy light on three of the major events which form a background in the poem: the Versailles Peace Treaty negotiations, the May Day protests and workers' strikes" (35). On a much broader scale, as noted by Boyde, Mills, and Briggs, WWI casts its own long and gangrenous shadow over the city and the poem. However, in Mirrlees' words "there are pretty things – /Children hung with amulets/Playing at *Pigeon vole,*/Red roofs,/Blue smocks,/and jolly saints" (97-102). In this city "The ghost of Pere Lachaise/Is walking the streets" (175-176) while "The Virgin sits in her garden" (379).

In her article "Parsing the Female Sentence: The Paradox of Containment in Virginia Woolf's Narratives," Denise Delorey says, "Woolf's modernist aesthetic was shaped by an ongoing conversation not simply between tradition and innovation, but, more [specifically], between her modern narrative and her feminist politics as well" (93). I would say the same of Hope Mirrlees. The Fisher King in Eliot's poem supplants Mirrlees' Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary is present throughout Mirrlees' entire poem; she "has not been idle" (294). Notably, Mirrlees casts the Virgin Mary as a liberatory mythic female figure overthrowing restrictive ideologies embodied by mythic male figures. Rather than being idle, she industriously has been casting "holy bait,/Waxen Pandoras in white veils and ties of her own decking" (296-297) Mirrlees is cleverly conflating Catholic doctrine with ancient Greek mythology, which draws attention to the fact that the Virgin Mary has multiple non-Christian antecedents such as Isis in Egyptian mythology, Cerridwen in Celtic legend, and Frigga in Norse lore. While the modernist mythology in her poem is ostensibly Judeo-Christian, Mirrlees is in fact re-casting religious doctrine in terms of ancient pagan mythologies. Eliot usurps her technique in his conflation of the ancient world, the legend of the Grail, and Hindu ideology.

Moreover, Mirrlees is reclaiming the infamous Pandora just as she decentralizes Prometheus, for "Prometheus has swallowed the bait" (302) of the waxen Pandoras. In Greek and Roman mythology, Pandora played a role analogous to that of Eve in Judeo-Christian tradition. The gods gave Pandora a box that they told her to keep safe and never open. She was unable to resist the temptation and opened it, letting loose all the evils of the world to plague mankind. After all the evils have left the box, one thing is left to fortify humans against them; hope – just as Hope's poem *Paris* is left to fortify us against Eliot's wasteland. Like Pandora, Hope indeed has hope.

The tale of Pandora is another form of the ubiquitous "original sin" patriarchal narrative in which the blame for suffering is laid at the feet of women; in some stories Pandora was the first woman created to tempt Prometheus and punish him for stealing fire from heaven. However, Mirrlees' Pandoras are different. They are homunculi created by the mythic feminine figure, embodied by the Virgin Mary, and are thus liberated from their traditional position as the destroyer of men's happiness. Their harmlessness is highlighted by the fact that they are "waxen" (just as the mouths of the nymphs are harmless). Yet harmless does not mean powerless. The Pandoras are subverting the traditional patriarchal narrative by "baiting" Prometheus, who symbolizes the patriarchal dominance over art and, in a larger sense, society, just as the Rhine maidens tease the dwarfs.

Historically, Prometheus has represented the male creative urge, as exemplified in works such as Goethe's poem "Prometheus" and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. In the traditional myth, he is at once the ultimate creator and savior. He steals fire from the gods to bring to humankind, thus ensuring human survival as he sacrifices himself to endless torment. Mirrlees is setting the iconic female in Christianity over the iconic masculine. She even decentralizes the

Virgin Mary from Christianity; earlier in the poem she writes, "Le petit Jesus fait pipi" (135). On one hand, this is a seemingly irreverent depiction of the child Jesus urinating. However, as Parmar reports, it is also a reference to child prostitutes, linking to the lines "Por-no-gra-phie,/Charming pigmy brides" (319-320), speaking of the "waxen Pandoras" created by the Virgin Mary. On a surface level these lines may be read as a criticism of contemporary sexual attitudes and practices. On a deeper level, they link the Virgin Mary to older pre-Christian goddesses. Sacred temple prostitution was practiced in many pagan religions, as famously noted by the historian Herodotus in his remarks regarding the temples of Aphrodite. The ancient worship of Ishtar and Astarte also involved sacred prostitution. In such practices, the act was considered sacred and the men who lay with the prostitutes were symbolically giving themselves over to the power of the goddess. We could read the waxen Pandoras as temple prostitutes of Mary or the archetypal feminine divine, before whose power Prometheus is powerless.

I am aware that in her notes to *Paris* Julia Briggs interprets this portion of the poem differently. According to her notes, "Having resisted Pandora, Prometheus swallows another 'bait,' the communion wafer and may respond to the first Communicants." Briggs is drawing a distinction between the "waxen Pandoras" and the "Petits Lyceens" (318) in the stanza, as well as between the pagan imagery of Pandora and Prometheus and Mary and the first Communicants. I argue that all these figures can be conflated and thus Mirrlees' modernist mythology encompasses both pre-Christian and Christian iconography, re-casting and reconsidering classical mythology through a Judeo-Christian lens. The many possible multiplicities of meaning present in the poem only serve to illustrate the fluidity and ambiguity of Mirrlees' modernist feminist narrative. She has indeed created a "holophrase" in the entirety

of the poem itself, and a holophrase that functions as a hologram, transmitting and reflecting multiple realities.

Some contemporary scientists such as Leonard Susskind have espoused the principle of the "holographic universe," which falls under the domain of quantum gravity and string theory, which in turn seek to describe the nature and structure of the universe on the most essential level. The theory of the holographic universe or the holographic principle states that the universe we perceive is essentially a two-dimensional structure "painted" or projected upon a more complex reality. Therefore, the universe we perceive is a holographic projection of the full, unobservable complexity of the universe. While Mirrlees was certainly writing *Paris* long before such theories were developed, the holographic principle forms a nice metaphor for her feminist narrative. She *desires* to observe and discourse upon the whole of the city of Paris, and by analogy to the macrocosm, the modern world. She *lacks* the ability to do so because the whole of reality may be seen as ultimately unknowable and untransmittable. Yet by functioning on multiple levels and with multiple purposes she is able to create a liberatory discourse – a holophrase – that transmits a greater portion of the complex whole than the patriarchal discourse of normative communication.

Modernist Magic Spells

Parmar notes that the opening of *Paris* serves as an "invocation" and that the flaneuse strides through the city and the poem with "oracular eyes." It is a poem of selfhood and identity; Parmar contends that the presence of the elements "I want/I can't/I must" in the poem's beginning demonstrate a lack of unity of self and, she further reports, Mirrlees herself once said

when speaking of *Paris* that "the unities are smashed." Yet, Parmar contends, by the end of the poem the self has been restored and has returned from "smashed" and broken language to its own private, secret tongue, as shown by the drawing of the constellation Ursa Major at the very end of the poem. "Ursa Major" means "big bear," and Mirrlees and Harrison's private names for each other were, respectively, "little bear" and "big bear." When Mirrlees writes, "I must go slowly" (19) she means she must carefully navigate the labyrinth of selfhood, womanhood, and the archetypal feminine, as if Andromeda instead of Perseus had faced the Kraken.

In her article "The Look, the Body, and the Heroine of Persuasion: A Feminist-Narratological View of Jane Austen," Robyn Warhol says of the book's heroine that her "access to power through the feminine language…lets her blur the oppositions of the textual world in which she is placed" (39). This analysis may also be applied to *Paris*. The poem is an invocation against the oppositions of male iconography, archetypes, and textuality, in which the narrator deconstructs both language and the self to emerge with a fuller textual as well as gender authority.

The Waste Land is an invocation as well, but of a different sort. In her article "A Sphinx Without a Secret," Maud Ellman writes, "the Sphinx [is] the symbol of the symbolic itself, because it did not know the answer to its own question: and *The Waste Land*, too, is a riddle to *itself*." She continues, "For it is in the silence *between* the words that meaning flickers, local, evanescent – in the very 'wastes' that stretch across the page" (259). In that sense *The Waste Land* is the exact *opposite* of *Paris* as holophrase – rather than transmitting a complex whole, it transmits only emptiness. It is only in its emptiness that there is meaning. It is ultimately a broken invocation.

The distinction between the invocatory nature of *Paris* and *The Waste Land* is perfectly illustrated in the poems' final lines. Mirrlees' poem concludes with "JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE" (445) or "I salute you Paris full of grace," an echo of the Catholic "Ave Maria" prayer. Since Mirrlees conflates the Virgin Mary with earlier goddesses elsewhere in the poem, *Paris* becomes a holistic invocation not only to the unified spirit of the city but also to a unified liberatory feminist mythology. Eliot's poem ends with line "Shantih shantih shantih" (433). In his notes to the poem, Eliot explains that shantih translates as "The Peace which passeth understanding" and that it is "repeated as…a formal ending to an Upanishad." According to the tenets of Hinduism, anyone reciting the triple shantih would attain perfect peace by ceasing to exist. Ellman notes this non-existence in the decentralized narrator of *The Waste Land*. While *Paris* certainly contains multiple voices, there is a unifying "I" casting the invocation. Ellman writes "The speaker [in *The Waste Land*] …has no stable identity at all" (259) and "this subject is the victim of a general collapse of boundaries" (260).

By the end of the poem these boundaries have resolved into the unified identity of the Fisher King as an analog to Mirrlees' Virgin Mary. According to Jesse Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the Fisher King derives from the Grail legends. "The forces of the ruler [are] weakened and destroyed, by wound, sickness, old age, or death, the land becomes waste." In many versions of the myth, the Fisher King is wounded in or near the genitals and the subsequent barrenness of the land is symbolic of his sexual impotence. Yet in *The Waste Land* the Fisher King is *not* restored to potency and wholeness. While he does sit with his phallic pole, "Fishing, with the arid plain behind [him]" (424) the plain is still arid and the King asks plaintively, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (425) in response to a tacit negation, highlighting his continued impotence. Although the Fisher King has shored up his ruins (in a line metatexually referring

both to the Fisher King's invocation to the fertility of the Grail and Eliot's own poem as invocation), "Hieronymo's mad againe" (431) and the only salvation is in nonexistence. Mirrlees' poem is an invocation for unity and meaning; Eliot's poem ultimately invokes nothingness.

I can extend the analogy even further by considering the origins of the Holy Grail and the Grail legends as understood in the 19th and early 20th century. In *The Legend of the Holy Grail and the Perceval of Crestien of Troyes,* William Wells Newell writes, "In several romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mention is made of a sacred vessel, to which, in English rendering, has been given the name of the Holy Grail" (1). Generally speaking, in the stories of the Grail legend the Holy Grail is the vessel used by Jesus during the Last Supper. According to some sources, such as the 12th century *Joseph d'Arimathie* composed by the author calling himself Robert de Boron, Joseph of Arimathea used the Grail to catch Christ's blood upon his crucifixion, and appointed a series of guardians in Britain to keep the holy artifact safe. In the Arthurian legends in the Matter (mythology) of Britain, the knights of King Arthur's Round Table embark upon a quest to retrieve the Grail, with varying degrees of success, according to the specific version of the tale. Chretien de Troyes' romances of the Holy Grail are usually considered to be the first codified versions of the legend. Alfred Nutt in *Studies of the Legend of the Holy Grail with Especial Reference to the Hypothesis of its Celtic Origin* reports that de Troyes' work forms 10,601 verses of the 60,000 verse poem *Le Conte Del Graal*. De Troyes' contribution to the poem is believed to date from the late twelfth century, and may or may not have originated from an older book given to De Troyes. Newell claims that "it cannot be supposed that Cresiten [a variant spelling of Chretien] was the first inventor of the Arthurian story" (16).

The genesis of the Grail legend reaches to pre-Christianity. Cups or cauldrons in general function as archetypically feminine symbols. The scholar Roger Sherman Loomis, in his book *The Grail: from Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* is one of many to connect the Grail's origins with ancient Celtic mythology, especially with vessels or magic practiced by Celtic goddesses. The Grail is often primarily associated with the Celtic goddess Cerridwen, whose magical cauldron appears in the Welsh *Tale of Taliesin* as a vessel in which she brews a potion that grants wisdom and inspiration. Her cauldron appears again in the tale of Bran the Blessed, where it is a vessel of rebirth as well as inspiration. Robert Graves identified Cerridwen as one of the aspects of his triple goddess (maiden, mother, crone) and she is associated with the Virgin Mary and other female figures in Christianity. Various aspects of the Celtic goddesses were appropriated by the Christians and incorporated into female Saints. In the same manner, the cauldron was appropriated as the cup of Christ, although initially maintaining its association with female figures through a little-known direct connection to the Virgin Mary. In his book *The Virgin and the Grail: Origins of a Legend*, Joseph Ward Goering notes that decades before Chetian de Troyes' version of the Grail story (one of the earliest extant versions and the foundation for much of the later legends), an artist called the Master of St. Clement painted a picture of the Virgin Mary holding a Grail vessel. He writes, "the enigmatic vessel of the Virgin could have been taken from the churches of the Pyrenees and transformed, during the twelfth century, into the Holy Grail of French romance" (139). However, echoes of this linkage remain in Troyes' and later Grail legends in which the Grail-bearer is represented as a woman or girl.

Just as Christianity attempted to remove the feminine principle from the rejuvenating Grail or vessel, Eliot tries to cast his failed regenerative incantation in solely masculine terms. As Ellmann notes, "Eliot himself declared that all women in *The Waste Land* are one woman"

(263). However, the female figures appearing in the poem are at best ambiguous, and at worst destructive. Even the supposedly hermaphroditic narrator, Tiresias, is "an old *man* with wrinkled dugs" (248, italics mine). Eliot could just as easily have described Tiresias as an old woman with wrinkled male organs and even the phrase "wrinkled dugs" underlines the undesirability of the female breasts. Many female characters in *The Waste Land* are depicted as pitiful and foolish, from the typist and her squalid affair to the vain and nervous woman in "A Game of Chess" in which Eliot refers to the Middleton play in which a young woman is seduced while her mother-in-law plays a game of chess.

Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley agree that "taking doomed female characters…Eliot creates…a portrait of women in waste lands, of wasted women in history and nature" (95). Further allusions to doomed women in *The Waste Land* include Philomena, Dido, and Ophelia. Even Madame Sosostris, the "wisest woman in Europe" (45), is made ridiculous by her cold and her prattling gossiping. Moreover, although the Tarot cards are a unifying set of symbols for the entire poem, Madame Sosostris misreads her own deck and fails to recognize the significance of her own clairvoyance. She admits that she "[does] not find/The Hanged Man" (54-55), yet, in his notes, Eliot says that the Hanged Man "is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer" (note 46). Frazer's ritualistically dying and reborn fertility god is a direct analogue to the Fisher King, who must die and be revived in order to reawaken the fertility of the land. As the masculine symbol of fertility, the Hanged Man/Fisher King is of absolute significance to the waste land, yet the female clairvoyant cannot see him, just as she is "forbidden to see" (54) the meaning of the blank card in her deck. The Hanged Man/Fisher King can be associated with Phlebas the Phoenician, whose death by water, a typically feminine symbol, midwifes the beginning of the rebirth in "What the Thunder Said," in which the

feminine water is supplanted by the masculine voice of the thunder and the male Fisher King. The critic Edmund Wilson in his essay "T. S. Eliot" attempts to resolve this gender conflation when he writes that Eliot makes "water the symbol of all freedom, all fecundity and flowering of the soul, [he] invokes in desperate need the memory of an April shower of his youth" (106-107), and associates this "flowering" with the hyacinth girl. However, the hyacinth girl is at most a minor and transient character in the poem; Eliot's main poetic "thrust" is male appropriation.

For example, while fertility and its return is of primary importance in *The Waste Land,* Eliot appropriates fertility and generation for his own masculine paradigm, just as he appropriates the Eastern wisdom of the *Upanishads* into the wasteland of the west. Brooker and Bentley note that "Eliot's focus on women cannot be understood apart from some attention to myth" and continue by saying, "a waste land is in mythic terms equivalent to a barren or unhealthy woman…if [the maternal figures] are saved, it shall be done for them" (97) by the male figures in the poem such as the Fisher King. Indeed, the generative feminine in the poem is either barren or destructive. For example, the character Lil in the section "A Game of Chess" was pregnant but elected to have an abortion, which ravaged her good looks and her health in the same manner in which the waste land is ravaged. The indifferent sexual liaison of the typist and the "young man carbuncular" is obviously not for the purposes of procreation. Many of the literary female characters to whom Eliot refers are either barren or of doomed fertility, such as Ophelia who, according to some critics, drowned herself because she was pregnant with Hamlet's child.

The destructive female principle emerges in the problematic lines from "What the Thunder Said:"

A woman drew her long black hair out tight

And fiddled whisper music on those strings

And bats with baby faces in the violet light

Whistled, and beat their wings

And crawled head downward down a blackened wall. (377-381)

Critically, these lines have often been discussed as a reference to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which, as well, perverts the feminine maternal and procreative, most notably in the character of Lucy Westenra. I think there is an additional interpretation. *The Waste Land* is concerned with regeneration and fertility and contains explicit Judeo-Christian elements. What if the woman in these lines is Lilith? Lilith is sometimes referred to as the first vampire due to the tales that she sucks blood from infants in the night, which would explain the connection to *Dracula* and the "bats with baby faces." Another significant female character in *The Waste Land* is named "Lil," the diminutive of Lilith. The threat of female sexuality and power, to Eliot, must be overcome by the knight on his Grail Quest, who then transfers the "magical" generative ability from the female to the male.

A Brief History of Sexism

One of the most damning misogynistic sections of *The Waste Land* exists only in the full unedited version and was ultimately excised by Ezra Pound. The unedited manuscript of *The Waste Land* contains a lengthy passage about a self-absorbed, silly woman called "Fresca." For example:

Admonished by the sun's inclining ray,

And swift approaches of the thievish day,

The white-armed Fresca blinks, and yawns, and gapes,

Aroused from dreams of love and pleasant rapes. (1-4)

Eliot jeers at Fresca in Pope-esque couplets, even mockingly recounting her trip to the toilet. He lambasts her intellect, asserting "Women grown intellectual grow dull/And lose the mother wit of natural trull" (54-55). Moreover, Fresca is a poet, for

She may as well write poetry, as count sheep,

And on those nights when Fresca lies alone,

She scribbles verse of such a gloomy tone

That cautious critics say, her style is quite her own.

Not quite an adult, and still less a child,

By fate misbred, by flattering friends beguiled,

Fresca's arrived (the Muses Nine declare)

To be a sort of can-can salonniere. (62-69)

According to modernist scholars such as Jane Marcus, "Fresca" is actually a thinly-disguised portrait of the modernist poet Nancy Cunard. Eliot did not respect Cunard or her work and this section of *The Waste Land* was originally conceived as an elaborate insult. Nor was Eliot's disdain for female modernists limited to Cunard. Eliot worked systematically to exclude women from the contemporary literary and publishing world. Some of the most extreme instances of misogyny against female modernists were perpetrated by Eliot, who subsequently came to be regarded as one of the most seminal modernist writers.

Eliot's friendship with Djuna Barnes is often remarked upon by those attempting to refute Eliot's sexism, but when discussing Eliot with her former lover Peter Hoare, Barnes remarked that Eliot had "an absolute disgust of women" (qtd. Scott 143). Scott notes that "when it came to

constructing an enduring modernist canon, Eliot left women off his most select lists" (124). She reports that in discussing his achievements at the *Criterion*, Eliot was "proud" of having published "Lawrence, Lewis, Joyce, Pound, Auden, Spender, and MacNeice" (124). In a letter to Pound about his work at the *Egoist*, Eliot wrote, "I struggle to keep the writing as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature, and also, once a woman has had anything printed in your paper, it is very difficult to make her see why you should not print everything she sends in" (qtd. Scott 125). Additionally, Eliot's disparagement and dismissal of the work of female modernists H. D. and Katherine Mansfield is well known. When Richard Aldington attempted to defend H. D. against a negative review of her book *Hymen* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Eliot wrote to him in a letter of 3 November 1921, "I can't agree with you about H. D. having seen the book since. It seems to me *stucco*" (484). In his letter to Pound on 3 July 1920 he wrote, "I believe [Mansfield] to be a dangerous WOMAN" (398). Scott notes that in an interview with Jane Marcus, Rebecca West "suggested that Eliot got [West] fired from the *Bookman*" (143), a literary magazine with which she had been involved.

Although Eliot counted Mirrlees among his rare female friends, he had no compunction about appropriating her innovative language and structure in order to shore up his own poetic wasteland. This is mirrored within his poem in the reference to Philomena, who was raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who also cut out her tongue so she could not accuse him. Ellmann writes, "By invoking this story, Eliot suggests that women is excluded from language through the sexual violence of a man…she is awarded for her pains with a pure art which is powerless and desolate – 'la, la'" (266-267).

However, Eliot's colonizing strategy ultimately rebounds upon itself. Ellman writes:

> Yet the misogyny [in *The Waste Land*] is so ferocious, particularly in the manuscript, that it begins to turn into a blasphemy against itself. For the poem is enthralled by the femininity that it reviles…in fact, woman is the spirit of its own construction, the phantom of its own betweenness. (265)

These words are literally true when considering Mirrlees as "the spirit of [*The Waste Land's*] construction" and metaphorically true in regards to Eliot's ultimate failure to translate the feminine incantation into patriarchal language.

Frazer's *The Golden Bough* was an important work for both poets; for Eliot, directly, and for Mirrlees, through Jane Harrison's work. In *The Golden Bough,* Frazer describes sympathetic magic (which he also called "homeopathic" or "imitative" magic) as the principle that "like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause." He continues:

> [Sympathetic magic assumes] that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether, not unlike that which is postulated by modern science for a precisely similar purpose, namely, to explain how things can physically affect each other through a space which appears to be empty.[15]

Frazer goes on to give various instances of sympathetic magic: the attempt to destroy or injure an enemy by destroying an image of the enemy, giving a wooden figure of a child to a barren woman to help her conceive, or attempting to bring animals into a region for food by acting and dressing like or creating an image of the animal desired. Mirrlees' and Eliot's poems do not just *contain* examples of sympathetic magic; they *are* examples of sympathetic magic. They are incantations in which form follows function, and vice versa.

[15] The linkage between magic and science is especially interesting, particularly in light of how Mirrlees' holophrase may be re-cast in terms of the holographic universe.

The neglect of Mirrlees' poem in general and as part of the genesis of *The Waste Land* is analogous to the way Eliot neglects the generative female figures in his poem, as he focuses only on the masculine generative (as did Pound in his correspondence and editing and in *Sage Homme*). Eliot appropriates Mirrlees' feminist discourse for his own purposes. Both critical history and Eliot himself have left Mirrlees virtually unrecognized until very recently.

What is the historical and social context for such a patriarchal ideology? The rights and freedoms of women in Britain in the early twentieth century were severely limited and the world in which these women lived was still hostile. While Queen Victoria died in 1901, the traditionally submissive, retiring, and maternal "feminine" behavior that had been so prominent during the Victorian Era did not die with her. Jane Garrity in *Step-Daughters of England* notes that "British feminist propaganda of the interwar period…[envisions] the privatized feminine sphere of the domestic as central to national culture" (45). Lowndes reports that *The Englishwoman* in March 1911 published the following statement: "Upon the foundation of the well-ordered home is built the health, the happiness, the prosperity, and the very life [of the English] race" (44, qtd. Garrity). As late as the 1930s, the Woman's League of Health and Beauty in Britain "advocated exercise so that women would be maternally fit vessels" (Garrity 67).

Prioritizing women's domestic life virtually excluded them from the intellectual, literary, political, and social sphere. Although the Representation of the People Act was passed in 1918, which gave suffrage to women over thirty, the right to vote only applied to women who were married to certain types of government officials. Garrity also notes that women were banned from "the armed forces, the diplomatic and consular branches of the Civil Service, the Church of England, and the Stock exchange" (45) and she quotes Ray Strachey, saying that by 1934 women

"made 75-80 percent of the money that men earned for the same work, while their chances of promotion were small" (45). Even a woman's immigration status was linked to men, as married women appeared as an addition on their husband's passport and did not receive one of their own. Cambridge refused female students the same status as male students as late as 1937, denying them the right to use the title "B.A." or to participate in governing the university (Garrity 45). Garrity also discusses the British "marriage bar," which required that women abandon their occupations after marriage. Although the marriage bar was a controversial rule, Garrity notes that some professions, such as teaching and the Civil Service, strictly imposed it and it remained in force for several decades past its inception in 1928 (45).

The contemporary literati and the reading public embraced Eliot's poem while condemning *Paris* to the wasteland of obscure poetry. Parmar notes in her Introduction to *Collected Poems* that even upon its initial publication, "nowhere is there the sense that the poem made a real impression on her fellow-writers" and that the scarce praise she did received in personal letters contained an irksome "pseudo-romantic tone." Parmar reports "on the whole, the reviews *Paris* received in the British press were negative" and quotes a particularly "damning" review from *The Times Literary Supplement*: "[*Paris*] is certainly not a 'Poem'…It does not belong to the art of poetry" (xxxix). Yet, just a few years later, many of these same critics were nearly tripping over each other rushing to praise Eliot's *The Waste Land*! It also benefited Eliot to be so closely allied with Pound, both as an editor and as an influential literary friend.

Another factor is that, as opposed to *Paris*, *The Waste Land* primarily draws its numerous references and sources from within the previously-established, Anglophone, male-dominated Western European literary canon. Eliot's frequent allusions to sources such as the Bible, Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and such might have increased the poem's appeal for

conservative Western readers. Even when Eliot incorporates non-Western elements such as the *Upanishads*, he co-opts and reinscribes them within the Western tradition. The critical approbation of *The Waste Land* represents a collusion with Eliot's neglect of women, a projection of the opposition to the burgeoning women's liberation movement and the destruction of the many patriarchal power structures after WWI. Readers could take refuge in a wasteland that advocated a return to the departing world of patriarchal monarchy and the male power structure.

Now, over eighty years since the publication of *Paris* and *The Waste Land*, Eliot's poem is the source of seemingly endless papers and critical examination and Mirrlees' poem is essentially underappreciated. She does not even rate a footnote in most analyses of *The Waste Land* and is barely even mentioned in the accounts of Eliot's career and the British literary community of the early twentieth century. Most literary criticism on Mirrlees focuses on her cult fantasy novel *Lud in the Mist* and ignores *Paris* entirely. *Lud in the Mist is* a well-crafted book; it tells the story of a stolid community of luddites (literally!) who steadfastly try to deny the presence of the fairyland next-door. Yet fairy breaks through the boundaries and enters the mundane lives of the inhabitants of Lud. Well-known authors like Neil Gaiman have praised *Lud in the Mist*. Gaiman cites it as one of his sources of inspiration for his popular novel *Stardust*, which has been turned into a graphic novel and a successful Hollywood movie starring Michelle Pfeiffer. While it is gratifying to see Mirrlees in the public eye, the attention lavished on *Lud in the Mist* consigns her to the ghetto of SF while she is denied entrance to the penthouse of high modernism.

Not One, Not Two, but *THREE* Waste Lands!

For several years modernist scholars Jane Marcus and Jean Mills have been working on the "three waste lands" of the Hogarth Press. These three waste lands are Mirrlees' *Paris,* Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Nancy Cunard's *Parallax.* Eliot's scathing portrait of Cunard in the original version of *The Waste Land* was more than just personal pique; it was an expression of deep jealousy towards a female modernist who, like Mirrlees, posed a very real threat to his position as one of the pre-eminent modernists. While my discussion here primarily deals with the first two wastelands, it is important that we acknowledge Cunard's third wasteland as both scholars and educators.

While *Paris* is undergoing a modest renaissance, Cunard's *Parallax* remains largely lost to the ages. Most people, upon hearing the name Nancy Cunard, are far more likely to associate her with the legendary shipping company, not modernism. While Cunard was born into this aristocratic shipping family, by that time the family had largely lost their fortune. Cunard was self-educated and tutored by governesses, including Vita Sackville-West's governess. According to Marcus and Mills, to whose work I am deeply indebted in this entire discussion, Cunard's mother, an Irish-American heiress, was the model for Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway. Cunard lived in Fitzroy Square, which was a center for poets and artists, and was initially very close to both Pound and Eliot before she published *Parallax*; in fact, she was romantically involved with both of them. After moving to Paris, Cunard founded the Hours Press as well, which published works by authors such as Ezra Pound and Samuel Beckett.

Not only was Cunard part of the contemporary artistic culture, she was also a political activist. She was champion of black rights and in 1934 edited *Negro: An Anthology,* which was

a collection of African art and literature. She was a journalist for United Negro Press International. Cunard was an outspoken Communist and in the 1930s became openly anti-fascist, criticizing Mussolini in her journalistic writings. As well, she published the pamphlet "Artists Take Sides," encouraging artists to take a political stance on the Spanish Civil War. Cunard's politics were in direct opposition to Pound's and Eliot's conservatism and Cunard completely broke with Pound during to his support for Italian fascism during World War II.

Cunard posed both an ideological and a literary threat to Eliot and Pound's attempts to dominate modernism. In Lois Gordon's 2007 biography, *Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist*, she reports that upon its publication "*Parallax* (1925) was favorably compared with Eliot's *The Waste Land*" (xii). She also says that Janet Flanner, an American journalist and Cunard's friend, "believed that her long poem *Parallax* (1925) was superior to *The Waste Land*" (113). According to Jane Marcus, that was a sentiment Eliot himself did not publically share. Marcus reports that Eliot's scathing review of *Parallax* in the *Times Literary Supplement* not only savaged Cunard's poem itself but accused her of plagiarism, which was the primary reason Cunard permanently settled in Paris.

I see Eliot's critique as personally motivated, especially in light of the "Fresca" section of the original draft of *The Waste Land* as well as his romantic affair with Cunard. The very fact that Eliot attacked *Parallax* with such vitriol lends credence to Flanner's claim that *Parallax* was indeed a "superior" poem. Unfortunately, Eliot largely succeeded in suppressing *Parallax*. Gordon's biography mentions the poem a bare five times and contains nearly no discussion of its content. Much discussion of Cunard seems to focus on her personal habits, sexuality, and connection to famous historical figures rather than her poetry. In the April 1, 2007 Sunday Book Review of *The New York Times*, Caroline Weber's review of Gordon's Cunard biography

dismisses her claims about the quality of *Parallax*, saying "[Cunard's] verse in no way rivaled Eliot's" and, after quoting a few lines from *Parallax*, calling them "unimpressive." Weber similarly dismisses Eliot's treatment of Cunard, saying that she "seduced" him.

Both Gordon and Marcus report that Cunard was deeply affected by World War I and *Parallax* is itself a battlefield. Eliot does not portray the war in *The Waste Land,* yet we teach the poem with the war as a backdrop. In *Parallax* the war pervades the text from the very beginning when Cunard writes "Earth, earth with consuming breast,/Across its ruined waste, its tortuous acre/Draws out his complex fires" (15-17). Later in the poem Cunard says

London –

youth and heart-break

Growing from ashes

The war's dirges

Burning, reverberate – burning. (170-174)

Cunard, like Eliot, is wandering through war-torn London; also, like Eliot (and Mirrlees) she employs the modernist technique of broken lines and irregular formatting. However, Cunard is *not* plagiarizing Eliot. Instead, she is going where Eliot feared to tread. In astronomy, parallax is defined as the apparent motion of stars caused by the orbital motion of the Earth. More generally, parallax occurs when a change in one's observational position offers a new line of sight; if you move, what you are looking at will appear to move as well. Measurements of parallax are sometimes used to determine the distances from the stars to Earth.

Cunard's poem is itself an example of parallax. She and Eliot are both "looking" at the same thing – the modernist wasteland after World War I. Yet Cunard is looking at the wasteland

from an "observational position" that Eliot was unable to assume. While Eliot tries to hide the wasteland with classical references, Cunard faces it head-on. She writes

> Taste, mind, uneasy quest of what I am –
>
> London, the hideous wall, the jail of what I am,
>
> With fear nudging and pinching
>
> Keeping each side of me
>
> Down one street and another, lost –
>
> Returned to search through adolescent years
>
> For key, for mark of what was done and said.
>
> Do ghosts alone possess the outworn decade? (176-183)

Cunard has a much better apprehension of what a wasteland is, and what it is to live in a wasteland, than Eliot. Eliot also saw London as "the jail of what I am" but was unable to observe and articulate the conditions of that imprisonment as well as Cunard. As well, when Cunard asks, "Do ghosts alone possess the outworn decade?" she might as well have been speaking of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, dripping with allusion and metaphor to cover the reality of the post-war wasteland that Eliot could not bear to face.

Cunard's poem, like *Paris*, contains hope of true redemption, which is even more impressive given the stark position from which she chooses to observe her wasteland. Despite the "clouded fool,/the poet-fool" (23-24) – perhaps a direct reference to Eliot himself? – who appears at the opening of the poem, there is still "music/in a clear vernal month" (30-31) and drifting "moths" (34). Like Mirrlees, Cunard peoples her waste land with hope for new life: "appletrees" (33), "seed, root, and kernel-stone" (92), "a palm-grove" (307) and, ultimately, "life [blooming] against disaster/pressing its new immortal shoots against disaster" (411-412).

Like Mirrlees (and Woolf and Kiernan), Cunard uses mermaids and water as a symbol of redemption and renewal. She writes

The sirens, then, beyond the ocean's brim,

Call, and make ready on their ultimate shore,

And singing raise their arms, and wait for him,

Nepenthe rises at the prison door…

But in what hour, what age

Are siren-voices heard across the water? (348-353)

When early in his literary career Eliot lamented that the mermaids would not sing to him, he was writing a sad prophecy about his own life. Not only did the mermaids sing to both Mirrlees and Cunard, their poems *became* the song of the mermaids. While Eliot and other canonical male modernists were successful in ignoring that siren song for a time, we now must fully hearken to it and acknowledge its beauty and power. This needs to become the hour and age in which we hear the siren-voices across the water.

Lighting Up *Paris* in the Classroom

In her introduction to *Collected Poems*, Sandeep Parmar writes, "Women must, as readers and authors, preserve the community…they must be prepared to see the ghosts of their literary mothers coming out for air on an imaginary spring evening" (xi). Parmar herself has helped preserve the community and Mirrlees' legacy; so have Julia Briggs and Jean Mills. Yet we educators have to do our part as well. It is almost impossible to imagine a college literature

classroom without Eliot and *The Waste Land*; until very recently, it would have been equally impossible to imagine a college classroom *with* Hope Mirrlees and *Paris*! Parmar, Briggs, and Mills have helped revive this "literary mother" – now the rest of us, including our students, have to embrace her too.

We can use *Paris* in the classroom to shed an entirely new light upon *The Waste Land.* For example, we can present the two poems to the students and ask: did Eliot commit plagiarism? He cited so many of his sources in *The Waste Land* – should he have cited *Paris* as well? The conversation about whether or not Ezra Pound should be listed as a co-author of *The Waste Land* already exists. We can bring our students into that discussion through Mirrlees and thus encourage them to engage with existing literary discourse in a new and innovative way. Our students already care and have strong opinions about plagiarism; in the age of Wikipedia and online term paper mills, they are used to being repeatedly commanded to cite their sources and avoid plagiarism. They are threatened with dire consequences like failure, black marks on their permanent college record, suspension, and even expulsion should they break the rules and plagiarize. Now, we can ask them to consider whether T. S. Eliot – a literary and cultural giant – might have been similar to a frantic college freshman cutting and pasting together a term paper from Spark Notes.

With the advance of digital imaging and programs like Photoshop, "mash-ups" are common, especially in geek culture. A fan can buy a T-shirt with and image of Luke Skywalker wearing Captain Kirk's uniform; they can watch an episode of *The Simpsons* with the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" reimagined as Home and the raven as Bart; they can download an image of Harry Potter fighting Iron Man. Our students are already familiar with this sort of collaging and may have even Photoshopped their features onto their "dream" body for their

Facebook profile picture. We can tell our students that *Paris* was an early mash-up. This is a way for us to connect modernism with contemporary digital culture and frame the poem in a way our students can understand. Moreover, the internet has led to an increased globalization of popular culture. A recent popular line of statues depicted superheroes like Catwoman, Supergirl, and Wonder Woman in the style of Japanese anime. The 2012 hit *Gangnam Style* by Psy was a Korean song interspersed with English lyrics. Students are used to encountering foreign languages and influences in their pop-culture pastimes; they are already, without even knowing it, familiar with the conventions of *Paris* and thus of *The Waste Land.*

We can also engage our students with the way that the politics of poetry and publishing led to *Paris'* unfair neglect. Sadly, our students live in a world where racial profiling is commonplace – where in New York City, an African-American man can be stopped, searched, frisked, and detained by police merely on the grounds of "looking suspicious." They saw Hillary Clinton lose the Democratic nomination for president while political commentators mocked her age and taste in clothing. They saw banks getting bailed out by the government while families lost their homes. They live in a world where the majority of the US states still refuse to legalize same-sex marriage. Our students are intimately familiar with the politics of power and know that the dominant narrative is not always the most deserving one. We can encourage them to use this familiarity to discuss *Paris* and *The Waste Land* (and *Parallax* as well) and ask questions like: who determines the canon of "great" literature and why? Who determines which texts are remembered and which are ignored? And, most importantly, how can *they* challenge the dominant literary hegemony and revive their neglected "literary mothers?"

CHAPTER 4: THE ELEPHANT'S EAR – H.D.

> The religions of ancient Greece and Rome are extinct. The so-called divinities of Olympus have not a single worshipper among living men.
>
> - From *Bulfinch's Greek and Roman Mythology: The Age of Fable* by Thomas Bulfinch

Thomas Bulfinch wrote these opening lines to his famous collection of Greco-Roman mythology in 1859. I suspect he would have been very much surprised by H.D. In his article "The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spaces," Mark S. Morrisson cites Alex Owen when he writes, "Modernity emptied the world of its magical forces and mysteries and even the spiritual and ethical meanings provided by religion, resulting in a 'disenchantment of the world.' Owen sees the new occultism as offering a kind of re-enchantment of the modern world" (3). The idea of the necessity for re-enchantment is explicit in *The Waste Land* and Mirrlees was able to discern magic amongst the modern industry and squalor of Paris. H.D. is another poet who, through her feminist narrative, continues to see magic in modernity. Unlike Eliot, H.D. does not require a complete apocalyptic catastrophe and renewal before mythology can return to the modern waste land. In "The Silver Key," H. P. Lovecraft wrote, "Wonder had gone away" (59), a sentiment seconded by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. To Mirrlees and H.D. wonder had *not* gone away from the world; their modernist poems are magical incantations and testaments to the enduring eternity of modernist mythologies. We must not forget that SF – Speculative Fiction – also encompasses H.D.'s fantastic magic.

Goddesses Both Modern and Mythological

In "Thesmophoria: Suffragettes, Sympathetic Magic, and H.D.'s Ritual Poetics," Edward Comentale claims:

> H.D.'s poetry reveals the effective unity of often gendered binaries, such as subject and object, public and private, work and world. Her ritualized poetry does not avoid political responsibility; rather, it raises possibilities for a community that already incorporates the marginal, the feminine, and the poetic. (484)

To this, I would add "the magical and mythological." If Mirrlees is the pole of feminist mythologies, Eliot the pole of patriarchal mythologies, H.D. is "at the still point of the turning world" where the two meet. This is best illustrated in her collection *Trilogy,* composed of the sections *The Walls Do Not Fall, Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod.* I propose to examine a few representative poems from *The Walls Do Not Fall*. Historically, H.D. wrote *Trilogy* during the World War II era, approximately two decades after Eliot and Mirrlees composed their respective modernist epics, yet her work expands upon their modernist ethos.

In the Introduction to the New Directions edition of *Trilogy*, Aliki Barnstone reports, "The poet [H.D.] wishes to 're-light the flame' of womanly vision and of the goddesses…[she gives] a vision of the Lady, who is a synthesis of all the holy women who have ever been portrayed in art, and all the goddesses…she redeems the feminine aspect of the soul and Eve" (XIV, XV). H.D. directly engages with the Green Lady, the flawed female figures in the wasteland, and "Marie plein de grace." She takes Eliot's fragments and assembles them into a harmonious whole.

The first poem in *The Walls Do Not Fall* (note the poems are numbered but untitled) begins with images seemingly torn directly from *The Waste Land*: "old town square:/mist and mist-grey, no colour" (3-4) in which "ruin opens/the tomb, the temple" (10-11). Yet in this WWII desolation, like Mirrlees, H.D. retains hope and life. In her landscape, "still the Luxor bee, chick and hare/pursue unalterable purpose" (5-6) and "through our desolation/thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us/through gloom:" (19-21). The Luxor bee is not only an Egyptian reference (as Luxor is a city on the banks of the Nile), but the bee is a universal symbol of womanhood, from ancient times to Sue Monk Kidd's contemporary novel *The Secret Life of Bees.* H.D. is already positioning the female archetypal principle as "Queen Bee" and her landscape, like Mirrlees' and unlike Eliot's, contains the seeds of redemption.

While her second poem in the sequence admits that "Evil was active in the land" (1), H.D. would, like Eliot, renew this land; unlike Eliot and Lewis, H. D. understands that the land already contains the seeds of its own renewal and needs no patriarchal fertilizing force. Initially she invokes the masculine aspect of divine power, saying in the third poem, "Let us, however, recover the Sceptre,/the rod of power" (1-2), referencing the "Caduceus" (5), Mercury's staff that "brings life to the living" (8). Yet the very next poem introduces the archetypically feminine symbol of the ocean: "There is a spell, for instance,/in every sea-shell:" (1-2). H.D. inserts the "I" into the poem at this point, identifying herself not only with the eternal feminine symbol – "I know the pull/of the tide" ([4], 29-30) but also with the masculine quester in search of the holy grail of renewal – "I escaped, I explored/rose-thorn forest" ([6], 9-10). In the latter lines the reference is to the prince who awakens the sleeping beauty from her long sleep and returns life and prosperity to her, the subjects, and the entire kingdom. Yet in the tale of the sleeping beauty the kingdom is not dead; it is sleeping only and requires the union of masculine and feminine

before it awake to continued life. It is not Eliot's dead wasteland that requires the fertilizing seminal rain. H.D. is describing the true sacred marriage, the *heirogamos.*

The seventh poem in *The Walls Do Not Fall* marries gender binaries, for "Gods, goddesses/wear the winged head-dress/of horns" (1-3). Eliot's phallic generacy is no longer strictly phallic or even single-gendered. Indeed, in the very next poem the singular subject "I" has become "we." "So we reveal our status/with twin-horns, disk, erect serpent/through these or the double-plume or lotus" (1-3). H.D. is evoking the iconography of the deities of ancient Egypt, in keeping with the modernist interest in secret magical societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. As noted by Morrisson, reclaiming ancient Egyptian mythology was extremely popular among these contemporary occult and spiritual orders. However, H.D. is also uniting masculine and feminine symbolism. The "horns," "erect serpent," and "double-plume" may be understood as symbolically representing male genitals and masculine generative power, while the "disk" and "lotus" represent female genitals and feminine generation. The very fact that H.D. textually juxtaposes male and female symbols in the poem without grouping them in subsequent binary order rhetorically displays her unifying praxis. The new "we" in the poem are "bearers of the secret wisdom" (9). H.D. warns detractors who are caught in false and restrictive binaries to "walk carefully, speak politely" (22), for they "have a long way to go" (21).

H.D. makes a very intriguing narrative shift from the singular to the integrated speaking subject; moreover, she does so without given up any of her textual and narrative agency. The "I" in the first poem becomes the "we" through the *heirogamos*; however, the singular subject is not completely subsumed in the plural, nor is this plurality strictly linked to gender binaries. In this sense H.D.'s central figure is reminiscent of Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, yet H.D.'s subject subverts the gender binaries Tiresias re-inscribes. She also sets the stage for the way in which

Caitlin R. Kiernan, in twenty-first century literature, juxtaposes ancient mythology and gender/sexual ambiguity, as I discuss in subsequent chapters.

What's In a Name?

The singular "I" re-emerges in H.D.'s thirteenth poem. Thirteen is a significant number – a traditional number of power, often considered unlucky due to the Christian story of the Last Supper, yet also the conventional number of witches in a coven. H.D. explicitly states, "I speak of myself individually/but I was surrounded by companions/in this mystery" (6-9). Later the subject is plural – "we know each other/by secret symbols" (13-14). She closes the poem:

> we know our Name,
>
> we nameless initiates,
> born of one mother,
>
> companions
> of the flame. (22-26)

Her iconography is complex and multi-layered. In occult parlance, an initiate has recently been made privy to the secrets of a magical order. Yet to initiate also means to begin. The narratives of Eliot, Mirrlees, and H.D. are all renewal narratives where the authors and subjects seek initiation into a new world. Yet for Mirrlees and H.D. the initiation is organic; it is not an initiation from death into life but an initiation into a continuance of life beneath the deathly veneer of modernity. The seeds of rebirth are already in the land, as symbolized by

Mirrlees' extensive use of flower imagery in *Paris*. It is a circular initiation: one that has always already begun.

H.D.'s "flame" has several layers of meaning. Fire is renewing and destructive, destroying and purifying. H.D.'s flame is not the barren, devastating flame of Eliot's "The Fire Sermon." Her fire symbolically references the Promethean fire of creativity and inspiration and recalls Mirrlees' "nymphs," which also bring to mind the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome. Vesta was the Roman goddess of fire and the hearth. The Vestal Virgins were women who tended the ceremonial fire in her temple, which they kept eternally burning. The priestesses of Vesta were exclusively female and were not expected to marry and raise children as were other women in Roman society. The duties and rituals of the Virgins and the goddess' temple were never taught to men, placing the Virgins in a position of authority and power almost unique for women in ancient Rome. In *H.D.: The Career of that Struggle*, Rachel Blau Duplessis notes H.D.'s repeated use of classical, especially Greek, elements in her work. Duplessis writes of H.D., "In her treatment of Greece, then, she acts in a feminist manner, often placing women at the centre of inquiry, and asking about the inscription of gender and female in traditional culture" (19).

I argue that in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. is also bringing this inquiry into the modern world, as the opening setting for the poem is the desolation of WWII. Moreover, she is re-inscribing male and female paradigms upon and within each other as in the whorls of a seashell, an image she evokes in the fourth poem in the sequence. The masculine Promethean flame is projected upon the feminine vestal flame (and vice versa), yet neither consumes the other. This is the flame of the phoenix, endlessly creative and self-renewing. As Duplessis notes in her discussion of H.D.'s treatment of mythic female characters:

[H.D.] postulates that alternative observations and possibly radically different

> interpretations of central choices and acts can be read from a well-known myth. This shift of narrative paradigm can create a critique of the assumptions and values implied in the hegemonic story. (26)

I see Duplessis' remarks as relevant to Eliot and Mirrlees as well as H.D. In each of these authors' poems, they are reading and re-reading multiple, not singular, myths but the overall narrative shift is the same. Mirrlees and H.D. "[displace] those dominant interpretations which are a form of 'patriarchal desecration' of female figures" (Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, 240, 244, qtd. Duplessis 27). Their revisionist strategy establishes a new feminist narrative and thus do they apprehend the renewal and rebirth of the damaged waste land of war-torn Europe and the human spirit. There is even a nod to pantheism here, as H.D. notes the initiates may "snarl a brief greeting" (20) at each other. As Duplessis writes, "this revisionary strategy [is] the critique of dominant culture by the rewriting of the dominant narrative" (26). However, Eliot ultimately re-inscribes the modern "patriarchal desecration." Ultimately, his waste land, like Tiresias, is still broken and vainly seeking unity.

On yet another level, H.D. is the literal narrator and the luminal "I/we" of the poem sequence raises the question of authorial intention. Eliot had Tiresias as his nominal narrative voice; Mirrlees slyly inserts herself into the poem with the image of the constellation Ursa Major at the close of the poem, referencing her and Jane Harrison's affectionate mutual nicknames. H.D. problematizes the issue of narrative authority and naming when she writes, "we know our Name,/we nameless initiates" (22-23). In occult practice, initiates into an order often take a new "magical name" upon their initiation. H.D. is playing with several layers of meaning. The first mention of "name" is capitalized, perhaps making a distinction between proper and common names, but also raising questions about the agency of naming. The "nameless initiates"

nevertheless know their "Name." Moreover, the plural subject re-emerges in relation to the singular; the plural initiates, the "we," have but one singular name. That name is textually marked by capitalization, suggesting the primacy of the united subject over the singular and even multiple separate subjects. Even when the narrative voice changes number or gender, it is still "Named" and not lost in or silenced by an overwhelming patriarchal narrative or narrator. Duplessis' comments regarding H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* may be applied to *The Walls Do Not Fall* as well:

> [It] can be read as a quest for wholeness and integration of a self whose many polarities fuse in the psychoanalytic crucible. Or it can be read as an acceptance of the ever unraveling and reconstituting of a subject-in-process/subject-in-question. The latter is symptomatically indicated…by issues about naming. (110)

Duplessis goes on to note that these "issues about naming" were mirrored in H.D.'s actual life in her "pseudonyms and plays with her own name, multiple uses of her initials, and the constant appearance of the subject-in-narrative who both is and is not the author as ego" (111). Mirrlees, to an extent, also appears as the "author as ego" in *Paris*; despite the "multiple voices" technique of modernism, there is still a concrete narrative consciousness. In *The Waste Land*, the central subject is fragmented; Tiresias is constantly in uneasy flux "throbbing between two lives" (218). Moreover, the Tiresias-self is decrepit, impotent, and barren, symbolizing the fundamental ego split present in Eliot's poem: Tiresias is an "old man with wrinkled dugs" (228). While *The Waste Land* may be an invocation, it is ultimately a failed invocation. It is what H.D. describes in the thirty-first poem in the sequence; an "intrusion of strained/inappropriate allusion/illusion of lost-gods, daemons;" (22-24). The result is "*reversion of old values,/oneness lost, madness*" (28-29). In contrast, *The Walls Do Not Fall* is an

invocation that unifies and heals the subject and object and names the narrator with multiple voices.

Additionally, H.D. is positioning herself within the tradition of women's writing with the liminality of names in her poem sequence. As Virginia Woolf notes in *A Room Of One's Own*, historically female artists were often doomed to obscurity and virtually invisible to later generations: nameless. Woolf even hypothesizes that many poems with the author identified merely as "Anon" may have been written by women who are now nameless. While complicating the issue of naming, H.D. resolutely insists that the subject "know[s] [her] Name." Since she is referencing ancient societies such as ancient Egypt and Rome where women *were* often essentially nameless, she is re-appropriating the power of identity and naming not only for contemporary but also for these ancient women. As previously noted, within numerous occult and magical traditions, naming is power. Knowing the true name of an entity gives one power over it. When H.D. says that the initiates are nameless yet know their own Name, she is suggesting that they have appropriated the power of their true Name for themselves. They are purposely nameless to a larger hegemony that has no effective power or dominion over them.

The Radium Girls

The thirteenth poem in *The Walls Do Not Fall* places H.D. in dialogue with Eliot and Mirrlees regarding modern science. She begins the poem:

The Presence was spectrum-blue,

ultimate blue ray,

rare as radium, as healing;

my old self, wrapped round me,

was shroud. (1-5)

Radium is a luminous radioactive chemical element first discovered by Madame Curie, who died from radiation sickness because of her exposure to radium. In the 1920s, a group of female factory workers, later termed the "Radium Girls," filed a lawsuit claiming they had contracted radium poisoning from painting the faces of self-luminous watches with radium-based paint. Especially in relation to the Manhattan Project and its devastating culmination in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of WWII, radium can be seen as a symbol of death and destruction. Such a perspective would be in dialogue with Eliot's pessimistic view of modern science and technology. Yet H.D. subverts this obvious symbolism by likening it to the divine "Presence" and linking it to the action of "healing." To her, it is an "ultimate blue ray" (radium glows with a blue light) that burns away the narrator's "old self" and gives her rebirth as an initiate of "this mystery" (7). Once again, the radioactive flame is simultaneously destructive and generative, burning away the "shroud" of established hegemonies and conventions for a new liberated rebirth. Radioactive elements are traditionally considered to be polluting and toxic, analogous to the manner in which Eliot approached modern science in *The Waste Land*. However, science and technology are neither destructive nor positive in and of themselves. It is only in their application and use or misuse can such value judgments be applied, which marks yet another masculine binary ideology.

As Sandra Harding notes in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* "Modern Western sciences and their technologies have always been regarded with both enthusiasm and dread" (2). She discusses the binary and demonstrative scientific epistemology of *positivism*, commenting:

> [most of the] scientists, philosophers, and social scientists who model their work on the natural sciences…still happily embrace fundamental assumptions of positivism. As philosopher Roy Bhaskar has astutely observed, positivism still represents the unreflective 'consciousness of science.' (79)

Instead, Harding calls for a new "feminist epistemology," asking "How could one describe or explain…women's lives within conceptual schemes or research models that so systematically distorted such subject matters?" (105). A feminist epistemology would create a liberatory way of knowing that would de-center men from the dominant discourse while still engaging with multiple levels of discourse in an empowering manner. As Harding writes, "The discourses of objectivity and of truth/falsity are ancient and powerful. It is a great strength of feminist empiricism [one mode of feminist epistemology] that it can enter and use these…languages and conceptual schemes" (113).

This is exactly what H.D. is doing by invoking modern science through the "ultimate blue ray" of radium. She rejects Eliot by subverting the standard meaning of the symbolic object; she also rejects the danger of Lovecraft's "colour." H.D. is even in dialogue with the American modernist F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald's satire, "A Diamond the Size of the Ritz" references radium and is one of his few stories to fall within the domain of fantasy/SF. In Fitzgerald's story, the Washington family has become by far the richest family in the world due to an ancestor's discovery of a diamond literally the size of the Ritz-Carlton hotel. Over the years, the Washingtons have used various subterfuges to keep the source of their wealth a secret but at the

end of the tale they are about to be discovered. The patriarch of the family, Braddock Washington, tries to "bribe" God with "forgotten sacrifices, forgotten rituals, prayers obsolete before the birth of Christ" (313). Among other things, he promises God a perfect temple carved from the mountainous diamond with "an altar of iridescent, decomposing, ever-changing radium which would burn out the eyes of any worshipper who lifted up his head from prayer" (313). God refuses the bribe and the Washingtons and the diamond are destroyed. In "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz," Fitzgerald uses radium as a symbol of Washington's blasphemy as a worshipper of a modern religion of gold and greed that, quite literally, worships at the altar of science – even as science destroys the worshipper, as Lovecraft predicted. To H.D., there is no difference between the "Presence" and the "radium-blue ray;" no disjunction between science and magic. H.D. is returning the "ultimate blue ray" to Marie Curie and her "scientific mothers." Harding argues that feminist epistemology has and can create a "radical future" (116); the very future H.D. is invoking in *The Walls Do Not Fall.*

While the work as a whole is a unified vision of that radical future, H. D. charts its beginnings in the closing poem of *The Walls Do Not Fall*. It begins:

Still the walls do not fall,
I do not know why;

there is zrr-hiss,
lightning in a not-known,

unregistered dimension (1-5)

There are no "fragments…shored against my ruins" in H. D.'s vision; rather the walls, those symbols of structural stability and determination, "do not fall" even if the poet herself does not completely apprehend their continued existence at this point in the epic. While the lightning recalls the thunder in "The Thunder Sermon," physically thunder is merely the sound of lightning. The increase in pressure and temperature caused by lightning in turn causes a rapid expansion of the surrounding air, creating a sonic shock wave that generates the sound of thunder. Thunder may be seen as a by-product or even a shadow of the true event, lightning. Lightning is also as a far more dynamic event than a peal of thunder as it is the massive discharge of electrical energy. Lightning can start fires, which may have been how early humankind first discovered and obtained fire. The contemporary terrestrial model of the evolution of organic molecules and, ultimately, life on earth suggests that organic synthesis may have been driven by energy sources such as lightning strikes. Lightning has fueled scientific discovery, from Benjamin Franklin and Nicolas Tesla's experiments to the science of galvanism.

H. D. recognizes that the new world she is creating is "not-known" but she instinctively imbues it with the galvanizing energy of lightning, the balanced feminine creative principle that will drive the new feminist epistemology. While Eliot's thunder said "give, sympathize, and control," H.D.'s lightning merely says "zrr-hiss" – a protolinguistic sound of pure energy and pure creation unfettered by reworked masculine ideologies, an echo of Kristeva's semiotic utterance.

H. D. posits a truly new epistemology discovered and fashioned by creators who are not bound to traditional narratives, who "*know no rule/of procedure"* (25-26) but rather are able to carve out a new meaning for themselves. She says:

we are voyagers, discoverers

of the not-known,

the unrecorded;

we have no map;

possibly we will reach haven,

heaven. (27-32)

Once again H. D. returns to the image of the quester but with a different emphasis. Her quester is unfettered by traditional narratives (*"we have no map"*) and associated restrictions. Her quester is not even wholly singular; she has moved away from the singular masculine-ego, decentering the iconography of the male hero in traditional narrative. That which is "unrecorded" remains outside the domain of empiricism and the dominant male discourse. Like Mirrlees, H. D. is the *flaneuse* treading the sacred labyrinth, with the ultimate goal of reaching *"haven,/heaven."*

H.D.'s Vestal Virgins in the Age of *The Avengers*

Thomas Bulfinch would not only have been shocked by H.D. but also by the Neo-Pagan and pop-culture elements of today's American society. Wicca is officially recognized as a religion by the United States government and members of the U.S. Armed Forces legally have access to Wiccan Chaplains for religious matters. New-age and Neo-Pagan books fill the *New York Times* bestsellers list along with more "traditional" works of literature. The popular film *The Craft* and television series *Charmed* both explicitly dealt with Wiccan practices. The website

adherents.com, which collects statistics on world religious demographics, estimated in 2012 that there were approximately 800,000 people identifying as Wiccans in the U.S. and the U.K.

On a more general level, there has been a plethora of recent popular media dealing with ancient mythology. The director Tarsem's 2011 film *Immortals* was about the ancient Greek gods; in 2010 there was a big-budget remake of *The Clash of the Titans.* The 2011 blockbuster comic book-inspired film *The Avengers* contained a character modeled on the ancient Norse god Thor; earlier that year, Thor also had his own self-titled movie. Thor is far from the only comic book character with mythological origins: some other examples include Wonder Woman (an Amazonian princess), Mars (the Roman god of war), Hades (the Greek god of death and the underworld), Loki (the Norse trickster god), and Hippolyta (Wonder Woman's mother). Anne Rice's iconic *Vampire Chronicles* series of books re-imagined the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris as vampires, as did the 2002 film *Queen of the Damned.*

Once again, our students *already* have the context necessary to understand H.D.'s work and we, as educators, can use that familiarity to bridge the gap between so-called "high" and popular culture. The *Harry Potter* book and movie series has familiarized a whole generation of students with the concept of magic spells and incantations, as well as the magical power of names. *Tom Marvelo Riddle,* in the second book/movie, is a palindrome for *I am Lord Voldemort*. Voldemort's name is too powerful for most wizards to speak; in the series, he is primarily addressed as "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named." Let us not underestimate our students! Of their own volition they have sought out mythic narratives like *Harry Potter,* standing in line for hours to buy the most recent book or to see the latest movie. It is but a small jump from J. K. Rowling's *wingardium leviosa* spell to H.D.'s liberatory incantations. I maintain that our students need only a small amount of guidance to make that leap.

CHAPTER 5: THE ELEPHANT'S MIND – MARGARET ATWOOD

> I was seriously disappointed [in *Oryx and Crake*]. It seemed [Atwood is] attempting to delve into territory where she simply doesn't belong – and why? There are already so many airport-grade novelists out there tackling this sci-fi-horror genre, and she isn't even adding anything new to the mix.
>
> - *Amazon.com* reader review of *Oryx and Crake*

Women's voices speaking about mythology and science became louder and more numerous in the later twentieth and into the twenty-first century, especially in the SF genre in general and science-fiction in particular. Yet these gains were hard-won; women's voices were still ignored, silenced, or both. In 1975, Pamela Sargent said in her introduction to *Women and Science Fiction* that the writers of science fiction took for granted certain presuppositions, as did almost everyone else in the society around them. Women…suffered under these assumptions" (xv). She questioned why "a literature that prides itself on exploring alternatives or assumptions counter to what we normally believe has not been more concerned with the role of women" (xv). One of her possible answers: "this literature, designed to question our assumptions, cannot help reflecting how deeply certain prejudices are ingrained – despite its sometimes successful efforts at imaginative liberation" (xv-xvi).

Certainly things have changed since 1975 – but not enough. SF literature is still not quite mainstream or canonical; while *The New Yorker* and *PMLA* have published "science fiction" issues, the fact that they did so in "special" issues demonstrates the distinction between this and other types of literature commonly appearing in these two major publications. Women continue to be marginalized within the marginalization of SF/science fiction. The "geek chic" contingent has brought SF as a genre to the attention of the mainstream but has reified its status as a "boy's club." Some of the most successful recent Hollywood films – films most, if not all, of our

college students are likely to have seen – are SF/science fiction films, such as *The Hobbit, The Harry Potter Series, The Hunger Games, The Avengers,* and *The Dark Knight Rises.* J. J. Abrams' reboot of the *Star Trek* movie franchise, coupled with his upcoming *Star Wars* movies, has increased already-present interest in these two classic SF series. Americans have fallen in love with the contemporary incarnation of the British television series *Dr. Who.* Yet these wildly popular SF narratives continue to be male-dominated narratives.

We as instructors can use these and other popular SF narratives, with which our students are already familiar, to open up the discussion of women's representation in SF, both as characters and as creators. For example, many of these films – including the entire original *Star Wars Trilogy* – fail the Bechdel Movie Test,[16] a measure of gender bias in popular culture. The degree to which women remain underrepresented in SF can also be measured by the fury that arises in the geek culture whenever attention is drawn to that fact. I have already discussed the overwhelmingly hostile response to *Feminist Frequency's* discussion of tropes in video games. Die-hard male *Star Wars* fans will assert that their beloved films cannot possibly contain any sexism because of the brave and powerful Princess Leia; yet in *Return of the Jedi* Leia, wearing a leave-nothing-to-the-imagination metal bikini, is chained in Jabba the Hutt's palace. Yes, she kills him by strangling him with that same chain – but only after Luke Skywalker has come to rescue her and while nearly naked to titillate the viewer's male gaze. *Harry Potter* fans will point to Hermione as a strong and positive female character – yet it is Harry who always saves the day and Hermione's most dramatic moment in the final book and film is when she passionately kisses Ron Weasley. Sure, Captain Kirk is a womanizer – but it's okay because

[16] The Bechdel Movie Test was created by and named after the graphic novelist Alison Bechdel. In order to pass the test, a film (or book or television show) has to fulfill the following three criteria:

1.) It has to contain at least two named female characters.
2.) The female characters have to talk to each other at least once.
3.) The female characters have to discuss something *besides* men with each other.

he's so *cool*. The very fact that male geeks go to such concerted extremes to defend their beloved narratives against claims of gender bias is proof of its existence. I suspect that many of our students, when confronted with these challenges to the "perfection" of their beloved stories and films, will respond in the same way. However, we have an opportunity to turn this challenge into teachable moments as well as present our students with more liberatory feminist SF narratives.

No Girls Allowed – Science Fiction and Gender Bias

Science fiction is a fairly new term for an established genre. Many consider Mary Shelley's 1819 novel *Frankenstein* to be the first science fiction novel. Brian Aldiss calls *Frankenstein* "the first real novel of science fiction," continuing by saying, "combining social criticism with her own ideas, while conveying a picture of her own day, Mary Shelley anticipates the methods of H. G. Wells…and some of the writers that followed him" (qtd. Sargent xvi). Ironically, Shelley's milieu (she also wrote the dystopian science fiction novel *The Last Man*) was soon appropriated by voices of male writers such as Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Science fiction continues to be dominated by male writers to the present day. In 2011 *The Guardian* conducted a poll of readers' top 500 SF novels. American writer Nicola Griffith commented on the results: "I scanned the Guardian comments – yes, all of them – and counted only 18 women's names. Eighteen. Out of more than 500…The ratio of women to men is 1:24. About 4%" (qtd. Barnett). In his *Guardian* article in response to the poll, David Barnett writes, "Perhaps the received wisdom that SF really is just for boys is true." A number of the online comments following his article are extraordinarily aggressive, with commenters even using obscene language to attack

the author and anyone who questions gender bias in science fiction. One commenter even went so far as to say, "Many modern women writing in SF are derivative and uninventive compared to the men."

Male and female writers also often approach science fiction differently. Science fiction can be divided into "hard" and "soft" science fiction. Hard science fiction is literature that explicitly and accurately discusses scientific theory. H. P. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" is a hard science fiction story. Writers of hard science fiction are predominantly male: Gene Wolfe, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, and William Gibson, for example. In contrast, soft science fiction deals less explicitly and/or accurately with scientific theories and is more concerned with characterization and plot. Many well-known female writers of science fiction fall into this category, such as Marge Piercy, Tanith Lee, Ursula K. LeGuin, and Octavia Butler.

One possible reason for the dearth of female hard science fiction writers (and readers) is that women, from an early age, are tacitly or openly discouraged from taking an open interest in science. In her 1990 article "Utopian Science: Contemporary Feminist Science Fiction Theory and Science Fiction by Women," Jane Donawerth writes:

> in the United States, participation by women in science education and science fields is still discouragingly low. The pattern is set by high school. Reasons that feminist scientists have suggested for these differences between male and female participation include overt discrimination, lack of encouragement from parents and teachers, scarcity of role models, and teaching methods uncongenial to female students; the higher the level of education or profession, the more extreme the discrimination. (537)

These words are still true today. There is a significant dearth of women in science, to the extent that higher-level educational institutions sometimes go out of their way to recruit female students. Many female science fiction writers may not have the requisite scientific background to discuss scientific theories in their work beyond the level of an educated layperson. C. S. Lewis explicitly stated that he was not concerned with actual scientific fact when he wrote his *Space Trilogy*. In comparison, female science fiction writers may not be choosing soft science fiction due to personal or literary preference, but rather because they lack proper scientific background in a society that is still inimical to female scientists. Another important factor is the politics of publication of hard science fiction. Just as the academy and society have not welcomed female scientists, the publishing world has not welcomed female writers of hard science fiction. Many women writers historically have published hard science-fiction under androgynous or male pseudonyms: C. L. Moore (Catherine Lucille Moore) and James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Bradley Sheldon), for example.

Does the distinction between science-fiction written by men and that written by women signal a difference in gender-linked narrative style? Donawerth argues that it does, saying, "A crucial difference between the science depicted in men's science fiction and women's science fiction is, quite simply, the participation of women" (537). Both Lewis and Lovecraft demonstrate the truth of her statement: in the former, the only women present in the texts I have discussed (the Green Lady and the two Camillas) are stereotypically portrayed and non-central; in the latter, women are almost or totally absent. Donawerth contends that feminist science fiction by women tends to treat the concept of utopias,[17] not the least because egalitarian treatment and representation of women in the science professions is a utopian goal. She notes,

[17] This argument can be extended to dystopian SF, for a dystopia is a failed utopia, as in *Oryx and Crake* and the more recent *Hunger Games Trilogy* by Suzanne Collins.

"rather than the traditional view of male science as a monolithic progress from natural law to natural law, women writers, like feminist science theorists, generally recognize that our current science is 'a human construct that came about under a particular set of historical conditions when *men's* domination of nature seemed a positive and worthy goal'" (539-540). In other words, women science fiction writers choose not to deeply engage with actual scientific doctrine because that very doctrine is patriarchally-coded.

As Harding states, "researchers have raised a variety of criticisms against the sexism and androcentrism that have shaped the results of research in biology and the social sciences" (39). As a former physicist, I would also extend that statement to include the physical sciences. Just as Hope Mirrlees and H. D. were seeking a new narrative to describe complexities of mythologies and science in the post-WWI era, contemporary speculative fiction writers like Margaret Atwood are seeking to discuss scientific ideologies within new narratives that examine and deconstruct the patriarchal hegemonies inscribed in many hard science-fiction texts.

Margaret Atwood – Science Fiction's Handmaid?

Margaret Atwood directly challenges some of the established genre conventions of science fiction in her novel *Oryx and Crake*. In her article "The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx and Crake 'In Context'," Atwood discusses the conventional definitions of science fiction. She relates the following anecdote:

> I got into hot water recently on a radio talk show in Britain: the radio person said she'd just been to a sci-fi conference there, and some people were really, really mad at me. Why? said I, mystified. For being mean to science fiction, she said. In what way had I

> been mean? I asked. For saying you didn't write it, she replied. And I having had the nerve to win the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Science Fiction. (513)

Atwood is subverting and re-defining the concept of science fiction as a revolutionary female writer; as she says, "I liked to make a distinction between science fiction proper…and speculative fiction…some people use both terms interchangeably and some employ one of them as an umbrella term, under which subgenres may cluster. Speculative fiction may be used as the tree, for which science fiction, science fiction fantasy, and fantasy are the branches" (513). Not only is Atwood cleverly employing an organic metaphor for a very technologically-oriented genre, she is refusing to conform to pre-determined genres. She is not only seeking to liberate her text from the claws of current definitions but also trying to liberate speculative fiction from its marginal status in the literary canon as compared to realistic fiction. For, as she says, "we have shambled into the bad habit of labeling all prose fictions as novels and of judging them accordingly – by comparing them with novels or with 'realistic' fiction generally…But there's more to…[reality]. Speculative fiction can bring us that other kind of [reality]: it can speak of what's past and passing, but especially of what's to come" (515).

Yet not all readers and critics share Atwood's view; a *New Yorker* review contemporary with the book's original release (19 May 2003) contains a subtext of sarcasm and derision that mirrors the criticism at the science fiction conference Atwood discusses. In "Bioperversity: Margaret Atwood's Genetically Engineered Nightmare" Lorrie Moore states that "Atwood has always been interested in pilfering popular forms." Moore derides the book, saying, "a morbid silliness begins sporadically to assert itself, like someone, exhausted by bad news, hysterically succumbing to giggles at a funeral. Atwood begins to smirk and deadpan." Moore also references a previous negative review of Atwood's other speculative fictional dystopia, *The*

Handmaid's Tale, but offers "praise" for *Oryx and Crake* as follows: "As for the characters here…They are mostly male, Atwood being rare among feminist writers in apparently liking her men—if not their institutions—better than her women. (Not since Edith Wharton has a female writer filled her oeuvre with so many unpleasant female characters.)" This is a blatantly sexist and generalist statement that not only unfairly critiques other feminist writers but also imposes flawed categorizations upon Atwood's text. Moore praises Atwood's transparently feminist text for its supposed *unlike-ness* to other feminist texts. She also reveals her lack of understanding of more subtle feminist themes by completely failing to understand Wharton's many complex and sympathetic female characters, such as Charity Royall in the short novel *Summer*. The crowning irony is that this review is ostensibly *positive*: the reviewer concludes by stating "Atwood takes the feminine view; here mother love is the great sustainer, the protean protector, the tender magician, and its loss the great loss" and damningly compares Atwood's novel to the children's book *The Runaway Bunny*.

Such critique stems not only from the dominant ideology surrounding female narratives, science, and science fiction, but also from a shallow understanding of Atwood's narrative. Moore praises Atwood for including two main male characters, including "Snowman," the primary narrator. If considered in conjunction with *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was told from a woman's point of view, *Oryx and Crake* may seem anomalous. I argue that Atwood is actually subverting the conventions of science fiction by only superficially re-inscribing them. The predominance of the male narrator, seemingly the sole human survivor of the cataclysm that has taken place before the novel's opening, is in dialogue with the convention demonstrated by Lewis and Lovecraft. Yet Snowman does not fit the trope of the traditional male narrator. Atwood divorces Snowman from traditional forms of masculinity. His name, Snowman, is short

for "Abominable Snowman," a cynically self-chosen appellation, as Snowman's birth name is Jimmy. He describes this title and himself as "existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards" (7-8). The apocryphal Abominable Snowman has been absorbed into pop culture and children's narratives as an almost sexless or de-sexed character, not dissimilar to the androgynous snowmen children may construct after a snowfall (this analogy is further bolstered by the child-like nature of the Children of Crake, over whose well-being Snowman ostensibly presides). Atwood describes Snowman as being dressed in a toga made from a sheet; the toga is a unisex garment that resembles a dress. Later in the novel Snowman acquires a flowered sheet that he fashions into a toga. He imagines that the Children of Crake view him as sexless: "*he wraps himself up [in the sheet] because he's missing his man thing, and he doesn't want us to see*" (8). Due to the fact that he is not genetically engineered, Snowman cannot take place in the masculine urination ceremony that protects the "home" of the Children of Crake from predators: "his piss is useless" (155). Upon observing a mating ritual among the males and females, Snowman thinks, "Why then does he feel so dejected, so bereft?...Because it's beyond him? Because he can't jump in? And what would happen if he tried?...What right does he have to foist his…self and soul upon these innocent creatures?" (167).

In Atwood's dystopia, Snowman, while physically male, lacks the traditional gender markers of masculinity. She is satirizing the masculine tropes of speculative fiction. Ironically, before the novel's apocalypse, Snowman, as Jimmy, displayed traditional masculine behavior. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes are a major factor in her society's downfall. As Donawerth writes, "women science fiction writers frequently exploit the irony of a future science that supports reversed sexual bias as natural, showing the male to be inferior or limited in his role" (542).

Atwood's story of the dissolution of modern society is told through Snowman's flashbacks to his previous life in a futuristic, science-oriented society that Atwood purposefully depicts as similar to our contemporary society. Atwood is meticulous with her scientific theory; in the acknowledgements to *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood notes that "deep [scientific] background was inadvertently supplied by many magazines and newspapers and non-fiction science writers encountered over the years" (376). She reports that she compiled a full list of her scholarly sources on the book's official website; however, at the time of this writing the website was defunct. While Margaret Atwood is not formally trained in the sciences, her father was an entomologist and in her youth she was fascinated with science fiction novels and movies.

In the book, Jimmy's father "worked for OrganInc farms. He was a genographer, one of the best in his field" (23), who takes part in genetic engineering experiments designed to provide a better life for humans, whether it be in the form of headless, multi-breasted and legged chicken-like animals that produce fast and easy meat, or human transplant organs harvested from genetically spliced pigs ("pigoons"). Jimmy's mother was once a geneticist as well but left the field due to ethical considerations. Later in the novel Snowman's flashbacks reveal that she abandoned his father and himself to join an underground resistance movement. The corporation employees live in gated communities called Modules where they are protected from the environmental and social chaos in the cities and less-privileged communities (pleeblands, an inventive portmanteau of "plebian" and "land") by armed military police called the CorpsSeCorps. Jimmy says in flashback, "these men had to be on constant alert. When there was so much at stake, there was no telling what the other side might resort to…[the Compounds] were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everyone else outside" (27, 28).

Early in his teenage years, Snowman meets Crake (then called Glenn), a brilliant student interested in futurity and science. Crake takes his name from a computer game called "Extinctathon," a twenty-question type game in which players are given clues referring to various extinct animals. Glenn took his name from the red-necked crake[18]. Jimmy and Crake first "encounter" Oryx, the other main character in the novel, as teenagers watching a sexually explicit Internet video. As Jimmy describes her:

> She was only about eight, or she looked eight…None of those little girls had ever seemed real to Jimmy – they'd always struck him as digital clones – but for some reason Oryx was three-dimensional from the start. She was small-boned and exquisite, and naked like the rest of them, with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon, frequent props on the sex-kiddie sites…she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer – right into Jimmy's eyes, into the secret person inside him. *I see you*, that look said. *I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want.* (90-91)

Both Jimmy and Crake are obsessed with Oryx from this first "encounter." Crake even goes to the potentially-dangerous (as he is viewing online pornography illicitly through his uncle's account) extent of taking a screen shot of her image.

From one perspective it may seem as if Atwood is reinforcing gender-based tropes in speculative fiction, even down to the child pornography in which Oryx participates, as child-like or underage sexualized female characters are common in SF. Like Lewis with the Green Lady in *Perelandra*, Atwood subsumes Oryx's narrative within Snowman's narrative. The only experience the reader has of Oryx is indirect and through Snowman's flashbacks. Yet Crake, the stereotypical "hero" and "alpha male" of the text, also has his narrative related through

[18] Atwood has stated that she "'saw' the book as [she] was looking over a balcony at a rare red-necked crake, during a birding expedition [in Australia]" (517).

Snowman's own narrative which is, in turn, related through the author's narrative voice as free indirect discourse. Unlike Lewis, Atwood gives Oryx agency over her own narrative. Oryx's direct gaze at the camera shows her autonomous and conscious participation in the internet video, despite the fact that Jimmy interprets her gaze through the male gaze of his own masculine desires and expectations.

Jimmy encounters Oryx in person as an adult after Crake has begun a relationship with her and involved her in his human genetic engineering experiments. Jimmy persistently urges Oryx to give him a coherent narrative of her life, especially the abuses she suffered as a non-Caucasian resident of an impoverished country (Oryx never reveals her original name, her ethnicity, or her native country). Oryx resists Jimmy's attempts to define her narrative and refuses to confirm or deny his belief that she was the child in the video. She answers his questions with responses such as "'I don't want to tell you that'…Once she'd said, 'You have a lot of pictures in your head, Jimmy. Where did you get them? Why do you think they are pictures of me?'"(114). Remembering his relationship with her later, Snowman thinks:

> How long had it taken him to piece her together from the slivers of her he'd gathered and hoarded so carefully? There was Crake's story about her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was different from both, and not very romantic at all. Snowman rifles through these three versions in his head. There must once have been other versions of her…but Jimmy had never heard these. (114)

Oryx remains an enigma not only for the characters in the text but also for readers of the text. Such readers may be well-versed in the tropes of science fiction and thus expect Oryx to neatly fit into one of the assigned "roles" for women in science fiction. The writer and critic

Sam J. Lundwall states, "The sex roles in science fiction are as unyielding as the metal in the space ship's hull; emancipation is an unknown word. The holy cry seems to be 'Woman, know thy place!'…they are generally treated as some kind of inferior creature" (qtd. Sargent xxxvi). Sargent continues the discussion by noting that after the 1960s when sex was "a more acceptable part of science fiction…the role of woman as sex object could be added to the traditional ones of housewife, childraiser, damsel in distress and scientist's daughter" (xliii). While Oryx seemingly fulfills some of these roles, ultimately she fulfills none of them, and any reader who attempts to fit her into these tropes is bound to be disappointed and frustrated.

Atwood, in post-modern fashion, is playing with the traditional patriarchal stereotypes and characters of the genre in order to re-write them. Therefore, Moore correctly calls *Oryx and Crake* a "pastiche" in the *New Yorker* review but incorrectly identifies the nature of the pastiche. Atwood does not "like" Oryx "less" than her primary male characters or find her "unpleasant;" she gives Oryx a degree of anonymity and autonomy she does not Snowman or Crake. Snowman and Crake can both be fitted into stereotypical science fiction tropes: Crake is the "mad genius" Doctor Frankenstein-esque character whose brilliant scientific work eventually destroys himself and those around him. Snowman is the sidekick; at one point in the novel he thinks of Crake as a lion and himself as a jackal. He also fills a role traditionally held by female characters. Harding notes that "women, in their limited roles, served a practical function for the writer. In his story he could have a character explain the workings of a gadget or a scientific principle to an ignorant girl or woman, and by extension to the reader" (xxxvii). At several points in the narrative Snowman serves exactly this function. After the cataclysm he cannot change anything of his complete lack of scientific knowledge or aptitude. Oryx is the sole character who resists the stereotypical genre tropes. Her unique status in the narrative is

highlighted by the book's title: it is not titled *Jimmy and Crake* or *Snowman and Crake*, but rather *Oryx and Crake* (emphasis mine).

Despite occupying much less "page space" in the narrative than Snowman and Crake, Oryx nevertheless plays a pivotal role in the plot. Upon graduating from high school, Crake attends the prestigious science-oriented Watson-Crick Institute, while Jimmy is barely accepted into the dilapidated and outdated humanistic Martha Graham Academy. Here Atwood wittily employs feminist themes. James Watson and Felix Crick were scientists who discovered the double-helix structure of DNA, for which they were awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962. However, their fellow scientist Rosalind Franklin was instrumental in their discovery. According to Lynne Osman Elkin's article "Rosalind Franklin and the Double Helix," Franklin provided most of the raw data and contributed to the formulation of the helix structure. Her work was published only after Watson and Crick's and they barely acknowledged her contributions. Only recently has her instrumental role in this important scientific discovery been fully recognized. Martha Graham was an important American dancer who helped shape contemporary dance and choreography. Jimmy dismissively describes the school as being "named after some gory old dance goddess of the twentieth century who'd apparently mowed quite a swath in her day." He continues, "There was a gruesome statue of her in front of the administration building…as Judith, cutting the head off a guy…Retro feminist shit, was the general student opinion" (186). These elements are not only a joke on Jimmy and Crake, whose relentless masculine definition of Oryx and of science in general lead to the destructive climax of the novel, but also on the oblivious reader (such as Moore, who calls this "morbid silliness"), who may read these elements as anti-feminist without understanding the more subtle and subversive nuances.

Oryx explicitly re-enters the narrative when Crake recruits Jimmy to handle public relations for his pet project at RejoovenEsense. One of the student services available at the luxurious Watson-Crick institute was sexual; students desiring sexual contact could request a willing partner. Crake reports that he encountered Oryx through this "service" and she became involved in his scientific projects. Crake's first major project is the BlyssPlussPill, a form of birth control that protects against all sexually transmitted diseases, gives the user enhanced sexual energy and an overall feeling of well-being, and prolongs youth. A last, unrevealed, function of the BlyssPlussPill is sterilization. Crake defends it by arguing that it "would confer large-scale benefits, not only on individual users…but on society as a whole; and not only on society, but on the planet" (294). Here Atwood is offering a seemingly-utopian solution to the current real-world problem of overpopulation and dwindling resources. While Atwood contends that *Oryx and Crake* "is not a classic dystopia," she admits that it does have "obvious dystopian elements" (517). The major dystopian plot device is the fact, revealed through Snowman's memories near the end of the text, that the BlyssPlussPill actually kills the users by spreading the JUVE (Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary – possibly a pun on "juvenile"). Crake has deliberately created the virus to destroy all human life and plans to replace humanity with the "Crakers," his genetically engineered new breed of humans and create a new utopia.

Crake ostensibly hires Jimmy to work on the ad campaign for the BlyssPlussPill (which, as Jimmy notes, is pointless as it basically needs no advertisement). However, his actual function is more significant; both Crake and Oryx expect him to take care of the Crakers when they are dead after their murder-suicide or perhaps double suicide following the outbreak of the virus. Crake introduces his creations as "floor models" (305) for designer babies, but in reality they represent his vision of human perfection:

> Racism…had been eliminated…Hierarchy could not work among them…Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturists hungry for land, there was no territoriality….They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two; thus their food was plentiful and always available. Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals…They were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing. They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money. (305)

In other words, it seems that the Crakers are free of most of the supposed "ills" of modern society through re-engineering of their neural pathways and genetic predispositions. I see a direct connection between Atwood's Crakers and Lewis' Green Lady and her King. Atwood is explicitly referencing the story of *Genesis*; Crake works and produces the genetically engineered humans in the Paradice dome. Oryx has joined the project for the sole purpose of teaching the Crakers; as Crake says, "'We needed a go-between, someone who could communicate on their level. Simple concepts, no metaphysics'" (309). She even goes amidst the Crakers naked, for "'They've never seen clothes. Clothes would only confuse them'" (309).

However, Atwood's paradise is much more complex than the trinity of Adam/Eve/the serpent that Lewis reinscribes in *Perelandra*. Crake eventually takes on the status of a godlike creator among the Crakers; when they ask, "who made them," Oryx responds, "'I told them the truth. I said it was Crake…I told them he was very clever and good'" (311). Also, Oryx is far from a traditional Eve figure, as she seduces and begins a sexual relationship with Jimmy while she is also in a relationship with Crake. In his reminiscences, Snowman thinks, "*Enter Oryx.* Fatal moment. But which fatal moment?...Which of these will it be, and how can he ever be sure

there's a line connecting the first to the last? Was there ever only one Oryx, or was she legion?" (307, 308). At the end of Snowman's memories, he recalls Crake slitting Oryx's throat a moment before he shoots Crake, leaving him the sole survivor to care for the Crakers, as Oryx and Crake had separately each made him promise. However, Oryx does not function as a simple victim or object of sacrifice. As Snowman thinks, "How much did she have in mind…How much did she guess?" (323). In his notes on the event, he writes, "As for Crake's motives, I can only speculate" (347). He might just as well have said the same of Oryx; not only of her motives, but of her actual identity and agency.

In death, both Oryx and Crake have entered into the mythology of the Crakers, a mythology that Snowman both depends upon and perpetuates. While Crake maintains that all curiosity about their origins or purpose, as well as need for religion, have been "edited out," (311), it is Oryx who, through her teachings, first establishes Crake as their creator. Snowman tells the Crakers that, before their existence, all was chaos:

> The people in the chaos were full of chaos themselves, and the chaos made them do bad things. They were killing other people all the time. And they were eating up the Children of Oryx [animals], against the wishes of Oryx and Crake….And Oryx had only one desire – she wanted the people to be happy, and to be at peace, and to stop eating up her children…And then Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the Chaos*. And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away. He cleared away the dirt, he cleared room…For the Children of Crake!...And for the Children of Oryx as well! (103).

In his retelling, Snowman makes Oryx the initiator of the creation of the Crakers, rather than Crake. The result is a god/goddess duality that more closely resembles the deities of pagan religions or the plurality espoused by H.D. than the patriarchally-centered tenets of Christianity.

Moreover, in Snowman's mythos, Oryx has more agency than Crake. She is the one who initiates the current order by suggesting it to Crake; he is only obeying her wishes by changing the world. The fact that Oryx also stands in dominion over the animals is a reversal of the traditional story of *Genesis,* in which God gives Adam rulership over the animals as well as the task of naming them. In *Genesis,* Eve is literally Adam's appendage as she is formed from his rib and is subordinate to his authority as well as the source of original sin. In Snowman's mythology, Crake's actions are subordinate to Oryx's wishes, which may have been true since Snowman is unable to unravel Oryx's identity or motivations. As well, it is not Oryx who brings about the epidemic virus in a sexual metaphor; it is Crake in a pill designed to prevent conception and increase human beings' pleasure in and ability to have sex. Atwood, like Mirrlees and H.D., is playing with the traditional forms of patriarchal religious and mythological narrative to re-cast them in a complex and empowered feminist narrative.

Donawerth writes:

> [Female science fiction writers] pieced together suggestions from linguistics, personal rhetoric, parapsychology, and the study of empathy and gesture in order to envision a future that would include knowledge of communication, which is traditionally important to women, legitimated under the title…of science, and directed nonhierarchically to all species (540).

Communication and narratives are a central theme of *Oryx and Crake*. Snowman thinks of his role among the Crakers as "a cross between pedagogue, soothsayer, and benevolent uncle" (7). Yet he cannot tell his own narrative because he literally lacks words to describe it in terms that the Crakers can understand; for example, he explains his facial hair as feathers but lacks the means to explain his baseball cap, which he keeps for nostalgic reasons, as other than

"removable hair that isn't hair" (8). He is the last bastion of the patriarchal narrative of the pre-apocalyptic world and responsible for the new "utopian" narrative. Snowman thinks, "He is Crake's prophet now, whether he likes it or not; and the prophet of Oryx as well. That, or nothing. And he couldn't stand to be nothing, to know himself to be nothing. He needs to be listened to, he needs to be heard. He needs at least the illusion of being understood" (104).

Even before the cataclysm Snowman was engaged with the complexities and hierarchy of language; his work in advertising involved using the proper words to describe a product for "Nothing's worse than last year's adjectives" (246). Yet during his actual job "corporately speaking, he was a drudge and a helot. He was to cudgel his brains and spend ten-hour days wandering the labyrinths of his thesaurus and cranking out the verbiage…Once in a while he'd make up a word…but he never got caught out" (249). After the cataclysm Snowman keeps lists of long, archaic words in his head like mantras, such as "Valance. Norn. Serendipity. Pibroch. Lubricious." For, he thinks, "When they're gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone everywhere, forever. As if they had never been" (68). A valance is a type of curtain, and pibroch a variety of Scottish music. Lubricious, tellingly, refers to bodily fluids associated with sexual arousal. However, norn may refer to the three female goddesses of fate in Norse mythology (Wyrd, Verdandi, and Skuld), who rule the destinies of all mortals and gods. Serendipity means an unexpected but positive result. While the term norn may refer to Oryx in Snowman's mythology, or perhaps to the trio of Oryx, Crake, and Snowman, Atwood's use of serendipity as one of Snowman's mantras suggests that the result of Crake and Oryx's actions may ultimately be more favorable than unfavorable and is in keeping with her claim that the novel does not depict a typical dystopia. These words are useless to Snowman because the previous patriarchal narratives utilizing such words no longer exist.

In the Beginning Was the Word – *Oryx and Crake*, *1984*, and *Swastika Night*

At the end of *Oryx and Crake* Snowman leaves the Crakers in search of what he believes to be other human survivors. Before leaving, he thinks:

> he should make a speech of some kind to the Crakers. A sort of sermon. Lay down a few commandments, Crake's parting words to them. Except that they don't need commandments: no *thou shalt nots* would be any good for them, or even comprehensible, because it's all built in. No point in telling them not to lie, steal, commit adultery, or covet. They wouldn't grasp the concepts. (366)

The idea that a concept or action cannot exist without its associated referent is reminiscent of Orwell's *1984*, which Atwood discusses in her article "*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context." As she notes, Orwell used "Newspeak" in his novel as a tool of a fascist and authoritarian society. She says, "by expurgating all words that might be troublesome…and by making other words mean the opposite of what they used to mean…the rulers…wish to make it literally impossible for people to think straight" (516). In *1984*, the elimination of "undesirable" concepts through the limitation of language and personal narrative is the ultimate tool of the repressive patriarchy, symbolized by the ever-present "Big Brother." Yet the changes in language fostered by the rise of the Crakers in *Oryx and Crake* are ultimately liberative, not repressive. Atwood continues by saying, "The majority of dystopias – Orwell's included – have been written by men, and the point of view has been male" (516). While Snowman is male, his point of view is determined by the female author and Atwood directly exposes the limitations of Snowman's perspective, especially as applied to Oryx.

In fact, Orwell has pulled a "Big Brother" himself in regards to *1984*. *1984* is perhaps *the* most widely-read dystopian novel. It is a permanent fixture in high school and college classrooms. When I took the GRE Literature in English subject test, the very first question on the test was to properly identify the first line of Orwell's *1984*. The phrase "Big Brother" is burned into the collective consciousness; it is the title of a world-wide franchise reality television show. A lyric from goth/glam-rock star Marilyn Manson's song "Disposable Teens" – "I'm a rebel from the waist down" – is taken directly from *1984*. Yet Orwell's novel is not nearly as revolutionary or foundational as most readers believe. In 1937, 12 years before *1984*, Katherine Burdekin published *Swastika Night*. *Swastika Night* is an alternate-history SF narrative in which Adolf Hitler won the war and, 200 years afterwards, is worshipped as a god. The male Nazis in the tale are homosexual and women are completely disenfranchised, existing only for the purposes of reproduction. *1984* bears a remarkable resemblance to *Swastika Night*; in her introduction to the book, Daphne Patai says, "internal similarities suggest that Orwell, an inveterate borrower, borrowed also from Burdekin" (xii). Patai lists some of these similarities:

> Both *1984* and *Swastika Night* depict totalitarian regimes in which individual thought has been all but eliminated and toward this end all information about the past, and even memory itself, has been destroyed…In both books the world is divided into distinct empires in perpetual and static competition…Furthermore, in each book there is a rebellious protagonist who is approached by a man in a position of power…he gives the protagonist a secret book and thus knowledge. In both novels, also, a photograph provides a key piece of evidence about the past…As in *Swastika Night*, in *1984* the secret opposition is called a Brotherhood…In both novels, too, there are official enemies to be hated…and the eternal mythical leaders, Big Brother and Hitler, to be adored (xii – xiii).

The relationship between *Swastika Night* and *1984* is analogous to the relationship between *Paris* and *The Waste Land*. In both cases a work by a female author was the direct precursor for a similar work by a male author – and, in both cases, the male author's work has been praised and widely-read while the female author's work is nearly forgotten. *Swastika Night* is practically unknown and has not yet been the subject of the type of re-discovery that *Paris* has been. Readers and critics continue to sing the praises of *1984* and hail Orwell as a prophet, all without knowing that Katherine Burdekin did it first.

1984, Swastika Night, and *Oryx and Crake* would form an excellent dystopian trilogy for the college literature classroom. I suggest starting with *1984*, which will already be familiar to some if not many of the students. The instructor should take the "traditional" approach to Orwell's work by praising its pointed cultural critique and far-sightedness, as well as noting Orwell's discussion of the power of language to shape the world – if you can control language, you can control history and human thought. I advise drawing connections between Orwell's world and the current American "culture of surveillance" with stop-and-frisk laws, hidden cameras, airport scanners, and increasing attacks upon personal rights. It would be helpful to include Foucault's panopticon as well. We as instructors can then completely de-centralize *1984* with *Swastika Night*. Just as with *Paris* and *The Waste Land*, we can ask our students, "Did Orwell steal from Burdekin?"

Reading *Swastika Night* also opens up *1984* to a feminist critique. According to Patai, "Orwell cannot and does not provide a name for the key factor that explains [his] Party's preoccupation with domination, power, and violence: these are elements in the gender ideology that Burdekin labels 'the cult of masculinity'…Burdekin gives her depiction of a totalitarian regime a critical dimension totally lacking in Orwell's novel" (xiii). We should pose our

students the question of *why* Orwell appropriated so much from Burdekin but left out this "critical dimension." Are Burdekin's beaten-down, abused, and beast-like women, ultimately, *really* all that different from Orwell's heroine Julia? Julia lacks the intelligence to understand the secret Book of the Brotherhood O'Brien gives Winston; like the women in *Swastika Night*, her purpose in the narrative is totally sexual and she is only "a rebel from the waist downwards."

This brings our students and us to *Oryx and Crake*, the daughter of *Swastika Night* and *1984*. Atwood is in conscious dialogue with Orwell's text; she is also thus in unconscious dialogue with Burdekin's text. She is also in dialogue with Burdekin's feminist sensibilities. *Oryx and Crake*, as anti-fascist dystopia, presents an alternative to both Burdekin and Orwell; our students and we may choose not to see it as a dystopia at all. Snowman rejects the role of Hitler/Big Brother; Oryx shapes Atwood's world and displays a personal agency foreign to both Julia and Burdekin's oppressed women. Once we have guided our students to view *1984* in a new critical light and question not only its canonical supremacy but its gender bias,[19] we can hopefully bring them to question their own personal pop-cultural canons and re-examine *Star Wars* and Batman in this new light.

[19] *Swastika Night* and *Oryx and Crake* are also excellent texts for Queering Orwell's narrative.

CHAPTER 6: THE ELEPHANT'S BACK – CAITLIN R. KIERNAN

> Women are writing many of the things male…writers thought could never be written; they are opening up whole new areas to us; they are making us examine tenets and shibboleths we thought were immutable.
>
> - Harlan Ellison, from "*Vertex* Interviews Harlan Ellison"

Caitlin R. Kiernan is perhaps SF's best-kept secret. Even hard-core fans of the genre have seldom heard of her and a quick survey of the English department where I teach showed that only one other professor had heard of her. To the best of my knowledge, at the time of this writing there is not one single scholarly article on her work. My 2012 NeMLA presentation on Kiernan (entitled "A Terrible Beauty: Caitlin R. Kiernan's Feminist Re-Visioning/Re-Envisioning of the Sacred") was the first time her work has been discussed in a professional critical forum. I contend that her work has been supremely successful at establishing a feminist discourse of imaginative liberation, including contemporary discourses such as alternate sexual identities, pansexuality, ecological issues, and even transhumanism. She deserves the critical discovery that Mirrlees' work is just beginning to experience.

Not only does Kiernan present a synthesis of mythology and science in her work while paying homage to earlier writers such as Lovecraft, she also transcends genre and narrative conventions to produce a text that subverts and re-defines narrative, gender, and normativity. Her *Wikipedia* page (which, she notes on her blog, she has reviewed for accuracy and of which she approves) describes her as a "transsexual, lesbian, and a Wiccan" and reports that she lives openly with her lesbian partner who is a photographer and dollmaker. Kiernan's Queer personal identity is reflected in her work, often in pseudo-autobiographical manner; the most notable example of this is her recently published novel, *The Red Tree*.

Kiernan, like Mirrlees, H.D., and Atwood, approaches mythology and science and technology from a feminist perspective that rejects patriarchal strictures and dominant hegemonies. Yet Kiernan is engaged in this re-defining discourse in a more postmodern manner as she explicitly discusses her authorial intentionality. She takes advantage of contemporary technology; Kiernan maintains a blog called "Dear Sweet Filthy World: The Online Journal of a Construct Sometimes Known as Caitlin R. Kiernan." The title is obviously meant to be ironic and amusing, but it also highlights the way that Kiernan plays with and conflates identity and narrative. In her blog she directly addresses her writing, both works in process and published works. She also sometimes answers questions from readers regarding her writing. While she is often self-referential and self-disclosing, within and without her fictional texts she creates an intentional liminality that blurs the boundaries between author and subject, referent and referred.

Imagination's Debt to Science – Kiernan the Scientist

Like the other authors I have discussed, Kiernan attempts to unite mythology and modern science. Yet Kiernan is unique among them (and many other SF writers) because she has an extensive formal scientific background herself. She studied vertebrate paleontology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Colorado at Boulder and holds a Master's degree. She discovered a new species of monasaur, *Selmasaurus russelli* (a monasaur is a large extinct marine predator that is related to snakes) and has published articles in the *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology* as recently as 2002. Like Lovecraft, many of her main characters are scientists or have some sort of scientific background. I am hard-pressed to think of even one of her novels or stories without any scientific underpinning. Her horror-fantasy

novel *Trilobite* included a glossary of scientific terms appearing in the text. Even if Kiernan is no longer actively working in the sciences, she stays abreast of current topics in science. She very frequently discusses scientific issues on her blog and she often posts news of scientific discoveries and advances on her twitter feed. Nor does she stick to paleontology; her discussions encompass astrophysics and cosmology, chemistry, neuroscience and genetics, and even the social sciences.

In an online interview with Jeremy L. C. Jones for *Clarkesworld Magazine*, entitled "Finding the Language I Need: A Conversation with Caitlin R. Kiernan," Kiernan says:

> I need a world filled with wonder, with awe, with awful things. I couldn't exist in a world devoid of marvels, even if the marvels are terrible marvels. Even if they frighten me to consider them. What would be the point of a world like that, a humdrum world of known quantities and everyday expectations? A lot of people don't grasp the importance of uncertainty to the scientific enterprise. A fact is only a momentary model of some aspect of the universe, backed by explanatory theory, waiting to be revised upon further study. Likewise, my stories rely upon uncertainty, the inscrutable nature of both the human mind and the fantastic. Also, just as science is an undertaking that requires endless revision in search of one ideal truth that will likely always lie beyond the grasp of the scientist, so my writing has passed through innumerable stages of reinvention.

Kiernan's understanding of the role of science in her work is more organic than that of Lewis, who essentially used science as a tool to further his patriarchal and Christian polemic. While it resembles the manner in which Lovecraft incorporated science in his writings, to Kiernan modern science and technology does not lead to the inimical wasteland conceptualized by Lovecraft and Eliot. As she says, science leads to marvels, even if they are "terrible

marvels." There is a direct connection here between her conception of science and the idea of the romantic sublime and Yeats' "terrible beauty." While the marvels about which she writes may eventually lead to pain and destruction, they also allow her characters to transgress ordinary reality and experience. As he demonstrated in "The Colour Out of Space" and "The Thing on the Doorstep," as well as in his other works, Lovecraft, in a pseudo-Puritanical manner, viewed such transgressions as capable only of bringing horror and destruction. Kiernan is more able to traverse the liminal space between beauty and terror, or "pain and wonder" by utilizing the narratives of modern science, legend, and mythology.

Kiernan's treatment of science is also in dialogue with Sandra Harding's discourse regarding the masculine-oriented scientific bias. Kiernan, unlike the traditional male scientist, embraces the role of uncertainty and liminality in both science and fiction. Here she is very much in dialogue with quantum mechanics and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle: the idea that reality is fluxional and variable for each observer. Kiernan extends this liminality not only to her process and philosophy of fiction but also to her fictional characters. Many of her characters are traditional modernist "outsiders." They are often uncertain of their place in the world, their gender identity and sexuality, and even, in some of her transhumanist speculative fiction stories, *species* identity. Yet it is this very uncertainty and liminality that often leads them to transcendence and an ultimate liberatory transgression.

Kiernan's scientific background and the manner in which she incorporates it into her work serve a very important pedagogical function. Recently I was talking to a male student and science fiction fan at the school where I teach. The conversation turned to female writers of science fiction and he asserted that women could not write science fiction as well as men. Why? Because, he claimed, they always wrote soft science fiction or fantasy, while all the writers of

hard science fiction were male. I replied that was not true and he challenged me to name one female writer of hard science fiction. My immediate response: Caitlin R. Kiernan. Some of her work, such as the novella *The Dry Salvages* and her short story collection *A is for Alien*, contains hard science fiction as technically rigorous and accurate as anything by Arthur C. Clarke or Larry Niven. The student's response? Unsurprisingly, he had never heard of Kiernan. As instructors, we can use Kiernan in the classroom to challenge our students' gender biases regarding science fiction – in fact, they may find some of her hard science fiction stories too "hard" for their own understanding.

Many male science fiction readers, like this student, defend their sexist attitudes towards female writers of science fiction by saying that if women were capable of writing science fiction as well as men, there would be more women doing just that. I am reminded of Virginia Woolf's discussion of the fictional "Shakespeare's Sister" in *A Room of One's Own*. She concludes that, in Shakespeare's time, an equally brilliant and gifted woman – perhaps his sister – would simply have been unable to express her gifts in the manner that Shakespeare did, because of her gender. We are certainly far from Shakespeare's time when speaking of science fiction, as it is a genre that has gained popularity mainly in the 20th and 21st centuries. Yet how would Isaac Asimov's sister fare in the world of science fiction? Well, she would face significant sexism in pursuing an education in the sciences and from an early age would be openly or tacitly encouraged to join a more "womanly" profession. Without a formal grounding in scientific theory she might turn to soft science fiction or fantasy. Were she able to earn an advanced degree in the sciences and write hard science fiction, she would face sexism within the publishing industry and compete both with established male writers as well as with publishers who were already disposed against her because of her gender. She might end up taking a male pseudonym, like James Tiptree, Jr.

and C. L Moore. Finally, were she able to earn a scientific education and get published under her own name, she would likely still be ignored both by critics and fans – in other words, she would be Caitlin R. Kiernan.

It Is So Difficult to Say Just What I Mean – Kiernan's Narrative Voice and *The Red Tree*

In the interview with Jones, Kiernan says:

> The process [of writing]…began as a search for voice…I was obsessed with tearing apart language and putting it together in new ways. I was infatuated with the Modernists… I wanted to create a mad fusion of voices, a distillation, of all these authors [I admired], that I could then wield to my own ends. But what has happened, instead, is that I've found my own voice, admittedly greatly influenced by these writers and many, many more.

Some of the authors that Kiernan admires include H. P. Lovecraft, Baudelaire, Lord Dunsany, and Harlan Ellison. Yet she frequently references modernists like T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats, as well as earlier poets such as Matthew Arnold, Lord Alfred Tennyson, and Samuel Coleridge, especially in her earlier works. In her earlier novels *Silk* and *Threshold* and the short stories in her collection *Tales of Pain and Wonder*, Kiernan's "voice" included stringing words together to form new adjectives in a technique she has explicitly called "Faulknerian." Kiernan took her early narrative voice from canonical male writers; however, as her work progressed, she became aware of the need to develop her own narrative voice, of which *The Red Tree* is an excellent example. As Douglas E. Winter says in his introduction to Kiernan's *Tales of Pain and Wonder*, her work "fill[s] a space that is genuinely hers – thematically and stylistically" (18). Peter Straub points out in his afterword to *Tales of Pain and Wonder*: "A symbolic connection

between revelation and alienated protagonists…resonates throughout the Romantic tradition." He continues, "Kiernan's remarkable contribution to our literature has been to mold this theme into an expressive vehicle by embedding it within her narrative technique, thereby creating [her] aesthetic" (387).

While these elements pervade all her work, *The Red Tree* is representative of her aesthetic and narrative style. In the novel Kiernan cleverly conflates real life, her own experience, homage, legend, science, and fiction in a manner that creates a unique liminal discourse. In her blog, Kiernan discusses her personal identification with her characters, noting that when she wrote *The Red Tree*, "I became Sarah Crowe," the protagonist of the novel. Sarah Crowe is a fantasy/speculative fiction writer who is experiencing writer's block and has moved to Rhode Island for a change of scenery, where Kiernan currently lives. She rents the lower floor of "the old Wight farm" (5), near a giant red oak, the "red tree" of the title. The details of Crowe's personal life are so similar to Kiernan's own that it is difficult for the reader to separate autobiography from fiction.

For example, Crowe is openly lesbian and feminist, like Kiernan. Crowe grew up near Birmingham, Alabama and studied geology and paleontology, even discovering a new species of trilobites before turning to writing as a career. Crowe has a neurological disorder, possibly epilepsy, and in her blog Kiernan has alluded to her own health problems. Crowe's publishing career and the lackluster critical reception of her work parallels Kiernan's own writing career. Part of the reason why Crowe flees to Rhode Island is due to the suicide of her partner, Amanda. To the best of my knowledge Kiernan has been circumspect about this aspect of her personal history; however, it is known that someone to whom she was close, Elizabeth Tillman Aldridge, died in 1995. Nearly every one of Kiernan's books, including *The Red Tree*, is dedicated to

Aldridge and the suicide of a lover or loved one and its crippling consequences is a recurring theme in her fiction. Like Kiernan's current partner, Kathryn "Spooky" Pollnac, Amanda was a visual artist (Amanda worked in photo-montage), and Crowe has an affair and pseudo-romantic relationship with Constance Hopkins, the other boarder in the house, who is a painter.

With the story and character elements alone, Kiernan sets up a mode of narration and discourse that is partially a post-modern nod to her devoted fans, and which also legitimizes her main character's voice and gender/sexual identity because it is partially the author's own. It is a way for Kiernan to assert her own autonomy. Readers may try to guess exactly how much of the text is autobiographical and try to find Kiernan herself within the character of Sarah Crowe, but, ultimately, only the author knows to what extent she is encoded in her own narrative. Since no one element of Crowe's character can be *definitively* identified as strictly autobiographical (Kiernan discovered a new species of monasaur in her paleontological studies, for example, not a new species of trilobite), all autobiographical references in the text are called into question. Kiernan ultimately retains control over her own as well as Crowe's personal narrative by choosing exactly what and how much she wants to reveal. For example, in the text the exact motives for and form of Amanda's suicide are not revealed to the reader. Similarly, Kiernan has not spoken openly about Aldridge's death. Mirrlees', H. D.'s, and Atwood's work discussed here all contains a multitude of voices. *The Red Tree* ostensibly contains one main narrative voice, but other voices are subsumed within that narrative, including even the author's own.

The stylistic format of *The Red Tree*, as well as the multiple narrations, is an homage to Lovecraft (Kiernan names Lovecraft as a source of inspiration in her afterword to the book), yet Kiernan subverts the patriarchal conventions present in Lovecraft's narratives to reclaim them for her own feminist narrative. *The Red Tree* is presented as an anthropological text and is

introduced with an "Editor's Preface" written by Sharon D. Halperin, Crowe's literary editor. The preface is written after Crowe's apparent suicide and is an account of Halperin's trip to the farmhouse where Crowe lived. Kiernan, as Halperin, writes, "Having accepted the task of editing *The Red Tree* for posthumous publication, [the trip] seemed, somehow, like a necessary pilgrimage" (5). From there, the novel assumes manuscript form as entries from Crowe's diary that she kept while living in the farmhouse. Her diary entries also contain long excerpts from a manuscript she finds in the basement of the farmhouse. Like the novel, it is titled *The Red Tree* and is written by Dr. Charles L. Harvey, the previous tenant of the farmhouse who also committed suicide. The unfinished manuscript is Harvey's exploration of the supernatural and often bloody history connected with the red oak tree near the farmhouse. The quotes from Harvey's manuscript are even presented in a different typeface than the rest of the novel, further adding to the effect.

Lovecraft commonly created mood in his stories by including testimony from other characters, such as that of Nahum Gardner in "The Colour Out of Space." He also used invented texts such as the *Necronomicon* as well as fictional newspaper clippings, journal entries, and professional articles. The best example of this technique appears in "The Call of Cthulhu" in which the narrator divines the existence of the terrible oceanic Great Old One Cthulhu through an archive of such materials. Kiernan uses Harvey's manuscript in this way; the manuscript itself refers to other texts and people's testimony about the tree. Kiernan also employs several notational references throughout her novel. Some are authentic-seeming but obviously fictional, as in the "Editor's Preface" where, in a footnote, Halperin notes that she has received permission from Constance Hopkins to be mentioned in Crowe's published manuscript but was unable to get

an interview with Hopkins. Others, such as the references to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The History of Spiritualism* and the Charles Fortean occult magazine *Fate,* are entirely legitimate.

An excellent example of the conflation of narration and authorship occurs when Hopkins finds a story entitled "Pony" that Crowe has seemingly written. However, Crowe has no memory of writing the story. While she initially suspects Hopkins of having written it herself, she says:

> there is genuinely no way left for me to attribute the authorship of 'Pony' to anyone but myself. It's my voice, my handwriting, me exploring my own very personal concerns, and, most damning of all, a set of line edits that, so far as I know, are entirely of my own invention." (222)

Crowe's comments mirror Halperin's comments in the "Editor's Preface" when discussing whether or not Crowe actually wrote *The Red Tree.* Halperin says, "as I read it, I recognized [Crowe] on every page. If for whatever reason, some other author had perfectly aped her voice, most of the pages bear notes and proofreader's marks in Sarah's own unmistakable handwriting." She continues, "Ergo, if this is an elaborate forgery, it's one she literally had a hand in" (13).

The irony is that Sarah Crowe did *not* write *The Red Tree*; Caitlin R. Kiernan did. Moreover, the story "Pony," included in the text (in a different typeface than either Crowe's diary pages or Harvey's manuscript) is a story previously written and published by Kiernan. It first appeared in her erotic webzine, *Sirenia Digest,* and later in her short collection of erotic fiction, *Tales from the Woeful Platypus*. Crowe does not remember writing the story "Pony" because she did *not* write it! By drawing such direct parallels between her own narration and the narration of her protagonist, Kiernan once again is playing with the idea of authorship and narrational agency. Lovecraft used such multiple narration (also a common convention of

modernist texts, as demonstrated by Eliot and Mirrlees) to create a mood of realism and convince his readers to suspend disbelief. This technique worked so well that even now some credulous readers insist that Lovecraft's work was *nonfiction* and consists of tales *reported* to Lovecraft! In contrast, Kiernan is subverting this convention in order to establish her own type of narrative, distinct from Lovecraft and canonical modernism.

In *The Red Tree*, when she visits the local library Crowe is asked to autograph a collection of her early short stories. Readers may see this collection as analogous to Kiernan's early collection *Tales of Pain and Wonder*; Crowe tells the reader that her collection contains the short story "The Ammonite Violin," which is an actual story appearing in Kiernan's short story collection *The Ammonite Violin and Others*. In the "Editor's Preface," Halperin reports that when she signed the book Crowe wrote, "Joke's on you. But please do try not to take it too personally. – Signed, The Author" (15). This comment can be read on a number of different levels. First, it can be read as Crowe's words within the story; words that, as Halperin says, may be "an epigraph that might well serve both *The Red Tree* and her fiction-writing career as a whole. Maybe even her life as a whole" (16). On another level, one might read it as Kiernan's own words (after all, it is signed "The Author," not "Sarah Crowe") to her readers who attempt to tease out Kiernan's identity and personal life from the pages of the novel. Perhaps her readers should not take it so "personally" but rather accept Kiernan (and Crowe's) narrative on its own unique terms. *The Red Tree* is not confessional literature (a genre stereotypically associated with female writers and "feminine" ideologies) but rather a complex and well-formed fictional narrative. Finally, I see it as an ironic quip to Lovecraft and other canonical modernists. The "joke" here is that Kiernan has taken their textual narrative forms and subverted them, re-claimed them in her own feminist narrative voice. Like Mirrlees, H. D., and especially Atwood,

she has taken these tropes and re-invented them. Kiernan's *The Red Tree* has that in common with Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*; they are both satires, both "jokes" about the science fiction genre and its conventions as well as masterful works within the genre in their own right.

In *The Red Tree* Kiernan utilizes and subverts not only Lovecraft's formal and narrative conventions but some of his common plot conventions as well. Lovecraft commonly created mood by only suggesting the horrific events and creatures of which he writes. Kiernan follows this method in *The Red Tree*; even by the end of the novel she does not disclose the *exact* nature of the horror represented by the tree. On one of her two visits to the red tree, Crowe says, "I wondered how I ever could have mistaken it for anything so uncomplicated and inconsequential as a mere *tree*" (315). She quotes from canonical writers – Conrad, Jung, and Thoreau, among others – in order to create a mood of menace without explicit description. A recurring theme in Lovecraft's work is the "unnamable," or something so horrific and far beyond human perception that it completely defies linguistic description. Kiernan acknowledges this a few lines later, when Crowe says, "finally, in my own faltering language, here, before me, was all time given substance, given form, and the face of a god, or at least a face that men, being only men, would mistake for the countenance of a god" (315).

This introduces an important aspect of Kiernan's writing; her use of mythology in her works, including *The Red Tree*. Like Mirrlees and H. D., she draws inspiration from older legends and mythology, as in her use of old New England supernatural lore referring to the red tree and other strange events (some invented, some not) that she presents in Harvey's manuscript. Like Lovecraft, she has an over-arching mythos that appears in works other than *The Red Tree*, including recurring characters (one of these recurring characters, Esther Matthews, is briefly mentioned in *The Red Tree*). One aspect of this extended mythology is

borrowed from Lovecraft: an underground society of cannibalistic, quasi-human creatures called ghouls. According to both Lovecraft and Kiernan, human beings who are kidnapped by the ghouls will eventually take on their form and habits. These ghouls appear in a number of works by both Lovecraft and Kiernan and date back to ancient mythologies and archetypes. In *The Red Tree*, the tree appears to be at the center of an underground ghoul nexus that is a place of sacrifice. Harvey's manuscript gives the tale of a serial killer, Joseph Olney, who claimed his lover Bettina Hirsch was kidnapped by the ghouls, who demanded repeated human sacrifices as payment for her release. According to Olney, "I cannot say what they are, these bestial men and women I have glimpsed in the hole…At times, I think they look like dogs born of human mothers, and at others, the human offspring of wolves" (277). This is how Lovecraft described the ghouls in his own work.

Reversing how Eliot used Mirrlees' liberatory feminist narrative and re-cast it in his own patriarchal terms, Kiernan takes Lovecraft's essentially patriarchal narrative and re-casts it in her own feminist liberatory terms. Almost all of Lovecraft's protagonists are male, while women are usually cast in the auxiliary roles of wives or landladies. In *The Red Tree*, the main characters (Crowe, Hopkins, and, posthumously, Amanda Tyrell) are all *female*. The sole male characters are the landlord Sam Blanchard, who is a very minor character in the tale, and Dr. Charles L. Harvey, who is dead by the beginning of the tale and whose manuscript serves merely as an impetus for Crowe's own explorations. Crowe fills the role of a traditional Lovecraftian protagonist; she is a former scientist, a writer, and a scholar who is compelled to investigate the inexplicable events and horrors around her.

The female characters in *The Red Tree* are characters of power, just like the male characters in Lovecraft's tales. Crowe is initially the only one "allowed" to approach the tree;

when she attempts to visit it with Hopkins, the two become inexplicably lost. In several of Lovecraft's tales, the recurring male character Randolph Carter is able to travel through space and time and to fantastical worlds in his dreams; in *The Red Tree*, Crowe has several illuminating and prophetic dreams. Pickman is a Lovecraft character who consorts with and paints terrifying pictures of ghouls. In contrast, Hopkins, at the end of Kiernan's novel, has apparently produced several paintings of ghouls and ghoul worship at the red tree (all of which are signed "B. [presumably Bettina] Hirsch"). Even in Harvey's manuscript, tales of women such as Hirsch abound. As I have mentioned, sex and sexual identity, with the exception of "The Thing on the Doorstep" is essentially never an explicit factor in Lovecraft's tales. Crowe's lesbianism is an important aspect of her character and her sexual encounters with both Tyrell and Hopkins play an important role in the story and in the development of her character. I maintain that this "feminizing" of aspects of Lovecraft's stylistic and thematic technique is deliberate on Kiernan's part.[20]

Is the Cat Alive or Dead? – Quantum Physics and *The Red Tree*

Although *The Red Tree* is not a science-fiction tale and falls into the fantasy/horror subgenres of SF, there are two specific elements of the novel that serve as a good segue into some of her more explicitly science-fiction work. I have previously discussed Kiernan's remarks on uncertainty as well as the fact that one of the cornerstones of quantum physics is the existence of a fundamental degree of uncertainty when discussing the physical world on a sub-atomic level. The idea of

[20] This aspect of Kiernan's work is best summed up in a character that does not explicitly appear in *The Red Tree*. One of the central and most horrifying figures in Lovecraft's mythos is Cthulhu, who is always referred to by the masculine pronoun. Kiernan has a similar figure in her mythos, only hers is "Mother Hydra."

uncertainty and relativity recurs through the entire novel; for example, during an ill-fated trip to the cellar below the farmhouse, Crowe can remember what transpired but Hopkins has no memory of it, including things she said and events in which she participated. Crowe cannot remember having written the story "Pony," and her own and Hopkins' memory of specific important events over the course of the narrative differ significantly. Another tenet of quantum mechanics dealing with uncertainty is the concept that the presence of an observer alters the outcome of an experiment on the subatomic level (the "observer effect"). The famous *gedankenexperiment* (thought experiment) of Schrödinger's Cat makes use of this idea. In general terms, in the experiment the life or death of the cat depends on the state of the wavefunction of a subatomic particle. Yet, according to the Copenhagen Interpretation of the thought experiment, until there is an observer present, the state of the wavefunction is indeterminate. Only observation causes the wavefunction to "pick a state" and kill or not kill the cat. The observer-dependent nature of reality is illustrated in a scene near the end of *The Red Tree*. After Hopkins' apparent departure Crowe goes to her attic room to look for her. Initially she sees the entire room covered in red oak leaves (presumably from the tree) and a series of canvases with cryptic statements and quotes pasted upon them. Then the canvases change to paintings. As Crowe says:

> First, I saw the oak leaves. And then I inspected the seven canvases, each one bearing a single snippet taken from an old book or newspaper. Otherwise the canvases were naked. Then they weren't anymore.
>
> Glancing towards the attic door again, and preparing to leave and to go back downstairs, I saw that the change had occurred. I didn't see it happen. That is, I did not catch the canvases in the act of metamorphosing, assuming that's what they did. I'm trying, hard,

> to make no assumptions about process, or cause and effect, as I write this out. But assumptions are inevitable. (362)

During the early days of quantum physics (and even to the present day) many scientists balked at making assumptions about observation and cause and effect. Yet as Crowe says, "assumptions are inevitable." Just like in quantum mechanics, Crowe's observation "fixed" the state of Hopkins' paintings and, obviously, fixed them in a state pertinent to her and her own concerns. The fact that the state of the paintings is now fixed is established in the "Editor's Preface" where Halperin says that one of Hopkins' recent art installations "apparently included several of the canvases mentioned "in Crowe's manuscript" (9). This adds yet another layer of uncertainty for, according to Crowe, by the end of her stay in the farmhouse Hopkins's presence there and even her very existence are debatable.

Kiernan provides another intriguing ambiguity to her text through clever use of electronic resources that were obviously not available in Lovecraft's time. In her afterword, Kiernan acknowledges that an actual tree inspired the tree in the book:

> In August of 2006, while walking in the woods near Exeter, Rhode Island, I happened upon an enormous oak tree. There were a number of peculiar objects set all about its base…For no reason I could put my finger on, I found the sight unnerving, and didn't linger there…Regardless, like everything else that I see and hear, the oak tree was filed away as potential story fodder. And, two years later, from it grew the novel that became *The Red Tree.* (383)

Clicking "The Red Tree" on Kiernan's home page brings up a screen with a short streaming video at its center. The video, when played, shows images of the branches and trunks of an enormous red oak tree: the tree, one assumes, that Kiernan encountered in real life and

which inspired the tree of the novel. There are links in all four corners of the page; one, "The Red Tree," leads to the Amazon.com page to purchase the book. Clicking on the link entitled "Feed the Tree" pulls up a "page" from Harvey's manuscript. Another, "Wear the Tree," leads to an online store where browsers can buy a t-shirt imprinted with an image of the red oak, and "Download Wallpaper" provides computer desktop wallpaper with images inspired by and words from the book.

The most interesting by far is the link called "Evidence." Clicking on this link reveals several photos that are related to the events of the novel and are presented as legitimate, with citations and background information. For example, an image of a decrepit and narrow staircase is labeled, "Basement stairs, farmhouse at the 'old Wight Place.' *Courtesy Sharon D. Halperin*." There is a photograph of the cover of the January 1982 *Fate* magazine, mentioned in the novel. A trilobite fossil purports to be "*Griffithides croweii* (GSATC 274), collected by Sarah Crowe in 1977, described in Esther D. Matthews, 1983. 'A new proetid trilobite from the Fort Payne Chert (Lower Mississippian, Osagean) of Alabama.' *Journal of Paleontology.* Volume 57, Issue 4. *Courtesy Tuscaloosa Lapidary Society*." This is supposedly the trilobite that Crowe discovered in the novel. While the Tuscaloosa Lapidary Society is fictional, there are trilobites of the genus Griffithides, although none of the species croweii. While the *Journal of Paleontology* is a legitimate journal, there is no article in it by that title or author. There is also a sepia photograph of a "woman believed to be Bettina Hirsch" and another of "Joseph Fearing Olney (1822-1926), ca. 1922; photographer unknown. *Courtesy Greater Foster Historical Society*." The page also presents an "unnumbered page from Sarah Crowe's original typescript of *The Red Tree.* Handwriting has been verified as Crowe's by a graphologist certified by the American Board of Forensic Examiners, Inc. *Courtesy Sharon D. Halperin*." There is a picture

of "the old Wight Place" and an "illustration inspired by Sarah Crowe's 'Pony,' by Vincent Locke," which also appears with Kiernan's story in her collection *Tales from the Woeful Platypus.*

The conflation of reality and fiction creates another level of uncertainty for the readers, an uncertainty that mirrors the uncertainty within the narrative itself. Just as Crowe's experience of reality, fiction, and delusion is uncertain, the reader's experience of what is reality and what is fiction is uncertain, adding to the self-referential, meta-textual aesthetic of the novel. The liminality adds to the post-modern "joke" Kiernan plays on her readers. All reality and fiction is called into question and the reading experience becomes relative and dependent upon the reader's knowledge of Kiernan's own history, her blog, and her website: another aspect of the "observer effect." As instructors, we can encourage our students to engage with the online resources for Kiernan's novel and ask them the question: if you did not know this novel was fiction, would you think it was non-fiction based on the text and the online materials? We should also urge them to explore *why* Kiernan chose to present the narrative in the way she did. We could also initially present the text and online materials *without* specifying if they are fictional or not and see what students think – do they fall for Kiernan's "joke?"

Into Something Rich and Strange – Kiernan and Transcendence

Another scientific theme in *The Red Tree* has to do with Crowe's dead girlfriend, Amanda Tyrell, and ties in to Atwood's use of speculative biology and genetics in *Oryx and Crake*. Tyrell is a photomontage artist. She specializes in creating people's fantasies in visual form. Most of these fantasies are animal-oriented; as Tyrell says, "there's some pretty dark stuff in

people's heads…Some of them just need to see with their eyes something they've already seen in their *mind's* eye…It can get sexually explicit and intense, and most times it's a lot grimmer than unicorns and fairies and mermaids" (50). Upon viewing them, Crowe describes Tyrell's images as "impossible creatures engaged in unspeakable acts…sublime, grotesque, and beautiful images" (54). Some of the specific image details include "centaurs and satyrs, dryads, a host of dragons and merfolk…werewolves, wereleopards, weretigers engages in the acts of feeding and copulation, sometimes both at once…Women with the serrate teeth of sharks and men with blind, toothsome eels where their cocks should have been" (55). Crowe is sexually aroused by these images and the encounter results in sex between Tyrell and Crowe, which is the beginning of their relationship.

Tyrell calls her more serious clients "the self-described therianthropes…the otherkin. The Transhumanists and parahumanists" (56). All of these terms represent actual subcultures of people who have an interest in transcendence beyond the normative idea of the human. According to the website *Theriantropes United*:

> Therianthropes may describe their nature manifesting in terms of their cognitive processes, their outlook on life, their inner reactions and instincts, their senses, or through their physical body, though claims of actual physical variations from the norm tend to be regarded with skepticism both within and outside the subculture. Detailed descriptions (as with all inner experiences) vary widely, with common descriptions being of a spiritual bond, the soul of an animal within, a belief that they have an atypical or atavistic neurology, or an emotional shading of the personality…. Some therians pretend to carry physical traits of their animal in their human form.

Otherkin is a more general term used to identify a potentially slightly different subculture than theriantropes for, according to *Theriantropes United*:

> Otherkin is a collective term for an assortment of people who have reached the conclusion that they (spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically) are something other than human. The otherkin subculture is made up of people who usually believe themselves to be mythological or legendary creatures…The word is an Internet-derived neologism primarily used by members of that subculture and is somewhat fluid in definition, sometimes being broadened to also describe those who consider themselves to be animals, aliens, extradimensional beings, and other non-human entities. Theriantropes fall into the Otherkin classification, there is a distinguishable difference between the two groups. Whereas most Otherkin are of mythical creatures, Therians are strictly animalistic and recognize their humanity as being an integral part of their existence.

Theriantropes and Otherkin are often rejected and ridiculed by "mainstream" society. The website notes that therians are often seen as "freaks" and may be perceived as suffering from dissociative identity disorder, delusions, or hallucinations. It also reports that normative culture often assumes that people "adopt [this] identity to justify social difficulties - the outcast syndrome - or because they have a delusion and are in denial about their biological humanity."

Many non-dominant and/or non-Western cultures have historically embraced the concept of the fusion of animal and human. Multiple Native American belief systems include totem animals and human-to-animal shapeshifting, for example. In Japanese mythology, fox spirits (kitsune) may transform into human beings or possess human beings. The concept of the werewolf or lycanthrope comes from the forests of central and Eastern Europe. By engaging

with this particular sort of transcendence within her fiction, Kiernan is in dialogue with older mythological traditions, contemporary sub-cultures, and modern genetic engineering.

Kiernan touches on the theme of Otherkin and theriantropy elsewhere in *The Red Tree* through the ghouls that may "convert" humans to their bestial form. However, she explicitly discusses it in some of her other works. One of the earliest instances of Otherkin in her fiction occurs in the short story "Tears Seven Times Salt" in the collection *Tales of Pain and Wonder*. "Tears Seven Times Salt" is an inverted re-telling and re-visioning of the traditional fairy tale "The Little Mermaid." In Kiernan's tale, Jenny Haniver[21] is a contemporary young woman who is convinced that she shares a kinship with mercreatures, for her grandmother told her when she was a child that "Old Papa" had found her "down there [in the sewers of New York] in the shit and the dark" (88). She tells the child that "You were such a very ugly baby that even the fish people who live down there didn't want you…your Mama knew that you weren't really her baby and that's why she went away" (88).

Haniver spends her life obsessed with fish and marine life and undergoes unsuccessful amateur surgery to graft fish scales and skin onto her body, and potentially even to sew her legs together into a mermaid's tail. Ultimately Haniver seemingly dies in the sewers below New York trying to find her own "kind." Kiernan leaves it up to the reader whether Haniver is a literal "fish out of water" or if her ideations are a delusionary product of her grandmother's tales. However, the tale straddles the "revelation and alienation" Straub cites as characteristic of Kiernan's fiction. In "Tears Seven Times Salt," Haniver thinks, "*I won't die locked in here* [her human body]" (87). The reader may draw obvious parallels between Jenny Haniver and transgender/transsexual individuals who feel "locked into" the wrong body or those with

[21] "Jenny Haniver" is also a term sometimes used to refer to a fraudulent mermaid corpse created through taxidermy.

"alternate" lifestyles and/or preferences "locked into" an existence and a world that is fundamentally alien to them. Yet Kiernan offers some glimpse of revelation and transcendence, for in Haniver's dreams of swimming beneath the water as a merperson and engaging in union with a male, "She has never felt this safe, has never felt half this whole" (96). Even in Haniver's death there is a suggestion she has finally found union with the aquatic existence she desperately sought, for she "lets the familiar currents carry her down to the sea" (98).

Haniver's therian identity metamorphosis is ultimately spiritual, for simply sewing fish skin onto human flesh would not result in an actual scientific hybrid. Haniver even notes that it is "necessary but utterly insufficient, dead end to salvation or evolution, transcendence" (83). In some of her explicitly science fiction tales Kiernan incorporates parahumanism, the science behind human-animal hybrids, known as chimerae (the term "parahuman" is not generally used by the scientific community). Parahumanism also refers to the process of splicing human and animal genetic material. The vast majority of animal and human genetic mixing is done for medical purposes, such as mass-producing insulin and for organ transplantation, as Atwood theorized in *Oryx and Crake*.

There has been reasonable success within this branch of science; for example, in 2003 scientists at the Shanghai Second Medical University fused human cells with rabbit eggs. Some scientists are currently exploring similar techniques as an alternative to the widely restricted techniques of cloning and stem cell research. Parahumanism and the creation of chimerae is a significant ethical conundrum. There is currently no legally conducted scientific research on parahumanism due to moral and legal challenges similar to those levied against cloning and stem cell research. Some opponents feel that it immoral and irresponsible to create human-animal chimerae, while others point to problems such as whether the decision to produce chimerae

should be individual or social. Religious concerns and ideologies also play a large role in parahumanism's detractors. In the United States, there is a House Resolution entitled the "Human-Animal Hybrid Prohibition Act of 2008" that forbids the creation of human-animal hybrids. I am reminded of Lewis' demonization of the "Stingingman" in *The Dark Tower*, who may be regarded as a sort of chimera, and of the many horrific hybrids in Lovecraft's work. Although Lewis and Lovecraft were writing well before the possibility of the creation of actual chimerae, their attitude nevertheless represents a conservative ideology. Parahumanism represents only one point on the spectrum of transgression and transcendence. Lovecraft and Lewis' attitudes towards parahumanism and science in general mirror their attitudes towards other types of liberatory transgression, such as sexual and gender transgression. Unlike Kiernan, they prefer a world in which boundaries and identities are clearly defined by those in power: i.e., the patriarchal hegemony.

Kiernan, in contrast, adopts an empathetic tone towards her para- and transhuman characters, many of whom associate with marine species, like Jenny Haniver and Sylvia in "Faces in Revolving Souls" from her science fiction collection *A is for Alien*. Partially this may be because Kiernan's paleontological specialty is marine vertebrates. However, this is a facile explanation. On a basic level, the ocean is the fundamental cradle of human life (both internal and external) and parahuman transformation into marine chimerae is the ultimate atavistic union. The ocean is also an archetypal female symbol (Kiernan's "Mother Hydra") and her focus on marine parahumanism may also be read as a gendered act.

For Kiernan, transformation represents the ultimate act of transcendence. In the Afterword to *A is for Alien*, Elizabeth Bear says that in Kiernan's works, "It is not the past from which we struggle to escape. Not the monsters out of the id or out of time, the ancient unevolved

horrors that still dwell within us. It is ourselves, our social personas, our constructed realities" (209). For Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot, the "social personas" and "constructed realities" from which their characters yearn to escape are functions of change and of modernity – modern science, modern notions of social structure, modern acceptance of the rights of women, and non-normative definitions of gender and sexuality. Their escape is actually a regressive retreat. Mirrlees and H.D. turn to liberatory mythologies for redemption; Atwood's view of modern science as a means of redemption is ambiguous at best. However, Kiernan manages to find a truly transgressive and liberatory synthesis through the acceptance of sometimes seemingly horrific transcendence.

These themes are illustrated in "Faces in Revolving Souls," one of Kiernan's hard science-fiction stories. In this short story Kiernan speaks both to the desire for transformation and the hegemonic opposition to that transformation. The story is set in a futuristic yet recognizable world in which parahumanism is a reality. The main character, Sylvia, tries to join the ranks of the parahumans. She has to hide her interest from her mother, who, when she discovers Sylvia's cache of literature on parahumans (Kiernan calls them "changelings," referencing older tales about human children being stolen by fairies and supplanted by fairy children), calls it "sick shit" (49) and asks Sylvia is she is a lesbian. Her mother declares that the changelings are "all a bunch of queers and perverts" (50) and says "I'm a Christian woman and I don't want that filth under my roof" (51). Elsewhere in the story, Kiernan writes, "there's still a multitude of psychiatrists that consider polymorphy a sickness, and politicians who consider it a crime, and priests who consider it blasphemy" (45). Obviously Kiernan is drawing a parallel between different sorts of transgression – species transgression and sexual transgression. In my view, this makes her a bolder writer than Atwood. Atwood, too, is concerned with transgression

but Kiernan incorporates the "unspeakable" into her narrative. She goes "beyond" the idea of transgression as normative society would conceptualize it and, unlike others, embraces it. She turns the horror of Dr. Moreau's island into a kind of paradise.

Nevertheless, Kiernan does not posit a naïve or uncomplicated utopia through these various modes of transgression. In "Faces in Revolving Souls," Sylvia "sneaks away" to attend a convention on parahumanism, telling her family and colleagues that she is on vacation in Mexico. The changelings have already drafted a "Provisional Proposition for Parahuman Secession" (47) and a good portion of the conversation Sylvia hears at the convention relates to response to the changelings and the Proposition. The American establishment is trying to enact "anti-crossbreeding laws." Therefore, according to one of the changelings, "[restricting] who we can and can't marry, who we can fuck" (52). He asks, "How long do you think it's going to take before we start seeing ways preventing us from voting or owning property?" (52). Another changeling says, "DeVries [a politician] has already started talking about concentration camps…when [will] they start rounding us up and locking us up in cages?" (53).

As usual, Kiernan's narrative works on several levels. These remarks could as easily be applied to the LGBTQ community. While great strides have recently been made towards legalization, same-sex marriage is still prohibited in most states in the United States. In many other countries and regions, non-heteronormative sexuality has been and continues to be prosecuted as a crime, with Queer individuals being deprived of basic social and human rights as a result. Homosexuality was classified as a mental illness in the *DSM* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) as recently as the 1970s. During the Holocaust many homosexuals were literally imprisoned in concentration camps. Historically and currently many societies and nations have and continue to propose similar measures. For example, in 1988 the British

government under Margaret Thatcher legislated the notorious Section 28 anti-gay law and Thatcher herself proposed detention camps for homosexuals. In 2013 Russia adopted laws making it illegal to disseminate any non-heterosexual "propaganda" to minors and levying heavy fines for using the media to present non-heterosexual images and information. On a broader scale, Kiernan is discussing what happens, both literally and figuratively, to all those individuals and groups who refuse to conform to the idea of "normal" and who reject the dominant hegemony.

Sylvia's personal fate mirrors this group alienation and rejection. She would be utterly rejected by her human family and associates were she to make her true self known. As Sylvia thinks, "they'd do their best to have her locked away, or worse" (45). She feels out of place at the conference because of her seemingly pure human physical appearance. She calls herself "birth-blank" and "not quite a virgin, no, but the next worst thing, and all that pink skin to give her away" (45). Some of the other changelings react hostilely to her appearance; one asks "Is it some sort of secret, what you're hiding under that dress?" (54) and says "it's just that none of *us* are wearing masks" (55). Sylvia has chosen not to belong to the "us" of normative humanity, yet cannot fully join the "us" of the transgressive changelings.

At the close of the story, Kiernan reveals why: her transition has failed. She has chosen a non-specified aquatic form and her doctor has warned her that "there's always the risk of rejection…the risk of a violate retrovirus, especially when the transcription in question involves non-amniote DNA" (57). Once again Kiernan is using legitimate science. A retrovirus is an RNA virus that produces DNA from its genome, which is then incorporated into the host's genome. Implanting marine RNA into Sylvia would result in her body producing DNA from that marine animal and thus acquiring some of its characteristics. However, a violate retrovirus

(sometimes also called an oncovirus) would not function in this manner and would instead cause cancer, which has happened to Sylvia. Amniotes refer to terrestrial four-limbed animals with vertebrae, such as reptiles, birds, and mammals (including humans). Non-amniote marine animals would be those such as octopi or sea worms. Essentially, Sylvia has attempted to splice her human DNA with the DNA of a creature that is simply too evolutionarily and biologically distinct from humans. Kiernan describes the failed results of her metamorphosis: "The rubbery violet flesh beneath her navel is swollen and marbled with pustules and open sores. The tip of a stillborn tentacle, no longer than her index finger, hangs lifeless from her belly" (58).

Sylvia's failure is reminiscent of Jenny Haniver's failure; even the physical results are described similarly. Haniver's transplanted patches of fish skin result in "dark, red-rimmed patches of rot…the most recent, only two days old, has already faded, silverblue shimmer traded for a color like sandwich grease through a brown paper bag…cycloid scales flake away like dandruff, drift dead and useless to the floor" (86). Haniver's fate contains a faint hope of transcendence, while Sylvia's contains none. Yet "Faces in Revolving Souls" *does* suggest the ultimate success of the group, of the entire subculture. Fantastical changelings populate the conference: "the woman who is mostly a leopard, the fat man with thick brown fur and eyes like a raven, pretty teenage girl with stubby antlers and skin the color of ripe cranberries" (46). Other attendees have "iridescent scales that shimmer faintly in the dim light…[and a] blue forked tongue" (52) and "the striped, blonde fur of a tiger-lion hybrid, and six perfectly formed breasts" (53). Sylvia's friend and mentor, Fera Delacroix, has "so little left…that anyone would bother calling human" and "many hundreds of long quills that sprout from her shoulders and back, from her arms and the sides of her face" (47). Even though Sylvia's transformation has failed, the subculture and sub-community remains. Kiernan even suggests this in the name "Fera

Delacroix." Fera is related to "feral," or wild, and "Delacroix" is French for "of the cross." Sylvia may have sacrificed herself on the cross of metamorphic transgression, but the other changelings have not.

Sylvia herself is aware of this fact, for, as Kiernan writes:

> [She] looks down at Fera's hands, her nails grown to sharp, retractable claws, her skin showing black as an oil spill where it isn't covered in short auburn fur. Through she still has thumbs, there are long dewclaws that sprout from her wrists. Sylvia knows how much these hands would scare most people, how they would horrify all the blanks still clinging to their illusions of inviolable, immutable humanity. But they make her feel safe, and she hold them tight. (48)

The very existence of Fera and the other changelings is a challenge to the "blanks" and to their hegemonic "illusions." I categorize writers like Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot as "blanks" as well; their work expresses their horror of any mode of existence or reality that is not ensconced within the conservative patriarchal hegemony. Kiernan imagines a "horror" far beyond the horrors of the modern wasteland or modernist science, yet to her it has a "mismatched, improbable beauty" (47). At the very end of the story, Sylvia looks at the dead tentacle growing from her abdomen and says, "I think this is all the truth I need" (59). Her statement may be interpreted two ways. First, we may assume that her "truth" is the failure of her metamorphosis and personal transcendence. The other explanation, and the one I favor, is that her "truth" is the possibility of overall transcendence through parahumanism on a large scale, even if it should fail on an individual scale. Sylvia's failure is the exception that proves the rule and, like the impotent Snowman, an anomaly within a transformed majority.

Queering Kiernan – Alien Sex

Although "Faces in Revolving Souls" does not explicitly include sexual acts and cannot be classified as erotic fiction, much of Kiernan's science fiction deals with sexual encounters with non-human and/or alien beings. In her article "Alien Sex Acts in Feminist Science Fiction: Heuristic Models for Thinking a Feminist Future of Desire," author Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan writes, "Science-fictional representations of sex acts involving aliens are therefore bound to reinscribe the epistemological and ontological lineaments of the human sexual experience" (443). She argues that "alien sexuality…calls attention to the limitations of the all-too-human oedipal model of sexuality and to the feminist heuristic potential of gesturing towards radically alien sex" (443), citing works by Monique Wittig, Samuel Delany, and Angela Carter. I argue that Rogan's thesis does *not* hold true in regards to Caitlin Kiernan. While the whole of her work may not satisfy these criteria, I maintain that some of her erotic fiction does describe and embrace "radically alien sex" in a true feminist mode.

Rogan claims that "Wittig sees sexual difference as requiring revision by a third term that breaks the male-female binary on which all forms of oppressive power relation are based…[this is] the figure of the 'lesbian'"(443). She also criticizes both Wittig and Delany, saying their "alien sex…is not just a deconstructive treatment of the limits of desire – it is not, in other words, merely a catalogue of the strange and wonderful beings and their various interactions, a celebratory treatment of difference as such" (459). To me, Kiernan's alien sex is *exactly* that. She does not view lesbianism as uncomplicated or related to simple binaries, as the problematization of Sarah Crowe's relationship with both Amanda Tyrell and Constance Hopkins (although it is not alien sex) demonstrates.

Kiernan's true feminist alien sexuality is illustrated in her short story "In View of Nothing" from her short story collection *A is for Alien*. This is a disturbing, dream-like story that defies linear analysis. The female narrator is in a motel room that may or may not be located in Kyoto with an albino female cyborg with prosthetic legs and neural implants. Various clues in the story suggest the narrator is an assassin but she has no memory of how she got to the room. The cyborg repeatedly urges the narrator to examine a scrapbook of photographs of the same man, all of which initially seem completely identical but take on strange organic qualities by the end of the story. The "action" of the story is interspersed with descriptions of sex acts between the narrator and the other woman. The tale initially seems to present a riddle to the reader; however, Kiernan simply does not provide enough information for the reader to unravel the thread of that riddle. She forces the reader to accept the story as it is, without extended analysis or judgment – a statement that can be extended to the "alien sex" between the two characters.

In her article "Body Parts: Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Short Stories by Women," Jane Donawerth writes "in…short fictions by women, body parts and the body as model stand always for at least two other systems: science and gender" (474). She continues, "The queasy ease with which body parts disappear or metamorphose raises questions about gender and identity: in modern scientific culture, are women still less than men? what parts are they missing?" (480). Examining the alien sex in Kiernan's story from Donawerth's perspective would indeed reinscribe the "limitations" Rogan discusses. Yet Kiernan resists the value-judgments Donawerth discusses. In "In View of Nothing" there is no sense of something "missing" or "less" about the cyborg's prostheses or their lack; her body is frankly eroticized. At one point the narrator watches her without the mechanical legs and thinks "how much more beautiful she is without the ungainly chromium-plated prosthetics" (115). The narrator also

describes her by saying "Her beauty is unearthly, and I might almost believe her an exile from another galaxy, a fallen angel, the calculated product of biotech and genetic alchemy" (120). Kiernan's descriptions certainly fulfill Rogan's terms of being "a catalogue of the strange and wonderful beings and their various interactions, a celebratory treatment of difference as such."

Kiernan transcends the patriarchal male-female binary rightly condemned by both Rogan and Donawerth. Instead of replacing it with the figure of the lesbian that Rogan argues merely reinscribes it, Kiernan replaces it with a liminal alien-human binary. As the two women embrace, the narrator notes, "together we have formed an improbable binary opposition, lovers drawn from a deck of cards, my skin so pink and raw and hers so chalky and fine" (120). This binary dissolves into ambiguity and is not a marker of Rogan's idea of the "limitations" of human "model of sexuality." The cyborg calls the narrator "sister" and, at the end of the story, the narrator realizes she is missing an arm just as the cyborg is missing her legs: "it occurs to me that I do not *know* what happened to my arm, and also it occurs to me that I have no recollection whatsoever of there being anything at all wrong with it before she asked how it got this way" (130).

Even the duality of gender and sex becomes subsumed into Kiernan's ambiguous alien/human duality. During their sexual activities the cyborg dons a phallic prosthesis in order to have penetrative sex with the narrator, seemingly reinscribing normative heterosexual sex acts.[22] After sex:

> My [the narrator's] eyes go to that space between her legs, that fine white thatch of hair, and for a moment I only imagine the instrument of my seduction was *not* a prosthesis. For a moment, I watch the writhing, opalescent thing, still glistening and slick with me.

[22] Many members of the lesbian community see sex acts involving phalluses as legitimately falling within the definition of lesbian sex.

> Its body bristles with an assortment of fleshy spines, and I cannot help but ponder what venoms or exotic nanorobotic or nubot serums they might contain. (122)

In her dream-like narrative, Kiernan deliberately blurs the boundaries between imagination and reality, even structuring the story in numbered sections that are placed out of order so the story does not follow a linear chronology. Thus, the body of the cyborg (who is always referred to by the feminine pronoun) can contain both male and female sexual characteristics. The male phallus has transcended masculinity and even the human gender duality; considering Kiernan's description, it seems more closely to resemble some sort of marine creature than an actual penis, which is in keeping with the marine themes in Kiernan's work.

The phrase "nothing to be desired anymore" (120) recurs through the story. There is nothing left to be desired because desire has been fulfilled. Kiernan has fulfilled the promise of liberatory and feminist alien eroticism and sex. She provides the following "Disclaimer" at the beginning of her second collection of erotic fiction, *Tales from the Woeful Platypus*:

> Obviously, once again [in reference to her earlier collection], this book was written for "mature readers," whatever those are being defined as at the moment, for herein lies weird sex. Very weird sex. Should your idea of "kinky" happen to begin and end with fleece-lined handcuffs and spankings, be warned – you may experience confusion, nausea, disorientation, annoyance, impatience, and, perhaps, even narcolepsy while reading this book. Then again, you might be surprised. Either way, you've been warned, so no whining, please and thank you. (1)

While the disclaimer is humorously ironic, a tendency Kiernan has shown in other works such as *The Red Tree*, it is also a conscious statement of the transgression and transcendence she addresses in her work. *Tales from the Woeful Platypus* includes tales of sexual interactions

between humans and shape-changers, plant-spirits, dragons, and kitsune. There are also interactions between humans where one assumes the role of a corpse or a doll and a very strange "bonus" tale about a sexual encounter between a modified human and a machine designed as an instrument of torture. Boundaries dissolve while Kiernan maintains the aesthetic sense of the terrible and marvelous, making this as well as many of her other works genuinely transgressive and liberatory in a new mode.

Challenging Students With Kiernan

Caitlin R. Kiernan is a challenging writer on many levels. It is challenging to tease out the literal and symbolic meaning of her tales – as well as challenging to decide if many of her tales even *have* a literal meaning. Her use of classical, mythological, and scientific allusions is challenging. Finally, her work and her identity as a Queer woman is a challenge to traditional science fiction. We as instructors should encourage our students to fully engage with these challenges. I have taught Kiernan's work a number of times – in fact I make a *point* of teaching it as frequently as possible so I can introduce as many students as possible to her. It has been my experience that while students initially find her work frustrating, they come to appreciate her aesthetic and the complexity of her texts and see them for the masterpieces they are.

One way we can use Kiernan's work to challenge our students' gender biases about science fiction is to provide them with one of Kiernan's hard science fiction tales along with a canonical science fiction tale by a male author. The "hook" is that there are no names on either of the stories. We can then open up a classroom discussion about what gender the students think each author is and why. This could lead to a revealing discussion of what kind of science fiction

women are "likely" to write and what kind men are "likely" to write. At the end of the discussion, we reveal the authors' identities. This knowledge then compels the students to examine their own preconceptions: if they thought Kiernan's tale was written by a man (as is likely), why? How does knowing a woman wrote it change their reading of it? How does reading a hard science fiction tale written by a woman change their ideas about gender representation in the genre? The "Shakespeare's Sister" section of *A Room of One's Own* would make a good companion reading for this assignment.

Of course, a standard "compare and contrast" assignment would involve having students compare *The Red Tree* to various works by Lovecraft or "Tears Seven Times Salt" to the traditional fairy-tale "The Little Mermaid." (This assignment would also work with many other short stories from *The Tales of Pain and Wonder* collection, as Kiernan herself has said many of them are re-imaginings of fairy-tales.) The assignment moves beyond a "connect-the-dots" comparison essay as we encourage our students to examine *why* and *how* Kiernan has re-written her source material. In Sarah Crowe, Kiernan finally gives a voice to so many of Lovecraft's voiceless "background" women. In "Tears Seven Times Salt," Kiernan has finally granted some agency to Hans Christian Anderson's voiceless little mermaid. We might even ask students to compare Jenny Haniver with the seemingly liberated but actually conservative Disney Princess Ariel.

Finally, I have taught Kiernan in my Queer Literature classes with great success. I find that her works are a good window into discussions of Queerness because, unlike many other works of Queer literature, her Queer characters are seldom positioned "against" heteronormative characters. They are not presented as "other" – instead, *they* are the norm in Kiernan's universe. Many of her stories, especially those involving transhumanism, also serve as a way to open up

discussions of the broader elements of the term "Queer." Lately in critical studies it has become popular to talk about "Queering" texts and ideas by moving beyond the LGBTQ context and into the entire realm of non-normativity. Queer, in Kiernan's universe, also means non-human, non-organic, non-linear, and non-canonical. Many of her most recent works such as *The Drowning Girl*, which I will discuss in the next chapter, challenge notions of what a story should *be*. In addition, Kiernan maintains an active Internet and social networking presence. She regularly gives readings and signs books in the New England/Tri-State area. We can encourage our students to supplant their examination of her work by learning about Kiernan herself. In my experience, Kiernan is very good about responding to messages from fans, especially when those messages take the form of comments on her blog. We might have students contact her personally or attend one of her readings as part of an assignment.

In her blog entry of 2 September 2011, Caitlin R. Kiernan writes, "In short, sf is *really* fucking hard to write, unless you settle for hand waving, and pulling shit out of your ass, and not asking the hard questions." She, like Atwood, is "asking the hard questions" – such as purely technical questions; she notes in that same entry that she struggles with the concept of, "The combination of multicultural and multilingual homogenization, normal drift in languages (cyclic long-term drift, unidirectional short-term, and also the creation of creole, possibly via catastrophic agents), accelerating technological advancement (even assuming the probability that this 'ATA' will eventually plateau)." These hard questions also include defining or re-defining science and SF as a genre, finding a unique feminist narrative within a male-dominated narrative space, and using this narrative to transgress and transcend normative patriarchal hegemonies. Ultimately, Kiernan is one voice joining others such as Hope Mirrlees, H. D., and Atwood in an

ever-evolving luminescent feminist narrative. We can guide students to an awareness of and engagement with this narrative – and encourage them to "ask the hard questions" as well.

CHAPTER 7: THE BEAST ENTIRE – VIRGINIA WOOLF AND CAITLIN R. KIERNAN

> Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again. And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back.
>
> - Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

> And she kissed me again, tasting all of brine, and her lips the lips of *l'Inconnue de la Seine*. And then I began to sing. It was *my* song, and my song alone, never voiced since the dawn of time. It was everything I was, had been, might be. I swelled with song, and I sang.
>
> - Caitlin R. Kiernan, *The Drowning Girl*

This is the first time that Virginia Woolf's and Caitlin R. Kiernan have been discussed together in one critical work. At first glance these two writers seem as if they couldn't be more different. Woolf was a modernist who primarily wrote during the 1920s and 1930s and died in 1941. Kiernan is currently alive and writing; her most recent novel was published in 2013. Woolf is widely regarded as an important high modernist writer; she is the *only* canonical female novelist many people know. Kiernan is not widely known by anyone and her work often gets consigned to the SF genre, stacked next to writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin in bookstores. Woolf is required reading in many high school English classes; there is hardly an American college graduate who has not been forced to read "The Death of the Moth" and *A Room of One's Own*. Kiernan is nearly unknown and little-read beyond a small group of her fans. Yet I contend that they are far more alike than anyone has recognized so far and, moreover, they are in direct dialogue with each other. Kiernan's drowning girl is swimming, not drowning, in Woolf's waves.

"Many Dark Places Left Unlit:" Woolf and Science

In *White Women Write Race,* Jane Marcus states that "Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves* has consistently been read as a work of high modernism" (59). Marcus claims that the majority of critical studies of Woolf and her work focus on her contributions to the modernist ethos and have neglected Woolf's engagement with science. She reports that Woolf was an active member of not just the literary but also the scientific culture of her time. Woolf's interest in science manifested itself in her childhood when she collected butterflies and did science experiments, and it continued throughout her entire life. Holly Henry, in *Virginia Woolf and the Discourses of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy,* says Woolf was "deeply curious about the sciences…she read best-selling, non-technical science texts covering cosmology, relativity, and the new physics" (14). She reports that Woolf and her husband Leonard both published extensively in the *Athenaeum,* a journal "devoted to providing a forum for intellectual exchange between artists, scientists, economists, and politicians" that announced its subjects as "literature, art, and science" (16). Woolf read works by Sir James Jeans and Arthur Eddington and attended public lectures on science and scientific exhibitions, especially those on astronomy. Henry notes Woolf's fascination with the June 1927 solar eclipse. She writes, "Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West were among the fascinated millions who flocked to the path of totality in hopes of glimpsing the event" (19) and that "Woolf clearly knew the science of the event she was observing" (23). Woolf was as well-versed in the sciences as anyone could be without becoming a scientist herself.

The expert on Woolf and science is Dame Gillian Beer. In her 1983 work *Darwin's Plots* Gillian Beer remarks that Woolf seized on the "superabundance and extreme fecundity" (114) of Darwin's theories in descriptive passages in *Orlando* but devotes the majority of her literary

discussion to George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Her work most important to my discussion is the 1996 collection of essays on Woolf and science entitled *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground.* In this work Beer goes into extensive detail about how deeply Woolf's body of work was shaped by modern science. She writes that Woolf "picked up lightly the throughgoing arguments of historians, physicists, astronomers, philosophers, politicians, and the stray talk of passers-by. That lightness is not superficial. Rather, it 'lets the light through'" (4). Elsewhere in the same work, she says that Woolf was reading James Jeans as she was writing *The Waves* and says "in the turn of [Woolf's] fiction, both physics and poetry help" (116). Beer quotes Woolf's letters where she directly references Einstein and claims that "Woolf, like most educated people of the 1920s, was well aware of Einstein as an intellectual presence" (117). Beer, unlike most Woolf scholars, fully recognizes the extent to which modern science influenced Woolf's work, especially her novel *The Waves*. She says, "[In *The Waves,*] it turned out that the language of physicists chimed with [Woolf's] search for rhythmic prose to give her new working freedoms. She used those freedoms…to reveal the lines of force that run through historical moments" (124). My analysis of *The Waves* is in direct dialogue with Beer's discussion; it is no accident that Beer uses the word "force," which is a quantifiable physical quantity. In *The Waves* Woolf is indeed tracing the way that modern science runs through people's lives. The scientific element is a coherent thread throughout her entire narrative.

Like Marcus and Henry, Beer emphasizes the fact that modern science was part of the popular cultural consciousness in the early twentieth-century. She writes, "wave-particle theory at the end of the 1920s and through the 1930s caught the imagination. Newspapers and journals of the time contain frequent [scientific] material and reports…certain scientists developed a rhetoric by which the epistemological puzzles of the new physics could be communicated to a

wider audience" (113). It may be tempting to bemoan the passing of the "good old days" when there was an active public interest in science and condemn the contemporary "average" American who watches hours of reality television and is probably addicted to Facebook. Beer openly rebuts this attitude; the plain fact is that the average layperson in 2013 is probably *better-versed* in science than the average layperson of Woolf's day. If we as educators cannot expect our students to have Woolf's scientific erudition, we nevertheless *can* expect them to come to the classroom with a reasonably solid grounding in contemporary science. The discovery of the Higgs boson in 2012 was front-page news in print as well as online publications and everyone heard about the "god particle." Even if most non-scientists (as well as some scientists) were fuzzy about what the Higgs boson actually *was*, at least they understood that it was a revolutionary discovery that changed our understanding of the structure of the universe and the nature of reality. NASA landed the Mars *Curiosity* rover on August 6, 2012 and broadcast a livestream of the mission control room on their website. Millions of people from all over the world watched with bated breath and let out a simultaneous digital and actual cheer when the rover successfully touched down on the Bradbury landing site. The rover almost immediately began to send pictures of the surface of Mars, which were posted all over the internet. The rover also has its own channel on Twitter, where NASA posts continual updates on the mission status in the Hal-esque "voice" of the rover. I personally watched the *Curiosity* landing on one computer window while in another window I carried on a simultaneous chat discussion of the mission with hundreds of science fans. My favorite moment in the conversation was when one person wrote, "This is what the internet was INVENTED FOR" and someone else replied "HELL YES!" Digital technology and social networking have made science easily accessible to people across the globe in a way that Woolf could never have imagined.

Even if our students do not regularly visit NASA's web page, the current interest in science fiction and SF means they are used to narratives that contain scientific elements and to analyzing those narratives from a scientific perspective. The new *Doctor Who* series has left fans everywhere debating the scientific validity of the Doctor's time-traveling adventures and the new *Star Trek* movies have made space travel "cool" again. There are entire websites devoted to fans arguing about the actual scientific theory (or lack thereof) behind their favorite science-fiction movies or television shows. The hugely popular television show *The Big Bang Theory* has as its main characters a theoretical physicist, an experimental physicist, an aerospace engineer, and an astrophysicist, who all work at Caltech. The episodes often focus on explicit scientific theories like string theory and David Saltzberg, who has a Ph.D. in physics, is a script consultant who makes sure that the science portrayed on the show is legitimate, even down to equations appearing on whiteboards in the background. Mayim Bialik, who in real life has a Ph.D. in neuroscience, plays one of the female characters on the show. She also sometimes works with Saltzberg as a science consultant. In her article "Quentin's Bogey," Jane Marcus speaks of Virginia Woolf as a "bogey" to various critics and readers. We can use science to make Woolf less of a bogey for our students; in the days of geek chic, asking our students to read and discuss Woolf from a scientific perspective may be an inducement for them to engage with her narratives rather than a deterrent.

Particles and *The Waves*

Below is one form of the Schrodinger wave equation (time-dependent and for a single non-relativistic particle):

$$i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial t}\Psi(\mathbf{r},t) = \left[\frac{-\hbar^2}{2m}\nabla^2 + V(\mathbf{r},t)\right]\Psi(\mathbf{r},t)$$

I do not necessarily suggest delving deeply into the solutions or derivations of this equation when teaching *The Waves* unless you happen to have a class full of physics majors! However, simply looking at the equation from an aesthetic viewpoint reveals some connections with Woolf's narrative. The equation itself is oddly beautiful; the Greek letters give it a classical, almost lyrical quality. Even someone completely unversed in mathematics can see this is a very complicated mathematical equation and it contains several levels of operations, as seen by the parentheses and square brackets. Woolf's novel is also classical, lyrical, and complex; the similarities increase if I delve just a little deeper into the mathematics of the equation. This is a time-dependent equation, which means that the solutions to the equation change with time, just as Woolf's novel spans many years in the lives of its characters and recounts their changing situations. This is also a multivariate differential equation – it depends both on position (r) and time (t) and Woolf's narrative depends upon the individual narratives of many characters (variables). If one of those voices was removed from the narrative, the novel (equation) would fail to make sense (be solvable). In *The Waves*, Barnard speaks this way about his own literary work: "I do not believe in separation. We are not single. Also I wish to add to my collection of valuable observations upon the true nature of human life" (221). Although the wave equation has multiple variables and solutions, it also contains a mathematical constant, which always has the same value: h-bar ($\hbar$), which is approximately 1.054×10^{-34} J * s. Woolf's novel is likewise grounded in the history of England and, as Jane Marcus claims in *Hearts of Darkness*, "the ideology of white British colonialism and the romantic literature that sustains it" (65). Finally, the wave equation contains the imaginary number *i*, which is the square root of -1; there are no

real numbers that have a negative square. Similarly, *The Waves* displays Woolf's splendid imaginative prose and literary skill.

Moving away from that frightening equation to a more thematic discussion, there are significant similarities between the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics and the content and construction of Woolf's novel. Ian Ettinger writes, "Understanding Woolf's work in relation to relativity and quantum theory may help to further discussions of the ways in which physics…influenced artistic and philosophical models throughout the modern era (and how it continues to do so" (2). I agree whole-heartedly and am indebted to his excellent article, "Relativity and Quantum Theory in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," in my own analysis. The best-known result of the Schrodinger wave equation is the particle-wave duality; electromagnetic radiation (i.e., light) sometimes behaves like a particle and sometimes like a wave. For example, as shown in Young's experiment (also called the double-slit experiment), a laser beam fired at a plate with two very thin slits in it will display a diffraction pattern characteristic of that formed by a wave. Yet the photoelectric effect established that the same beam, if fired at a light-sensitive material, is absorbed at distinct points as if it were composed of particles. Another important result of the wave equation is the superposition principle and the wavefunction collapse. The superposition principle states that an electromagnetic particle (such as a photon) can have several different energies and be in several different places at the same time due to the fact that it is in a quantum superposition of two or more states. Yet once that particle interacts with an observer, the wavefunction collapses and the electromagnetic particle can then be described by a single state. In very general terms, an outside observer causes the particle to "pick a state" among many different possibilities. This correlates with the observer effect in quantum mechanics; the presence of an observer (which does not have to a person – it can also

be a measurement device) affects the result of the experiment. The infamous "Schrodinger's cat" thought experiment is based upon the wavefunction collapse and the observer effect, as I have discussed. Schrodinger meant it to show how ridiculous it is to apply quantum theory to a non-quantum system. Yet there is no such ridiculousness in applying quantum theory to Woolf's *The Waves*; her wave is bounded neither by the quantum wave equation nor by the limits of classical wave theory.

So, then, how to explicitly apply wave theory to *The Waves*? Quoting Harvena Richter's *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, Ettinger writes

> Through the parallels between the characters' soliloquies and the artificiality of their speech [in *The Waves*], the prose gradually begins to morph into what Richter calls "supraconsciousness," which challenges both relativity and quantum mechanics, not only in destabilizing identity but also in presenting minds as permeable, with consciousness passing between them. Richter notes that "Virginia Woolf's means of transition from mind to mind are frequently the same as from thought to thought, and so give the reader the impression that he remains, somehow, *within the same mind or a facet of it."* This fluidity of consciousness correlates to wave-particle duality, in which seemingly separate entities (in this case embodied personalities) become "flowing" and indeterminately bounded. The characters' alternating sensations of atomization and fluidity reflect the strange predicaments of a quantum universe in which the individual body is actually a flux of particles and waves. (7)

In *Hearts of Darkness* Jane Marcus notes the rising and falling pattern of the narrative and says "In *The Waves* Virginia Woolf explores the way in which fiction imitates the wavelike motion just then declared by scientists to be a key to the universe" (59). The novel opens with the image

of the sun rising over the sea on which "As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again" (179). The reader is then immediately drawn into a conversation between the main characters; the wave-like shift from one speaker to another might indeed make a careless reader who did not keep careful track of the dialogue "sea-sick." Woolf is, of course, using the modernist technique of multiple voices, but she is doing far more than just that. She is performing an experiment – just like Edwin Schrodinger or Thomas Young – with literature and creating a narrative that mirrors both the classical and quantum nature of a wave. It is no coincidence that at the beginning of the novel the main characters are recounting their observations, or that those observations span all five senses. For example, Bernard says, "I see a ring…hanging about me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light" (180). Louis says, "I hear something stamping" (180), and Neville states, "Stones are cold to my feet…I feel each one, round or pointed, separately" (181). These characters recount their observations and experiences like experimental scientists in a laboratory; indeed, they *are,* as is Virginia Woolf, scientists creating this textual experiment. Yet, just as quantum mechanics tells us that the presence of the observer-scientist affects the results of an experiment, these characters' observations are the "key to the universe" of the text. Their observations both shape and *are* the text; for example, take away even one of Jinny's utterances, no matter how small, and the narrative would be irrevocably changed.

If the overall structure of Woolf's narrative resembles a wave, on close examination the wave(function) "collapses" to a single perspective (particle). Woolf shows this attention to discrete, small moments in her other work; for example, in "The Death of a Moth" and *Moments of Being.* In *The Waves* she masterfully casts those discreet moments within the overall wave-

like structure of the narrative. Ettinger writes about "moments in which the characters are experiencing 'supraconsciousness' and the self suddenly coheres in the presence of a familiar face, which Bernard describes as 'being contracted by another person into a single being'" (8). In those moments the wave *is* being contracted or collapsing; the narrative becomes a discrete particle and not a flowing wave. This collapse is doubled; it occurs *both* for the characters and the readers, who are both "observers" in this narrative, both simultaneously part of it, contributing to it and determining its shape. Ettinger writes that "one's sense of self is not only affected by others but actually *generated* in relation or reaction to them" (8). This is true on several different levels – a superposition, if you will. The characters generate their selves in relation to each other; as Ettinger notes, for them, "Both identity and perception become fluid, morphing with the approach of a familiar face" (8). He also discusses how the different characters' personalities "entangle" with the personalities of the other characters and are sometimes not individually distinguishable, just as you cannot distinguish one H_2O molecule in a wave of water or one particle in the wavefunction equation. Yet the *reader's* personality also entangles with the personalities of the characters in the text; when I am reading *The Waves* I am not wholly Jaime Weida, nor Bernard, nor Percival, nor Rhoda, nor Susan – I am a superposition of all of these. My personal reading of the text shapes the text for me (observer effect) and thus I read a different text of *The Waves* than Jane Marcus or Ian Ettinger; my analysis or "lab report," while greatly indebted to *their* "experiments," ultimately reflects my own, individual observer's, imprint upon this narrative-experiment. If the characters in the text display a "supraconsciousness," such a supraconsciousness is also necessary to fully engage with Woolf's complex narrative, just as it is necessary to fully engage with and understand the seemingly-contradictory modern physics of relativity and quantum theory.

How many of the parallels between quantum theory and *The Waves* were conscious parallels on Woolf's part? Ettinger writes, "The question of whether Woolf consciously experimented with modern physics, and whether she intentionally assimilates other modern versions of reality, is debatable" (3). I feel that Ettinger does Woolf a disservice; even if Woolf was not familiar with the full mathematics of Schrodinger's wave equation, Gillian Beer credits Woolf with significant scientific erudition. She writes, "Woolf's preoccupations chimed in with those of the physicists who emphasized the universe as waves" (118). A close examination of the text suggests that Woolf did, indeed, "intentionally assimilate" aspects of quantum wave theory. Bernard says of Byron, "Like a long wave, like a roll of heavy waters, he went over me, his devastating presence – dragging me open, laying bare the pebbles on the shore of my soul. It was humiliating; I was turned to small stones. All semblances were rolled up" (236). So might a photon (particle of light) say of the scientist-observer who "dragged" him from the superposition of states described by the wavefunction to "lay him bare" on the surface of the photon shot-counter or other measuring device. Woolf's words, "All semblances were rolled up," can not only be related to the collapse of the wavefunction but also taken as a prophetic utterance about contemporary string theory. Some current scientific models of the deepest structure of the universe describe the universe as an assemblage of vibrating strings. Particles are no longer discreet but "spread out" along these fundamental strings. Many of the equations involved in string theory contain multiple dimensions – over 20, in some cases – and these "extra" dimensions are "rolled up" within the equations in order to describe the physical universe we inhabit. In *The Waves* Woolf penetrates not only into the heart of the reality of the characters in the narrative, but also into the heart of *reality itself!*

I agree with Beer regarding the transcendent nature of Woolf's narrative; she writes that Woolf herself viewed *The Waves* as an experimental work that "would challenge the bounds of fiction" and "follow a rhythm, not a plot. It would inhabit the body" (76). She notes that Woolf called the work "mystical" and links it to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.* Like Mirrlees and H.D., Woolf has created a liberatory feminist text. As Beer asserts, the "working freedoms" with which Woolf engaged during the composition of *The Waves* "sound communal experience, even universal experience" (124). *The Waves* is a masterful modernist meta-narrative that transcends both scientific theory and mysticism[23] to create its own reality and offer the reader a glimpse of "the beast entire" – of *true* knowledge and understanding.

Sirens, Mermaids, and *The Drowning Girl*

"There is always a siren, singing you to shipwreck." This is a lyric from the band Radiohead's song, "There There (The Boney King of Nowhere)," and it pervades Kiernan's novel *The Drowning Girl*; she quotes it in the text and it is one of the introductory epigrams. She even has it tattooed on her arm. There **IS**, indeed, always a siren, but what sort of siren? What sort of song, and what sort of shipwreck? *The Drowning Girl* is Kiernan's masterpiece (so far)[24], just as *The Waves* is Woolf's. Woolf and Kiernan are sirens, singing to us – their readers – and leading us to a shipwreck. Yet this is a shipwreck not of the body but of the mind, a shipwreck that will "wreck" our pre-conceived ideas about narrative and literature, that will "wreck" our perception

[23] In *Hearts of Darkness* Jane Marcus notes that "the italicized interludes [in *The Waves*] take the form of a set of Hindu prayers to the sun" (59).
[24] In her blog Kiernan has written that from now on she intends to primarily write Young Adult fiction, both for monetary and emotional reasons. It is therefore possible that *The Drowning Girl* will stand as Kiernan's magnum opus.

of the literary canon, women's writing, and even reality itself – just as the discoveries of modern science "wrecked" so many of the staid Victorian sensibilities.

Unlike Woolf, Kiernan does not have a multitude of different characters in her narrative. Yet she does employ multiple voices, just like Woolf. In the previous chapter, I talked about Kiernan's tendency to blur the lines between author, text, and reader, which references the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. *The Drowning Girl* is no exception. The full title of the novel is *The Drowning Girl: A Memoir*, which leads the reader to the inescapable question: *whose* memoir? Is the main character Imp (actually a pseudonym: her full name is India Morgan Phelps) a stand-in for Kiernan? Is this a memoir of the author or of the main character? Furthermore, Imp is schizophrenic, which means that she is not only an unreliable narrator, but also potentially a source of "many voices" herself. From the opening lines in the novel, Kiernan conflates Imp's identity: "'I'm going to write a ghost story now,'" she typed. 'A ghost story with a mermaid and a wolf,' she also typed. I also typed" (1). Who is "she" and who is "I?" Kiernan posted on her LiveJournal blog while writing this novel; in one entry she called it a "calculated tumult." She expanded on this concept in a later post:

> What is most important here is that the reader absolutely must accept that this story is most emphatically not being written for anyone except the interauthor, in this case India Morgan Phelps (a.k.a. Imp). If the reader is unable to accept this conceit, or unaware of it, the book cannot hope to succeed on the level that I mean it to succeed (let's call me the extra-author, existing as I do beyond the narrative). Literally, you'll not be reading the book I am writing, if you fail to grasp this point. Imp is not sane, and Imp has no concern for the needs of readers she isn't writing for. Her thoughts are sometimes a jumble, as her

thoughts would be. None of it's being filtered to make it any easier for others to read. Not you, or you, or you.

In the "Author's Note" at the end of the novel, Kiernan writes, "never has [a novel] come with such profound difficulty as did *The Drowning Girl*" (333). The reader may feel this same "profound difficulty" while attempting to decipher Kiernan's text; that difficulty is increased by the fact that, as she did with *The Red Tree*, Kiernan blurs the lines between fact and fiction via the Internet. The home page of her official website has a link to a "trailer" for the imaginary film *The Drowning Girl*, which was filmed by Kiernan and her partner using Kickstarter funds.[25] What is real and what is fiction? Does that question even make sense in the context of Kiernan's work? As Kiernan wrote in her blog, "But, and also, not always requiring an answer, and, sometimes when an answer is required, not always requiring that answer be spoken aloud. Other times, there is and cannot be an answer. We are surrounded by an ocean of words, and virtually no one knows their meanings." Let us not forget that eighty years separate Kiernan's narrative from Woolf's narrative. As Jane Marcus points out, Woolf lived in a time when intellectuals still thought that it was possible to know *everything*. Kiernan lives in a time of chaos theory, quantum indeterminacy, and the multiple-worlds theory, when even the most scientifically illiterate layperson recognizes that there are things s/he will never grasp within his/her lifetime. Our current fund of knowledge contains not only the concept of unknowability but has expanded to a point where it is simply not possible for one mind to encompass the extent of it. While Kiernan's novel engages with the scientific and archetypal properties of waves just as Woolf's novel does, it is also less bounded than Woolf's novel, for no true closure is possible in Kiernan's twenty-first century literary and scientific aesthetic. Kiernan's final words on her

[25] I contributed to the Kickstarter project!

novel? "You move on" – one way or another, and not necessarily in the sacred, eternal "ring" of Woolf's text.

As I discussed in the last chapter, Kiernan, unlike Woolf, *IS* a scientist. Her master's degree in paleontology would definitely have included classes on modern science and physics and there are her usual references to scientific terms and biology, especially marine biology, in *The Drowning Girl*. Kiernan's ongoing interest in science mirrors Woof's own fascination with contemporary scientific discoveries. If there is any uncertainty about how deeply and consciously Woolf was integrating scientific theory into *The Waves,* there is no uncertainty with Kiernan. At three separate points in the book she describes some of the ambiguities in the narrative as "a particle and a wave." Early in the novel, the main character Imp says,

> I'm afraid you've made an awful, stupid mistake, India Morgan Phelps, choosing to relate this ghost story as you remember it, as two separate narratives, as a particle and a wave, the devil *and* the deep blue sea, instead of boiling it down to a single narrative free of paradox and contradiction…It's difficult enough to hold both versions in my head, though both strike me as equally true…much less translate these competing, parallel histories into prose. (81)

This is not only Imp addressing herself and the contradictions in her story, but also Kiernan addressing the reader and her own narrative. After finishing *The Drowning Girl*, Kiernan wrote on her blog "It is my intention never to write this book again after *The Drowning Girl: A Memoir*. I won't have written it out, or found 'closure,' or have healed, or any of that nonsense. It'll still be right here locked up in my chest, where it's always been." In another entry she says, "Every time I've had to read back over the novel, I see how truly it is indeed a 'fictionalized autobiography.'" Kiernan says that she has been writing the story of *The Drowning Girl* since

her first published novel, *Silk*, including in *The Red Tree.* I have previously mentioned that Kiernan has dedicated almost all of her books to Elizabeth Tillman Aldridge, who died, possibly by suicide, in 1995. Her first published collection of short stories was entitled "Candles for Elizabeth." It is not my intention to "play detective" by trying to dredge up the "real life" inspiration for such a large body of Kiernan's work – especially because Kiernan herself has been publically very reticent regarding that subject. I do, however, want to highlight that Kiernan's narrative contains many different levels of uncertainty. In the end, all these uncertainties simply cannot be resolved; we must accept the concept of unknowability. This "we" encompasses Imp herself, us as readers, and also Kiernan. We cannot know for sure how this memoir reflects Kiernan's real life; writing it has not "resolved" the situation for Kiernan herself either. She has simply "moved on" – she has not solved the puzzle of Schrodinger's cat or the Pauli Exclusion Principle.

The uncertainty at the heart of the story and Imp's life is Eva Channing, a woman who enters her life under strange circumstances. Imp tries to make sense of Eva's existence and impact on her own life by casting her in mythic terms – as a mermaid and a werewolf. Eva is doing exactly what all the other authors I have discussed in this work did; using an outside paradigm (whether it be mythology, magic, science, or some combination thereof) to make sense of things and articulate the ineffable. During the pivotal chapter in the book (Kiernan herself has acknowledged it as the most important moment in the narrative and read it to the audience at the book release events), Imp, a schizophrenic, goes off her medication (which she takes to "make sense" of her self) and writes about Eva Channing. Various theorists such as Foucault have discussed understanding schizophrenia not so much as a mental illness but a next step in human perception. In the post-modern fragmented world, the fragmented self is perhaps a more

effective way to perceive and deal with a reality that has no essential "reality." Unlike Eliot and Lewis, who desperately cling to the hope of a unified Cartesian worldview, and Lovecraft, whose literary body of work is an extended funeral for that worldview, Kiernan is able to accept the indeterminacy of both internal and external reality.[26] Imp stops taking her medication so that, through the indeterminacy of her illness, she can better come to terms with the indeterminacy of Eva Channing, her life, and reality in general.

Even once Imp is "stabilized," back on the medication and reconciled with her lover Abalyn, she has not given up her acceptance of this indeterminacy. Her therapist urges her to "make a list for me. I'd like you to list those things you are starting to believe are false, that you previously thought were part of the truth" (234). Imp does so, but one of the items on the list ("It may be impossible for me to set forth a strictly accurate chronology/narrative of these events") shows that she cannot impose a rigid true/false dichotomy on her understanding. Later in the text, Imp finds out that she accidentally "lied" about one of the items on the list; she listed something as true that she later finds to be false.

During the pivotal chapter in the novel, the un-medicated Imp writes:

> She was a kaleidoscope chrysalis of shifting skeletons and muscle and marrow, bile and four richly appointed chambers of a mammalian heart. The heart, the chest's pumping aqua vitae tetragrammaton, for the life of the flesh is in the blood, blood is the life. She was never for an instant only a single beast, as I will not accept the deceit that there was only ever one of her, that I must choose between July and November. Why can't she, Abalyn, see this, when she, like Tiresias, has turned her gender lycanthropy trick on her own skin. Isn't that an hypocrisy? She is a paradox, and wants to take mine away, and

[26] Popular science fiction writer Phillip K. Dick and SF writers/graphic novelists Grant Morrison and Alan Moore have also discussed schizophrenia from this perspective in their work. Speaking of his famous Batman graphic novel *Arkham Asylum*, Morrison called the schizophrenia of his version of the Joker a kind of "super-sanity."

> wants me to believe it impossible? She slipped out of a skin she hated and into one she wished, and so a particle and a wave and so Eva and Eva, right? (211)

The reference to Tiresias recalls *The Waste Land*, which Kiernan states she has read and sections of which she quotes in other works. In an online *Locus* interview she describes her first novel *The Five of Cups*, which remained unpublished for many years, as "what would have happened if T. S. Eliot had written a vampire novel."[27]

As in her other works, Kiernan is in dialogue with Queer theory and identity as Abalyn, Imp's lover, is a male-to-female transsexual. Kiernan is presenting even sexual and gender identity as subject to the indeterminacy of the wave equation and the Pauli Exclusion Principle. While Kiernan does not often discuss her own identity, she does so in the *Locus* interview, and explains why not: "I don't want to be thought of as a gay writer, or 'that transsexual writer.' In interviews it's something I shy away from addressing directly…I've never tried to keep the transgenderism a secret; I just don't put a big sign over my head. It does not define me." I frankly had no idea Kiernan was transgender until I started doing research for this work. While I certainly do not want to use her identity to categorize her, it does point to her acceptance of indeterminacy on a personal level along with on a scientific and artistic level. Moreover, Kiernan uses both "transgender" and "transsexual" in regards to herself. Within the Queer community, transsexual is usually (but not by any means exclusively) seen as distinct from transgender and used to describe someone how has undergone sex reassignment surgery. Kiernan casts another layer of indeterminacy about herself; we, as readers and fans, are still not sure how to "collapse" her identity. She states that her gender and sexual identity has shaped her work, saying in the *Locus* interview, "As a transsexual, how can I not write about the

[27] I do not address *The Five of Cups* in this work because it is honestly not a very good novel. It is obviously a work of juvenilia and does not contain the subtleties of *The Drowning Girl* or reflect Kiernan's true literary skill.

transmutation of flesh? How can I not write about having one mind, and a body that doesn't match?...I'm constantly drawn to the subject of transformation, in a lot of different aspects."

The transformation, transmutation, and ambiguity in *The Drowning Girl* are embodied in "the drowning girl," Eva Channing. Imp meets Eva Channing when she finds her, naked, at the side of the road and takes her home. Imp remembers this happening twice (in July and in November), and in the first meeting Eva was a mermaid and in the second she was a werewolf. Even when the "objective" observations of those around her such as Abelyn and her therapist do not match her memories, Eva cannot (and *chooses* not to) collapse this ambiguity. Even the mythological figures Imp "chooses" for Eva are ambiguous figures. The mermaid is an overwhelmingly female figure (even in the structure of the word) but is simultaneously generative and destructive. Mermaids can be beautiful, mysterious, desirable women who live beneath the waves of the ocean, the ultimate symbol of generation and life. Mermaids can also be sirens who attempt to lure Odysseus' ship to dangerous rocks and his sailors to a watery death. In some tales, mermaids are cannibals who eat the flesh of the men they hypnotize with their siren songs.

Like the whole of Kiernan's narrative, Eva's role in Imp's life falls somewhere in the middle. She *does* sing to Imp and she *does* grant her rebirth. She also very nearly destroys both Imp's mind and her life. Near the end of the narrative, Imp recounts how Eva came to her for a final time and made her throw away her medications because "They would only blur your perceptions of me. They keep you from seeing" (285). Imp says, "In those days that followed, all and every song was hers, and of her kind…Eva Canning laid me out of my bed, filleted me, and she buried her face between my thighs, and her tongue sang unspeakable songs into me" (288). *The Drowning Girl* is *Imp's* – and Kiernan's – song, but Imp (and Kiernan) know that

"stories shape-shift like mermaids and werewolves. A lycanthropy of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, subjects and predicates" (288).

One linguistic "lycanthropy" is wolf to Woolf. I have not been able to find out if Kiernan was specifically inspired by *The Waves* when she wrote *The Drowning Girl*, but very early in the narrative Kiernan quotes from Virginia Woolf's suicide note to Leonard Woolf, showing that Woolf was at least on her mind as she wrote the book. Jane Marcus points out that this note was actually meant to be taken on several levels and was an act of kindness on Woolf's part. The note makes it seem as if the Woolfs had a happy marriage, which was simply not true. When Woolf writes, "I owe all the happiness of my life to you" and "If anyone could have saved me it would have been you" (qtd. Kiernan 3), she is essentially publically exonerating Leonard from any complicity in her death. Marcus states that this is in the tradition of women who commit suicide and do not blame those they leave behind. On one hand, Kiernan may be including these lines from Woolf's note (she mentions Anne Sexton's and Diane Arbus' suicides but does not quote either of them) to highlight the indeterminacy of her own narrator and own narrative. Yet in the end the "drowning girl" does not strictly drown and she does not blame Imp. If *The Drowning Girl* is Kiernan's memoir as well as Imp's, she is the one who is "left behind" after Elizabeth Tillman Aldridge's death. Kiernan may hope that Aldridge would grant her the same forgiveness Eva granted Imp, and Virginia granted Leonard, lycanthrophically transmuting guilt and blame into acceptance.

If the mermaid is an archetypally feminine figure, the werewolf at first seems to be an archetypally masculine figure. Even popular culture has absorbed this gender binary; the two main characters in the *Underworld* film series are a female vampire (Kate Beckinsdale) and a male werewolf (Scott Speedman). In the *Twilight* book and movie series, the werewolves are

overwhelmingly male; in the novels, Meyers makes it clear that female werewolves are exceedingly rare and the one female werewolf character cannot have children due to her lycanthropic nature.[28] Yet the mythic werewolf is more complex. The werewolf – and the wolf – in Western culture is inextricably tied to Red Riding Hood, or Little Red-Cap in the older tales and Kiernan's work. He "cross-dresses" when he wears her grandmother's clothes to fool Red Riding Hood. The werewolf changes from human to wolf during the full moon; some contemporary writers such as Alan Moore have drawn parallels between this and women's monthly menstrual cycles. In an episode of the popular but critically-underrated *Swamp Thing* graphic narrative, Moore has a female character who changes into a wolf and tries to fight back against the "red lodge"[29] of sexism and gender bias that traps and oppresses women in modern society. Kiernan links the werewolf Eva to historical accounts of werewolves and to Elizabeth Short, the infamous "Black Dahlia." Her murder was called the "werewolf murder" in contemporary Los Angeles papers, referencing both a comparison between her killer and the bestial werewolf and the "werewolf smile" Short's killer carved into her face. As she did in *The Red Tree*, Kiernan is conflating actual historical fact and narrative fiction. Her literary and artistic references in *The Drowning Girl* are far too many to list; they include Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," Perrault, New England folklore, the beast of Gevaudan, Carl Jung, Dante, Blake, and Milton. She also references fictional artists and characters that exist within her Lovecraft-esque mythos. Kiernan also includes the "story within a story" technique she uses in *The Red Tree* to further merge narrative identity; in this case it is the story "Werewolf Smile," written by

[28] This reveals more about socially-constructed gender stereotypes and Meyers' own prejudices than it does about actual werewolf lore.

[29] According to some accounts, various cultures saw menstruating women as "unclean" and isolated them in a "red lodge" where they could not contaminate anyone else. Menstruation is described as "unclean" in *Leviticus*, where several prohibitions are laid upon menstruating women. Some contemporary followers of the Hindu faith (and others) prohibit a menstruating woman from performing her ordinary duties and isolates her from her family; she must be "purified" before returning to them.

Imp within the narrative but actually by Kiernan without the narrative. Yet Kiernan is also in dialogue with other writers like Moore by reclaiming the traditionally masculine werewolf as a symbol of female power.

Of werewolf Eva, Imp says, "What long-leggedy beast, she, sidhe, Eva the second coming after my failed Ophelia. What sharp claws. She creeps along country roads and railroad tracks, and I'm no more than meat…Opening the door of my Honda, the night spills in because she owns the night, and it does her bidding" (209). Werewolf Eva liberates Imp just as mermaid Eva does. "She licked clean my skull and breast, until the bones were bright alabaster as her wayward rakish moon…she soared high, victorious above fallow fields. Transubstantiation…She pawed open the ground again that I might gaze in wide-eyed wonder" (210, 211). Kiernan links werewolf Eva with other women who have been the victims of violence, not just Elizabeth Short but women in New England legends, and while werewolf Eva enacts violence upon Imp, she also *heals* Imp of the scars from the violence she has already suffered.

Ultimately, Eva is a werewolf, she is a mermaid, she is both and she is neither. In her final encounter with Imp, Eva has transfigured into something beyond gender, sex, and even humanity and shows her "truest face":

> Eva writhed in the vermiform coils of eels and sea snakes, hagfish and lamprey. She fastened that ravenous, barbed mouth around the folds of my labia, rasping teeth…Across her rib cage were drawn the gill slits of a shark, a deep row of four crimson slashes on either side of her torso…Her breasts had vanished, leaving her chest flat except for those gills. I gazed into black eyes that were only black and nothing more, and they gazed into

me…Her chitin claws drew welts on my breasts and face. Her lionfish spines impaled my heart and lungs" (295, 296).

Eva is a particle and a wave; Eva is something far more than a particle *or* a wave. In the eighty-plus years between *The Drowning Girl* and *The Waves*, "modern science" has evolved into something even James Jeans might not recognize. Kiernan – and the rest of us – live in a world where the wave/particle duality is now understood as a crude and incomplete model for electromagnetic energy; where Steven Hawking writes about black holes, wormholes, and time travel; where physicists talk about quantum tunneling and quantum teleportation; where the universe is somehow constructed of an assembly of strings like a giant sweater; where the Higgs boson is both a particle and a field and, despite being massless itself, somehow causes existing particles to have mass. On the popular television show *Futurama*, the "mad scientist" Herbert Farnsworth says, "Quantum physics teaches us that anything can happen at any time for no reason." It may be a large leap from an animated television show by the creator of *The Simpsons* to Woolf and Kiernan, but perhaps not *that* far. Farnsworth's words sum up the attitude of many non-scientists and even some scientists, with quantum mechanics unraveling the way we understand causal interaction. Woolf masterfully engages with the modern science of the early twentieth century in *The Waves*; Kiernan likewise masterfully engages with the modern science of the early *twenty-first* century in *The Drowning Girl.*

You Say To-may-to, I Say To-mat-o – Woolf and Kiernan in Dialogue

Woolf and Kiernan have penetrated to a narrative, mythological, and scientific reality far beyond what the other authors I discuss have done. It may seem odd to place these two writers together,

but I maintain that they are directly in dialogue with one another. By quoting from Woolf's suicide note at the very beginning of her novel, Kiernan is placing herself in Woolf's narrative as well as re-writing Woolf's fictional and personal narrative. With Imp and Eva Channing, Kiernan is re-writing the Western myth of Ophelia (Shakespeare's famous drowning girl) and the myths around Woolf's life and her suicide. Kiernan imagines a new ending for *all* the drowning girls, in real life and in fairytales and mythic structures.

In *Art and Anger*, Jane Marcus discusses Mrs. Ramsay from Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as a mermaid. She says:

> Mrs. Ramsay is a mermaid, and reading is swimming into the unconsciousness. She is submerged in water, but her mind is also a body of water with the waves washing back and forth…the passage does convey a rhythmic, rocking, womblike atmosphere, as if the reader were a baby, flying and swimming inside the womb. (245)

In her Introduction to *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, Marcus discusses Woolf's writing career, saying, "she extends her project from the purely female desire to rejoin the mother at Kristeva's 'semiotic,' or preoedipal, level of language acquisition, to make a 'genotext' of class as well as gender," calling Mrs. McNab from *To the Lighthouse* "the voice of the semiotic" (7). Later Marcus says that, inspired by Jane Harrison, Woolf "continually reached back deep in the subconscious to the primeval mud of 'semiotic' origins in art, pre-symbolic discourse, the Mother Tongue" (16). I agree and contend that Woolf continued her quest for the "Mother Tongue" – and achieved her greatest victory – in *The Waves*. The novel's cyclic structure, following the structure of an ocean wave AND an electromagnetic wave, leads to a revolutionary narrative that not only reaches "back" to the Mother Tongue and the semiotic but deeper, into the very nature of life (the ocean) and the universe (wave theory) itself. The

narratives of the various characters in *The Waves* demonstrate Woolf's new narrative, new language: Bernard says "It is the speed, the hot, molten effect, the lava flow of sentence into sentence that I need. Who am I thinking of?" (229). Well, he is thinking of himself, and the other characters, and Woolf herself. Not only does lava flow as a wave, the surface of the Earth was covered in lava during its early formation. The characters in *The Waves* "fly and swim" within the womb of the waves themselves, the womb of Woolf's narrative, just as in *The Drowning Girl* the mermaid is born from the wolf/Woolf. In *The Waves* Rhoda says, "Let me pull myself out of these waters. But they heap themselves on me; they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths" (193). Both Woolf and Kiernan do *not* pull themselves out of these waters; they may be "tumbled" but it is a tumbling-down of patriarchal myths and patriarchal narratives. In *The Drowning Girl*, Eva Channing repeatedly quotes from Melville: "Who are hearsed that die on the sea?" (79). In the story, Imp "hearses" Eva Channing and, in her narrative, Kiernan "hearses" Woolf as well. As she writes her story (inside Kiernan's narrative), Imp writes, "This might be my pocket full of stones" (27). But what if the suicide *doesn't* die? What if the incantation, the magic spell, of the narrative can re-write Ophelia's story, free the Lady of Shalott from the curse, and keep Death by Water from becoming the Hanged Man? What if there is really no drowning girl at all, only girls that men *want* to drown, drown in language, drown in patriarchal narrative and patriarchal oppression?

In *The Drowning Girl*, Eva Channing follows her mother (also named Eva Channing) into the sea. The first Eva Channing was a member of the Open Door of Night cult (which is referenced in some of Kiernan's short stories), a group that believed that humans could become immortal by returning to the sea, to Mother Hydra. Kiernan follows Woolf into the sea, into the

search for the Mother Tongue and the heart of the semiotic. Early in the novel, while narrating, Imp says, "Am I repeating myself? Bah. Dah. Ba-ba" (49). Upon my first reading, I found those three utterances odd but assumed that Imp was merely blurting out her frustration at composing her narrative. Once I read further, I realized she was repeating a few lines of the siren song Eva Channing sings to her. In the title of this work, I quote from T. S. Eliot: "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each." Eva sings to Imp, Woolf sings to Kiernan, and Kiernan sings back to Woolf across the waves and across the years. And that singing, that mermaid song, is the song of the mother, the song of the semiotic. "Bah. Dah. Ba-ba." – the song a baby sings at the mother's breast. Eva sings to Imp and Kiernan writes the song across two pages, a song of nonsense:

> *Shoo, shoo, shoo la roo, shoo la rack shack, shoo la baba boo, When I find my sally bally bill come dibb-a-lin a boo shy lor-ree, Hush-a-buy, don't you cry, Go to sleepy little baby. When you wake, you shall have, All the pretty little horses…As slow our ship her foamy track Against the wind was cleaving, Shoo, shoo, shoo lar roo shoo la rack shack, shoo la baba boo When I find my sally bally bill come dibb-a-lin a boo shy lor-ee.* (286, 287)

Kiernan quotes from nursery rhymes, folk songs, even writes in Gaelic at one point. This is the song of the mother, the song that let Imp "fly, sing, swim" like Mrs. Ramsay and Woolf herself. As she sings, Eva makes love to Imp, becomes the universal mother, daughter, and lover all at once. "She took me into song, which became a far white country, until it became a painting, until it became the sea" (286).

Woolf and Kiernan both are performing experiments in language, experiments in narrative, experiments in reality. In the poem "Not Waving But Drowning," Stevie Smith writes:

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always

(Still the dead one lay moaning)

I was much too far out all my life

And not waving but drowning. (9-12)

Kiernan is *not* drowning; she is waving to Woolf and to us. Like Imp, who tries to drown herself in her bathtub after meeting Eva, she has gone down to the sea of the semiotic, down to the water of the mothers' wombs, and come back with her song. She swims in Woolf's waves and they sing to each other; and, if Eliot thought they would not sing to him, it is simply because he did not know how to listen to their song.

The Waves and *The Drowning Girl* in the Classroom – A Day at the Beach for Students?

Since both *The Waves* and *The Drowning Girl* are such challenging narratives, I would not recommend using them as texts for an introductory literature class. Students should already have some familiarity with stream of consciousness writing, multiple and unreliable narrators, and extensive use of allusions (not to mention ideally having taken a science class or two) before taking on these two narratives. Both Woolf and Kiernan have shorter, less challenging works that can serve as a good introduction to these two authors for the novice literature student.

I do not see either of these works as the "key" to the other; I maintain that reading either one helps the reader decipher the layers of subtlety and meaning in the other. I would, however, recommend teaching *The Drowning Girl* before Woolf's *The Waves*. Although *The Drowning Girl* is still a very difficult text, it is not quite as formally complex as *The Waves.* Students are also likely to find *The Drowning Girl* slightly more accessible as Kiernan makes references and

uses language that is current to their personal experience. Kiernan also engages with scientific theory somewhat more explicitly than Woolf. Encountering the melding of science, literature, mythology, and narrative in Kiernan's text will help the students decipher how Woolf's text does the same thing. As much as I adore *The Drowning Girl*, I must reluctantly admit that in many ways *The Waves* is a *better* novel. Woolf is subtler than Kiernan and her use of language is more skilled and more deliberate. Woolf's characters are better-constructed and her novel is more formally satisfying as a work of literature than Kiernan's novel. By reading Kiernan first, students can then return to her text and analyze it with a critical eye (in both senses of the word) after being exposed to Woolf. An interesting classroom exercise or writing assignment might be a "before and after" comparison: How did students react to *The Drowning Girl* before reading *The Waves*? What is their take on the novel *afterwards*? I would not be surprised to find students more critical of Kiernan's text after reading Woolf's.

As I mentioned in my last chapter, teaching a living writer who regularly engages with her fans opens up all kinds of pedagogical opportunities. As an assignment, we can ask our students to email Kiernan or post on her blog with their questions about *The Drowning Girl* – they can even directly ask her if she was inspired by *The Waves!*[30] While Kiernan is fairly forthcoming in providing answers, as she noted in the *Locus* interview, there are some things she prefers not to discuss. This can also open up all kinds of teachable moments for our students. What sort of questions does the reader have the "right" to ask the author? What, if anything, does the author "owe" her/his readers? How much agency or authority does (and should) a writer have over his/her own text and how it is read by others? Parts of *The Drowning Girl* are very intense, graphic, and upsetting. We can encourage our students to ponder why they may feel uncomfortable about certain parts of Kiernan's narrative and why she chose to include such

[30] I have emailed Kiernan with this very question and, so far, she has not responded to me.

moments in her book. I can easily envision a "library day" when the students use the school library and/or the internet to track down some of the many historic/literary/artistic/etc. references in both novels. This can be a great lead-in for a research paper assignment as well as helping the students more fully understand these difficult texts.

I punned in writing the heading for this section, but if we happen to teach in a coastal location, we can *literally* give our students a "day at the beach!" The ocean and its waves run through both narratives, sometimes silently beneath the surface like an underground river, sometimes bubbling to the surface like a playful spring, sometimes thundering like a waterfall. Students can listen to the same waves Virginia Woolf heard (albeit on the other side of the Atlantic) and see some of the fantastic marine creatures Kiernan describes. What narratives of their own will the waves inspire? At the end of Kiernan's novel, Eva Channing walks into the ocean while Imp watches. Yet she is no Ophelia; in the end the drowning girl does not drown – she swims. After all, isn't that our role as educators? To take our students' hands and lead them down to the sea of literature, of knowledge – a sea that can be turbulent, harsh and forbidding. A sea that can drown them. We are there to see that they do not drown – we teach them to swim. We guide them as they navigate the waves so that there are no drowning girls (or boys, or men, or women). And, like Imp watching Eva, we watch as they swim away – in many cases, swimming far deeper and with far more skillfully than us.

CONCLUSION: THERE AND BACK AGAIN

"Begin at the beginning," the King said gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop."

- From *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

It is so difficult to say just what I mean!

- From *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot

Menace them with language, the language mirror.

- From *The Flame Alphabet* by Ben Marcus

While writing this work, I read Ben Marcus' excellent dystopian novel *The Flame Alphabet*. One line in particular stood out: "Menace them with language, the language mirror" (6). I realize now that I have been writing about the various ways that canonical and non-canonical writers have used language to menace. Who is the "they" that is being menaced? Why, the "other," the "outsider" – any "they" that does not fit the standards of male heteronormativity, the academic canon, and/or "high culture."

For example, in *The Space Trilogy* C. S. Lewis menaced women and non-Judeo-Christian belief systems. He did so most explicitly in *Perelandra* when he, the Un-Man, and Ransom all menace the Green Lady with language. In *The Dark Tower* Lewis' "modern" Camilla menaces all the contemporary real-life Camillas struggling for freedom and equality. Lovecraft's language does not even stoop to menace women; unless, of course, they are "un-women" due to queer (Queer) transformations or extreme age. In *The Waste Land,* Eliot does Lewis one better; he menaces very specific actual women – Hope Mirrlees and Nancy Cunard. The narrative of *The Waste Land* as a whole also menaces mythological generative female figures by belittling and demonizing them, or replacing them with masculine archetypes.

Science is a language, both in how it is formulated and the "language" of the equations behind the theory. Mathematics, the language of science, is often called the "universal

language." Lewis, Lovecraft, and Eliot all used science to menace and were menaced by it as well. *The Space Trilogy* can be read as an anti-science cautionary tale; just consider Weston and Devine in *Out of the Silent Planet.* Lewis seems to be saying, "This is what will happen if you allow science to gain the upper hand." His solution? Make sure that science, if there must be science, remains firmly the servant of conservative religious ideology. Use those spaceships to prevent the Fall of *Genesis* from happening on Mars, not to open up new industrial opportunities, and only if the angels (*Oyarsas*) say it's all right. The only way Lewis would wholeheartedly accept science would be if the same spaceships could fly the devout to Heaven. Lovecraft flat-out states in the short story "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family," science "will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species" (73). Despite his own fascination with science, Lovecraft's semi-autobiographical narrators are indeed menaced by science: the primal atomic chaos of Azathoth and the buzzing, beetle-like Fungi from Yuggoth (Pluto). Great Cthulhu will return "when the stars are right" and bring an end not only to humanity but to the universe as humans understand it. Lovecraft's readers have been menaced by his horrific science to the extent that, even now, writers create new tales of horror set in his fictional world. The contemporary "fear-meister" Stephen King, the author most non-academic readers think of when they think of horror literature and fear, has admitted that his greatest inspiration was H. P. Lovecraft. Eliot's wasteland is menaced by the modern technology (made possible by modern science) that pollutes the Thames, causes "high" culture to devolve into accursed "popular" culture, and turned Camelot with an unreal city in which taxis scream in the night as they race down rat-filled alleys.

These writers, indeed, understood very well the power of language to menace and fully exploited that power. Yet they did not understand the flip side of that menace, which Ben

Marcus articulated in his brilliant words: "the language mirror." *Paris* is the mirror of *The Waste Land*, whether Eliot deigned to accept and/or acknowledge that fact. It is Looking-Glass Land to Alice's world; only in this case Mirrlees' mirror world is liberatory and hopeful and Eliot's world its twisted, insane, doomed reflection. H. D. recognizes that the "language mirror" of menace is sacred incantation. In *Trilogy* she achieves the mythic fullness that Eliot could not in his broken incantation of *The Waste Land*. Moreover, Mirrlees and H.D. both understand that the language of science can be not only menacing, but liberating as well. Science and technology is just one of the many voices in *Paris*, not the polluting, desiccating force it is in *The Waste Land.* H. D. knows that radium can "menace" the radium girls and Marie Curie, who died of radiation poisoning. She also knows that it can create light and energy that does not, in fact, menace "the presence" or its female initiates. In *Oryx and Crake*, science and technology is the tool that brings about Atwood's dystopia but it is not the *cause.* The cause of her dystopia is a man and woman who wanted to re-make human existence and language. The reader is left wondering if this world can properly be called a dystopia at all and may find her/himself yearning to escape the "menace" of the contemporary world by leaping into Atwood's fictional one. Caitlin R. Kiernan's novel *The Red Tree* and selected short works are *all about* menace – but a menace that has gone "through the looking glass" and transmuted into transcendence. Even if her "terrible marvels" sometimes menace her characters, her readers, and herself, she (and *we*) cannot stand to live without them.

My final chapter discussed the way that two great female authors – one canonical and one not, one falling solidly within the SF genre and one not – looked into the "language mirror" fully without menace. Woolf and Kiernan sing their semiotic siren songs in *The Waves* and *The Drowning Girl*, respectively. They re-tell the narratives of doomed, drowning girls and teach

each other – and us – how to swim and not drown within their waves. They have finally found the Mother Tongue that illuminates and enlightens, not menaces. Eliot believed the mermaids would not sing to him because his tongue was tied by the menacing language of patriarchal narrative.

Looking at the entire genre of SF/science fiction, it certainly has been menaced by the discourse of the academy and "high culture." Even if the self-appointed guardians of high culture include SF literature in their discourse, that discourse still contains menace. The Science Fiction issue of *The New Yorker* was nearly a joke. Harold Bloom wrote the science fiction novel *The Flight to Lucifer*, but the novel itself was laughable and, years later, he attempted to deny its existence. H. P. Lovecraft is openly mocked in *The New York Times* and SF criticism is relegated to the "ghetto" of the Special Issues of *PMLA*. At bookstores, only a very few "classic" SF texts (like *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*) have made the leap from the "Science Fiction/Fantasy" shelves to the "Fiction and Literature" shelves. Ursula K. LeGuin does *NOT* sit next to D. H. Lawrence on the bookshelf. That is, of course, if these texts can be found in the bookstore at all – a number of classic SF texts, like *Swastika Night*, were out of print and hard to find until recently. A number of others, like the vast majority of Kiernan's work, are simply impossible to find in major bookstores at all and must be purchased online or through small press companies. While the standard literature canon is happily beginning to open its doors to previously non-canonical works, the "bouncers" guarding those gates are still likely to "menace" works that fall within the SF genre – especially SF written by women – or reluctantly let one or two through as long as the official "quota" of dead white males is fulfilled.

Since I have written this work from a pedagogical as well as a critical perspective, I have looked at the ways that language might "menace" in the classroom and discussed strategies to

make our students' classroom learning experiences more fulfilling and less menacing. SF is a genre of literature that is extremely popular and less menacing to many of our students than the traditional "great works" of literature. We can reduce the menace they feel by not only using SF texts to build bridges to lead to canonical works like *The Waste Land* and *1984* but also by helping our students to realize these SF texts are "real literature" in and of themselves.

Finally, there is a regrettable tendency in the geek subculture associated with these SF/science fiction narratives to quite literally menace women inside and outside that subculture. I have talked about how Anita Sarkeesian, the creator of *Feminist Frequency*, has received death threats and threats of physical violence and rape. When the seemingly-reputable *Guardian* published a response to the fact that their online poll of great SF novels yielded a list with less than 4% female writers, commenters responded with, "This is exactly the kind of crapola that makes me fucking sick" and "this is just plain stoopid." The "calling-out" of geek girls is so wide-spread that there is a specific term for it; in short, within the marginalized geek/SF community, women are even more marginalized. They aren't taken seriously as writers, as readers, or as fans. I have experienced the pressure to establish my "geek cred," as have many of my female students. While I contend that we absolutely *should* work to bring SF into the classroom and the canon, we also have to be careful that we are *not* simply re-inscribing a "boy's club" mentality.

I have come to the end but this discourse has not "stopped." It carries on in the pages of literary journals and publications, in classrooms, and on websites all over the Internet. And, increasingly, we are refusing to be "menaced" by those in power or those who imagine themselves in power. On 1 May 2013, Jen Yates posted a comic on her feminist *Epbot* blog (which she self-describes as about "Geekery, Girliness, & Goofing Off"). The comic, by artist

Paige Hall, describes her experiences being menaced cosplaying[31] as Wonder Woman at a comic book convention. Hall draws herself as a larger but attractive woman; the male fans at the convention call her a "whale" and a "fat ass." She then shows another woman cosplaying as Wonder Woman with a more normatively "desirable" body type. This woman is called a "whore" and a "slut." Hall writes, "Why the hell do we have to prove ourselves to anyone?" In the face of various men (a DC Comics executive and a male geek) who claim, "We respect women," Hall rebuts, "Is this what respect feels like?" Should respect for the SF genre "feel like" a couple of special issues of literary journals here and there? Should respect for Hope Mirrlees "feel like" a modest critical interest in *Paris* over a hundred years after it was written? Should respect for mythic feminine figures in literature "feel like" Lewis' Green Lady and Eliot's Madame Sosostris? Should respect for Virginia Woolf "feel like" a critical discourse that mainly ignores her engagement with and expertise in modern science? Should respect for Caitlin R. Kiernan and her writing "feel like" the fact that this is the very first critical work to talk about her?

We need to keep asking these questions and we need to encourage our students and the academic and cultural community as a whole to ask these questions. I believe there is a growing wave of voices asking, like Page Hall, "Is this what respect feels like?" The more we ask this question, the more we call attention to a very necessary discourse. And, to end on a positive note, after Hall's comic was published on *Epbot*, more than 400 readers,[32] male and female, left positive and supportive comments for Hall. Not one comment called her out or menaced her. Let's continue *that* kind of discourse.

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[31] Cosplaying is short for "costume playing" and refers to fans dressing up as their favorite comic book/science fiction/fantasy/etc. characters, very often for an SF-themed convention.

[32] Myself included!

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