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# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the Editor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Romance: Figures of Venus in “The Knight’s Tale”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb Molstad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When War is Peace: Peacebuilding in an Era of Warfare</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh Berkenpas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing the Rotten Citric Lump: A Somatic Reading of the Death Of Shahrazâd’s Hunchback</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin S. Lynch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something is Rotten in the Unreal City: Hamlet in the Waste Land</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimee Valentine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocating for Mother Earth in the Undergraduate Classroom</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Triezenberg and Ilse Schweitzer VanDonkelaar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future is Fire</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel Berry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Michigan Lighthouse</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Lein</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie R. Goodman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinarity</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina G. Collins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Spaces Between</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Evory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backwater</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Devoogd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Hilltop Review, Spring 2016*
Let Us Now Praise Famous Names  
Aimee Valentine

Graduate Humanities Conference Winners

2016 Winner: More Than One Way to Measure: Masculinity in *Zurkhaneh* of Safavid Iran  
Zachary Smith

2016 Runner-Up: Facing Our Demons: Psychiatric Perspectives on Exorcism Rituals  
Joel Sanford
Notes from the Editor

Dear fellow graduate students and readers of The Hilltop Review,

I am proud to present the Spring 2016 issue of The Hilltop Review, my last as editor. In the fall, my successor, Zahra Ameli, will begin her tenure as editor. Zahra is from Iran, and came to the U.S. about two years ago, as she puts it, “to learn things and start my new journey here.” She has a Bachelors of Social Sciences-Research from the University of Tehran, Iran, and is in her second year of the Master’s program in Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology. During her undergraduate study, Zahra worked at the Cyberspace Policy Research Center at the University of Tehran and as a junior researcher. At WMU, she works in the International Student Activities Office as an Outreach Coordinator/Intern, which she very much enjoys. In her free time, Zahra loves to exercise and play sports, mostly indoor soccer/futsal, and to spend time with her husband, family, and friends. Zahra has an impressive background of leadership experience which will serve her well as director and editor of The Hilltop Review, and I look forward to two more successful years of the journal. Zahra can now also be reached at the Hilltop Editor email: gsa_hilltop@wmich.edu

I have many thanks and congratulations to extend! First, a big thanks to the Graduate Student Association, its E-Board, and of course, all of the graduate students who have submitted to and acted as peer reviewers for The Hilltop Review over the last two years. This is a student-run endeavor, and we could not have published these four issues without all of you! I encourage all WMU graduate students to find out more about the GSA and to get involved with their work and advocacy. Thank you to Maira Bundza, Interim Head of Research and Instruction Services, ScholarWorks Librarian, and Associate Professor of University Libraries, who trained me on ScholarWorks and was a terrific resource for The Hilltop and our migration to wholesale use of ScholarWorks for submission, review, and hosting of the journal. Thank you to my Editorial Board, some of whom will be returning next year and some of whom are leaving for bigger and better things: Joshua Berkenpas (now Dr. Berkenpas, Political Science!), Roland Black (MA, Medieval Studies), Cameron Manche, Jill Mceldowney, Hannah Pankratz, and Carolyn Ray. Congratulations to Roland and Josh! Next year we will welcome some new editorial board members, and I will be serving on the Editorial Board for the next two years, as retiring editor—a tradition which I hope will continue, when possible.

Now, to congratulate this issue’s award winners! The winners of our Best Paper awards are: receiving a $500 prize for First Place, Caleb Molstad, who is also graduating this spring with an MA in Medieval Studies, for “Philosophical Romance: Figures of Venus in ‘The Knight’s Tale’”; receiving a $250 prize for Second Place, Joshua Berkenpas (full disclosure: the Editorial Board ranks articles to determine the winners, but Josh did not take part in this round of article ranking), for “When War is Peace: Peacebuilding in an Era of Warfare”; receiving a $150 prize for Third Place, Erin Lynch, from the Medieval Institute, for “Killing the Rotten Citric Lump: A Somatic Reading of the Death Of Shahrazād’s Hunchback”; receiving a $250 prize for Best Creative Work, Rob Evory, Department of English, for “The Spaces Between”; and receiving a $250 prize and the placement of her artwork on the cover for Best Artwork, Ariel Berry, Department of English, for “The Future is Fire.” We are once again featuring the work of the winners of the 2016 Graduate Humanities Conference, which can be found at the end of the issue: congratulations to Zachary Smith, winner of the conference, for “More Than One Way to Measure: Masculinity in Zurkhaneh of Safavid Iran” and to Joel Sanford, runner-up, for “Facing Our Demons: Psychiatric Perspectives on Exorcism Rituals.”

Please keep an eye on your inboxes over the summer for updates and announcements about the fall 2016 issue of The Hilltop Review, as Zahra starts her tenure as editor and learns the ropes. She will take over from me after the publication of this spring 2016 issue, and I
wish her all the best with her four forthcoming issues. Thank you all for a wonderful two years of *The Hilltop Review*, and I look forward to reading your future work—and maybe to finally submitting something myself!

Rebecca Straple  
Director and Editor, *The Hilltop Review*  
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Philosophical Romance: Figures of Venus in “The Knight’s Tale”

First Place Paper, Spring 2016

By Caleb Molstad
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The Roman goddess Venus seems an unlikely figure to survive the transition from Roman antiquity to the Middle Ages. Catholic Christianity, which grew to be the dominant religion in medieval Europe, is monotheistic. Pagan gods were potential idols and/or rivals to the one God. Furthermore, Venus is a goddess, a powerful female pagan figure. A society in which men were almost exclusively responsible for defining and defending orthodox belief would ostensibly be hostile to goddesses. In spite of this, Venus had a remarkable career in the literature of the Middle Ages, as noted in Theresa Tinkle’s Medieval Venuses and Cupids, which emphasizes the presence of not one, but multiple medieval Venuses. Though there are commonalities between these Venuses, each particular Venus varied according to the aims of the individual writer. Any investigation of the medieval Venus requires looking at the nuances of individual texts. However, there is a larger trend of goddess figures in medieval literature that can guide our study.

Barbara Newman’s God and the Goddesses deals with the subject of powerful female figures in medieval texts. In the book, Newman proposes a category of literature called imaginative theology, which she defines as, “the pursuit of serious religious and theological thought through the techniques of imaginative literature, especially vision, dialogue, and personification.” While Venus is not one of the major female figures that Newman looks at in her book, the concept of imaginative theology provides a new way of reading medieval texts that include the goddess of love. Authors who wrote in genres that are not customarily associated with theology and philosophy may actually have been expressing theology in their own way. Geoffrey Chaucer is one such author who used imaginative techniques in his works.

Chaucer was steeped in mythographical and allegorical traditions that dealt with Venus and the subject of love. He knew the works of Virgil, who used the mythological Venus as a central character in his Aeneid. Likewise, Chaucer was familiar with Ovid’s mythological and love poetry. Chaucer also produced The Romaunt of the Rose, a Middle English translation of the popular medieval allegory, Roman de la Rose. Venus figures prominently in the Roman de la Rose as the generalissimo of Love’s army in its attack on the castle which guards the allegorical rose. There she represents female sexual desire, which allows the male lover to overcome the rose’s defenses. Dante is another author who greatly influenced Chaucer. The Commedia makes extensive use of medieval philosophy and theology in an imaginative setting and while the mythological Venus is only mentioned a couple of times in the poem, Dante includes the celestial sphere of Venus in Paradiso.

1 Thank you to Dr. Eve Salisbury for her generous feedback and help on this essay.
For this reason, it is unsurprising that Chaucer includes Venus in several of his poems. Like his predecessors, Chaucer draws on the goddess's multiple personas. Tinkle’s observation about the multivalence of Venus is particularly important when approaching the figure of Venus in Chaucer’s poetry. Even in a single poem, Venus may play multiple, intertwined roles, depending on Chaucer's narrative and philosophical goals. His philosophical aims are particularly important in “The Knight’s Tale.”

Chaucer's other important translation was Boece, a Middle English version of Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. The Consolation's influence on “The Knight's Tale” is clear from the frequent references to Fortune and the content of Theseus's philosophical speech near the end of the tale. Yet “The Knight’s Tale” is not typically viewed as a philosophical work, but rather as a chivalric romance. At first glance, romance and philosophy appear to be as at odds as Venus and medieval Christianity. However, the cosmographical role of love is an important part of the Consolation's argument, a point which Chaucer makes clear by incorporating it in a chivalric romance. Through an imaginative use of Venus in “The Knight’s Tale,” Chaucer expounds Boethius's argument that love governs the world.

**Seeing Stars: Astrological Influence in “The Knight's Tale”**

In addition to being a goddess, Venus was a planet. During the Middle Ages, she, like the six other planetary gods, was widely thought to influence events on Earth. Arcite's complaint about his and his cousin's imprisonment is one of many references to astrological influence in “The Knight's Tale.”

> Som wikke aspect or dispositioun  
> Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,  
> Hath yeven us this…  
> ………………………  
> So stood the hevene whan that we were born.4

Arcite identifies the astrological Saturn, in conjunction with an unnamed constellation, as the cause of their misfortune.

Scholars, including V.A. Kolve and A.J. Minnis, have noted that the personalities of the main characters can be associated with particular planets.5 Theseus, as a fair and just ruler, has a Jovian temperament, i.e. influenced by Jupiter. Emeyle's disposition, with her desire to preserve her virginity and love of hunting, recalls Diana. Arcite has a combative character and can be interpreted as the first to break the bonds of friendship between the cousins, suggesting a martial character, coming from Mars.6 Palamon seems to be under the influence of Venus since he is the first person to be moved to love in the story and cares little for prowess in battle when he prays to the goddess of love. However, there are plenty of places where the characters break out of their mold, showing that planetary influence is more complex than a “one-to-one equivalence.”7 Free will is not destroyed by the influence of heavenly bodies. Arcite can fall in love with Emelye and Palamon can respond violently when he confronts...

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3  Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity, 112.
4  Kolve, Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative, 122.
Arcite at the grove. Likewise, Emelye readily abandons her devotion to chaste Diana when Arcite wins the tournament.

Boethius's description of causality and the stars in the Consolation of Philosophy is an important source for Chaucer's understanding of astrology. Book IV, Prosa 6 of Chaucer's Boece translation reads,

Thanne, whethir that destyne be exercised outhir by some devyne spiritz, servantz to the devyne purveaunce, or elles by some soule, or elles by alle nature servyng to God, or elles by the celestial moevynges of sterres, or elles by the vertu of angeli, or elles by the divers subtilite of develis, or elles by any of hem, or elles by hem alle, the destinal ordenaunce is ywoven and acomplissid [italics mine]

“Sterres” here include the astronomical bodies we call planets, such as Venus. Their “celestial moevynges” shape human “destyne” and execute “devyne purveaunce.”

Similar language is used when Theseus happens upon the cousins fighting in the woods. Since this is the second chance encounter in the poem, the narrator takes the opportunity to explain how coincidental events occur. He says that, “The destinee, ministre general, / That executeth in the world over al / The purveiaunce that God hath seyn biforn” can make something happen in a day that normally would “fallenth nat eft withinne a thousand yere.” Seemingly chance encounters are really the result of destiny executing divine purveyance. Because Arcite has already complained of Saturn's role in shaping the cousins' lives, it is very possible that planets like Venus and Mars are the means by which this destined meeting was executed. Astrological forces are at work in “The Knight's Tale” in seen and unseen ways. However, the astrological figure of Venus is not the only manifestation of the goddess in the poem for she appears alongside mythological and allegorical Venuses.

Myth and Allegory in the Gods' Shrines

While mythological and allegorical depictions of Venus occur throughout “The Knight's Tale,” they are particularly significant in the ekphrasis of the gods' shrines in the tournament arena. Literary ekphrasis generally takes the form of a poetic description of visual art, as occurs in “The Knight's Tale.” It bridges the gap between two mediums of artistic expression, the physical and the literal. Because ekphrasis presents visual images in written language, it is a highly imaginative literary technique.

Palamon travels to Venus's shrine at the hour of the day devoted to the planet Venus, which points to the continuing presence of the astrological Venus here. Her shrine contains a statue of the goddess and a painting on the wall. The painting is described first,

Wroght on the wal, ful pitous to biholde,  
The broken slepes, and the sikes colde,  
The sacred teeris, and the waymentynge,

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8 “The Knight’s Tale,” ll. 1576-78, 1594-95.  
9 Ibid., ll. 2680–82.  
11 Dante similarly refers to the planets as stars in his Commedia. He does so most notably in the famous last line of Paradiso, “l'amor che move il sole e l'altri stelle” (“The love that moves the sun and the other stars”).  
12 “The Knight’s Tale,” ll. 1663–65, 1669.  
13 Ibid., l. 2217.
The fiery strokes of the desirynge
That loves servantz in this lyf enduren;
The othes that hir covenvantz assuren;\textsuperscript{14}

This is followed by a group of personifications similar to those found in \textit{The Romaunt of the Rose}. There is “Plesaunce and Hope, Desir, Foolhardynesse, / Beautee and Youthe, Bauderie, Richesse” to name a few.\textsuperscript{15} “Festes, instruments, caroles, daunces” are followed by Venus's dwelling on “the mount of Citheroun.”\textsuperscript{16} Then the narrator describes portraits of famous people who have been dominated by the influence of Venus. Pagan figures like Hercules and Medea are placed beside the biblical Solomon. Each is presented as an \textit{exemplum} of the negative effects of love.

The statue provides Chaucer with an opportunity to draw on the mythographical handbook genre, which includes works like \textit{Mythologiae} by Fulgentius. Chaucer carefully follows the description used by Fulgentius.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{quote}
The statue of Venus, glorious for to se,
Was naked, fletynge in the large see,
And fro the navele doun al covered was
With wawes grene, and brighte as any glas.
A citole in hir right hand hadde she,
And on hir heed, ful semely for to se,
A rose gerland, fressh and wel smellynge;
Above hir heed hir dowves flikerynge.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Her son Cupid stands before her, blinded and bearing arrows. The depiction belongs to the tradition of Venus \textit{anadyomene} or “of the sea.”\textsuperscript{19} Mythographers established an allegorical significance for each of these details, though as Tinkle has argued, the significance could vary with the aims of the mythographer. For example, in Fulgentius's \textit{Mythologiae}, roses are associated with Venus because roses “both grow red and have thorns, as lust blushes at the outrage to modesty and pricks with the sting of sin; and as the rose gives pleasure, but is swept away by…swift movement…so lust is pleasant for a moment, but then disappears forever.”\textsuperscript{20} A short description of a statue of Venus can be full of allegorical significance, though the narrator refuses to fix the meaning by interpreting it for us.

Since the primary focus of this essay is Venus, I will only briefly mention the ekphrasis for the other two shrines in the tournament arena. Arcite visits Mars's shrine which, belonging to the god of war and strife, is more sinister than Venus. The narrator tells us that “Noght was foryeten by the infortune of Marte.”\textsuperscript{21} Likewise, Emelye, who desires to remain unmarried, visits Diana's shrine. Its description reflects the triune identity of the goddess as chaste huntress, Lucina, the goddess associated with childbirth, and Persephone, wife of Pluto.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., ll. 1919-1924.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., ll. 1925–26.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., ll. 1930, 1936.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Derek S. Brewer, “Chaucer’s Venuses,” in \textit{A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck} (Liège: Université de Liège, 1992), 32.
\item \textsuperscript{18} “The Knight’s Tale,” ll. 1956-62.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Tinkle, \textit{Medieval Venuses and Cupids}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Fulgentius the Mythographer, trans. Leslie George Whitbread (Columbus, OH.: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 66.
\item \textsuperscript{21} “The Knight’s Tale,” l. 2021.
\end{itemize}
Venus, Mars, and Diana are equally presented as astrological, mythological, and allegorical figures.  

Kolve attempts to make a distinction between the painting part of the shrines and the statues. He says that the murals belong to a tradition of art that depicts the “children of the planets,” people following occupations and behaviors beneath the planetary god associated with them. While this is true, the painting is far more complex. Solomon is a straightforward child of Venus and “The broken slepes, and the sikes colde” are behaviors of those who are in love. However, “Plesaunce and Hope” belong to the fin’amor tradition and thus are only tangentially related to the planetary Venus. Furthermore, “the mount of Citheroun” is mythographical in its association with the goddess of Roman antiquity. The description, as elsewhere in Chaucer's depiction of the gods, defies attempts by interpreters to fit it into strict categories.

Another example of Chaucer's tendency to mix versions of the gods appears in Palamon's complaint while in the tower.

But I moot been in prisoun thurgh Saturne,
And eek thurgh Juno, jalous and eek wood
That hath destroyed wel ny al the blood
Of Thebes, with his waste walles wyde.
And Venus sleeth me on that oother syde
For jalousie, and fere of him Arcite.  

Palamon blames Saturn, Juno, and Venus for his misfortune. The inclusion of Juno here is odd. Statius does depict her in his Thebaid as the enemy of Thebes, which is the home city of Palamon and Arcite. However, Juno was never a celestial body like Saturn and Venus. An insistence on a single meaning in this passage would constrain us to interpret Venus and Saturn as only mythological. However, Arcite has already blamed the cousins' imprisonment on the astrological Saturn. Attempts to make a god mean one thing at a time—whether astrological, mythological, or allegorical—are fraught with difficulty. In contrast to approaches such as that used by Kolve, the solution is to recognize that all meanings are possible at the same time.

Chauncey Wood in Chaucer and the Country of the Stars argues that such ambiguity in relation to the gods “does not indicate a 'confusion,' but rather a disinclination to distinguish.” Multiple meanings have been conflated. Chaucer is free to emphasize one or all as his narrative demands. When Mars and Venus are in heaven to debate which of the two should be allowed to prevail in the matter of the tournament, the Saturn that arrives to settle their dispute is astrological and mythological. He is described as an old man who calls Venus his “dere doghter.” Yet Saturn can also talk about his, “cours, that hath so wyde for to turne” and refer to his baleful influence when he dwells in the astrological “signe of the leoun.” The figure of Saturn here is simultaneously astrological and mythological. Wood's advice to interpreters faced with this ambiguity is to consider the context, rather than assume a fixed

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22 The goddess Diana was associated with the moon.
23 Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative, 115.
24 “The Knight’s Tale,” ll. 1328–33.
26 “The Knight’s Tale,” l. 2453.
27 Ibid., ll. 2453, 2462.
meaning. The context in which the god or goddess appears will suggest the possible range of meanings.

A similar opinion to that of Wood is found in an article by James Dean. Though exploring Chaucer's use of allegory, Dean recognizes the poet's tendency for ambiguity. Dean argues that Chaucer will often “shade into an allegorical mode without” the narrative becoming a full-fledged allegory. Writing in a quasi-allegorical manner and using symbols with rich allegorical potential are techniques that Chaucer uses to add depth to his narrative. “For Chaucer makes use of allegory, or something approaching allegory, to refine, color, and ornament his narratives, but not as an end in itself.” Approaching Chaucer's texts with a perspective that something is either a full allegory or not one at all is unhelpful. An interpreter must follow Chaucer's allegory as far as he takes it but no further.

Chaucer's technique is both flexible and powerful. He can suggest allegorical meaning, as with the statue of Venus, without providing a fixed interpretation. This invites the reader to participate in the act of interpretation. Likewise, using Venus as a multivalent figure allows him to present a much more complex story than if the goddess had been limited to a single meaning. Such is Chaucer's narrative technique in “The Knight's Tale.” Now we will turn to what the tale is trying to do through the goddess Venus.

### Theseus's Speech and the “Faire Cheyne of Love”

Prior to announcing the marriage of Palamon and Emelye, Theseus makes a Boethian speech about causality and the First Mover. Initially, a discourse on philosophy seems an odd way to lead into a wedding announcement. Yet when we consider the speech in light of the argument that Chaucer is advancing through the narrative, the wedding announcement becomes surprisingly appropriate.

Theseus begins his speech with these lines:

> The First Moevere of the cause above,  
> When he first made the faire cheyne of love,  
> ........................................  
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond  
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond  
> In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee.

This is strikingly similar to the final section of the second book of *The Consolation of Philosophy*. In *Boece* this occurs in Book II, Metrum 8. The relevant portion says that, “al this accordaunce [and] ordenaunce of thynge is bounde with love, that governeth erthe and see, and hath also comandements to the hevene.”

According to Boethius's argument in this section, love binds the physical world together. Without Love, chaos erupts, for “yif this love slakede the bridelis, alle thynges that now loven hem togidres wolden make a batayle contynuely.” If love relaxes its hold, the elements that

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28 *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars*, 68.
30 Ibid.
32 “Boece,” ll. 13-16.
33 Ibid., ll. 16-18.
make up the world will come into conflict because of their “contrarious qualites.”  

Boethius then jumps from macrocosm to microcosm. What is true at a cosmological level is true for human relations: “This love halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrements of mariages of chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes.” The same love that binds the elements of the world together also holds people together, whether in marriage or in true friendships. The marriage between Palamon and Emelye, which will unite two people and the cities of Thebes and Athens, is an expression on a human level of the way the “faire cheyne of love” unites contradictory elements on a cosmic one.

The power of love, both to unite and to order the affairs of the world, has been a theme throughout the tale, with the figure of Venus as its primary representative. Venus and Mars promised their respective supplicants that they will grant their requests. The result is a squabble in heaven, in which both parties argue before Jupiter that their side should prevail.

And right anon swich strif ther is bigonne,  
For thilke grauntyng, in the hevene above  
Bitwixe Venus, the goddess of love,  
And Mars, the stierne god armipotente  
That Juppiter was bisy it to stente,  

Jupiter is powerless to stop the conflict until Saturn arrives. Saturn is in a unique position of authority since he is the mythological father of both Venus and Jupiter. He resolves the conflict by promising that Palamon, “Shal have his lady...Though Mars shal helpe his knyght.” Arcite is allowed to win the tournament, but as he is exulting in his victory, Pluto, acting on Saturn's request, sends a Fury from hell to spook Arcite's horse. The horse falls saddle downward on Arcite, crushing him and, despite the best efforts of doctors, causing his death. On his death bed, Arcite praises the knightly attributes of Palamon and tells Emelye that “if that evere ye shul ben a wyf, / Foryet nat Palamaon, the gentil man.” The division between the cousins that was caused by their love for Emelye is repaired. Arcite gains the victory, but Palamon wins Emelye.

Commentators on the poem have noted that each young person technically gets what they prayed for at the gods' shrines. Arcite's prayer to Mars focuses on achieving victory in the tournament. He finishes it by petitioning the god of war to, “Yif me [victorie]; I aske thee namoore.” Palamon's prayer to Venus is so centered on possession of Emelye that he tells the goddess,

Ne I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie  
Ne renoun in this cas, ne veyne glorie  
Of pris of armes blowen up and doun;  
But I wolde have fully possessioun  
Of Emelye...
It is only Saturn's strictly literal interpretation of the prayers that provides reconciliation. Even so, the intent of Arcite's prayer is not answered. The argument between Venus and Mars shows that the gods both interpret fulfillment of the requests as victory and possession of Emelye. Arcite's consequent winning of Emelye is extremely short lived. Saturn's solution favors his daughter and her petitioner far more than it does Mars. The “goddess of love” comes out as the final victor in her heavenly battle with the god of war.

The narrator has already hinted at the power of love in the poem. He makes an observation in the ekphrasis of Venus's shrine that has no parallel in the other descriptions. “Ne may with Venus holde champartye / For as hir list the world than may she gye. / Lo, alle thise folk so caught were in her las” [italics mine]. The Middle English Dictionary defines “holde champartye” as “to hold one's own…, contend successfully.” This plays out vividly in the conflict between Venus and Mars over whose supplicant should have his petition granted. As noted in the previous paragraph, Venus is the true champion in the heavenly squabble. Palamon receives exactly what he wants, while Mars is only able to deliver a hollow victory to Arcite.

“Gye” is also significant and ranges in meaning from guide to rule over. It occurs in a few other places in the text, but most notably in Theseus speech before the marriage of Palamon and Emelye. There he uses it when discussing the futility of going against Jupiter's will: “And rebel is to him that al may gye” [italics mine]. Two different gods are posited as guiding or ruling over the world. Theseus presents Jupiter, while the narrator points to Venus. The omnipotence of Jupiter has already been undermined by his failure to stop the argument between Venus and Mars. Saturn, who is the father of Jupiter and Venus, is the only one with the ability to stop the conflict. He does so by providing a solution that favors his daughter. Venus, not Jupiter, is presented as the one that truly guides the world.

“Las” is also a significant word, meaning a cord or occasionally a net. The “las” is a strikingly similar object to the “faire cheyne of love.” Venus with her “las” mirrors the “Firste Movere” with his “faire cheyne of love.” At the same time, Venus, as the allegorical, mythological, and astrological cause of love, can be identified with the “faire cheyne of love” itself. She is one of the means by which God exercises his “devyne purveaunce.” Her influence causes the young knights to seek marriage just like love does in Boece. She also overcomes the god of war as Boethian love keeps contrary elements from “batayle.” Neither humans nor the gods nor the elements can contend with love. This accords well with Book II, Metrum 8 in Boece: “O welleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages!” Love is the power that governs the heavens and the material world, while humans must choose whether they will submit of their own free will. Whether willing or not, every character in “The Knight's Tale” is brought under the governance of love by the end.

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42 Ibid., ll. 1949–51.
44 “Gīen,” Middle English Dictionary (University of Michigan, 2001), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED18525.
45 “The Knight’s Tale,” l. 3046.
Venus and the One God

As noted in the introduction, Barbara Newman examines the ways that female figures are drafted into the service of medieval theologians and philosophers in God and the Goddesses. One of these female figures is love, which often becomes a symbol for divine Love. She writes,

Lady Love, on the other hand, “ascends.” In texts governed by this goddess, sacred and secular rhetorics converge, elevating themes and tropes of courtly eroticism to a high sacrality, until the figures of Caritas, Dame Amour, Frau Minne become not just personifications of human loving, but also names or emanations of the One God.48

The figure of Venus in “The Knight's Tale” has a similar two-fold nature. In her mythological and astrological guise, she inspires the young knights to fall in love and aids Palamon in his quest to acquire Emelye. Through these actions, she becomes identified with romantic desire and emotion. At the same time, the image of Venus with her “las” is very similar to the “First Moevere” and his “faire cheyne of love.” Venus, the goddess of love, becomes in the poem an emanation of the First Mover, the one God of medieval Christianity.49

Newman considers the above an example of what she calls imaginative theology. Though the definition of imaginative theology was given earlier, it is worth repeating here. Imaginative theology is “the pursuit of serious religious and theological thought through the techniques of imaginative literature, especially vision, dialogue, and personification.”50 Chaucer's presentation of Venus and Boethian philosophy in “The Knight's Tale” includes these imaginative techniques. Furthermore, he relies heavily on ekphrasis, an imaginative technique that Newman does not list. Ekphrasis is highly imaginative, standing at the intersection of visual and literary art.

The concept of imaginative theology also suggests the reason why Chaucer chose to include Boethian philosophy in a chivalric romance. Just as Theseus recognizes the appropriateness of a Boethian discourse before a marriage announcement, so a romance is a fitting place to expound Boethian ideas about the function of love in the world. Venus is not the only one who “ascends.” Chivalric romance as a genre is itself elevated to the level of theological and philosophical discourse. “The Knight's Tale” becomes a philosophical romance.

The Many Faces of Venus

One might object that Venus is the root of conflict in “The Knight's Tale.” Rival love for Emelye is the cause of Palamon and Arcite’s hatred and jealousy. Does not Venus divide rather than unite? The power of love to be both positive and negative is an ambiguity stretching back to Plato's Symposium.51 Human love can ennoble and unite people in the bonds of friendship. At other times, it can provoke them to jealousy. We must also recognize that love is not the only power acting on the cousins. Each has free will to rebel against the

48 God and the Goddesses, 291.
49 This again recalls Dante's “love that moves the sun and the other stars” which fuses the image of the First Mover with that of divine Love, the one God of medieval Christian theology.
50 God and the Goddesses, 292.
impulse to love, hence the recommendation above from Boece that humans allow love to rule in their “corages.” Furthermore, the presence of Venus does not exclude the influence of Mars. Both cousins display the effects of the god of war in their actions.

Another explanation can be found by returning to Tinkle. She has aptly pointed out that medieval authors freely used Venus in complex and contradictory ways, even within a single text. Writers were more interested in their moral or philosophical goals than establishing a singleunchanging interpretation of the goddess. As a figure for human love and desire, Venus could very well cause conflict between human beings, but as an image of the First Mover, her effect is to bring unity. Her multivalence allows her to be many things at once, depending on the demands of the narrative.

In “The Knight’s Tale,” Chaucer uses Venus to give imaginative expression to Boethius’s argument that love governs the world. Chaucer does so by drawing on Venus’s multivalence as an astrological, mythological, and allegorical figure. Whether using ekphrasis or allegory, he suggests meaning, while refusing to provide a fixed interpretation. His imaginative technique invites the reader to discover the deeper meaning present in the romance. It is this which explains Venus's remarkable survival in the Middle Ages. Chaucer and other writers have found a way to incorporate her into the intellectual framework of monotheistic Christianity. Venus becomes the means of her own reconciliation with the one God.

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---. Medieval Venuses and Cupids, 88–89.

When War is Peace: Peacebuilding in an Era of Warfare

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Rome had originally been founded by force of arms; the new king [Numa] now prepared to give the community a second beginning, this time on the solid basis of law and religious observance. These lessons, however, could never be learned while his people were constantly fighting; war, he knew well, was no civilizing influence, and the proud spirit of his people could be tamed only if they learned to lay aside their swords. Accordingly, at the foot of the Argiletum he built the temple of Janus, to serve as a visible sign of the alternations of peace and war; open, it was to signify that the city was in arms; closed, that war against all neighboring peoples had been brought to a successful conclusion. Since Numa’s reign the temple has twice been closed: once in the consulship of Manilius at the end of the first war with Carthage and again on the occasion (which we ourselves were allowed by heaven to witness) when after the battle of Actium Augustus Caesar brought peace to the world by land and sea. Numa himself closed it after first securing the goodwill of all the neighboring communities by treaties of alliance.

— Livy, The History of Rome from Its Foundations, 27 BCE (I.18)

Writing at the outset of the Roman Empire and at a time when the living memory of the Roman Republic was still strong, the Roman historian Livy opens his monumental history of the rise and decline of the republic with an invocation of a traditional narrative about its foundation. Livy recounts how the Roman state began as a monarchy “founded by the force of arms.” The king wanted to encourage his people to pursue peace and not war and so he built the Temple of Janus whose open doors meant the city was at war and closed that the city was at peace. Seven hundred years later, the doors of the Temple of Janus had only been closed three times, once during Numa’s reign (715-673 BCE), once after the first war against Carthage (ca. 392 BCE), and once following civil war and the victory of Augustus Caesar over Mark Antony and the Roman Senate’s capitulation to Caesar’s demand to be declared emperor in 27 BCE. The force of Livy’s narrative is to convey to his readers that the Roman people have rarely enjoyed a state of peace since the founding of their state some seven and a half centuries earlier.

I begin this paper by drawing attention to this narrative, because it seems that in a global world, the prospects for peace and the symbolic closure of the Temple of Janus seem as remote as ever. Today, the world system is rapidly being integrated in a process of globalization. A key component of this system is the institutionalization of warfare on a

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1 This paper was presented at the Young Scholars Peace Conference at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, the University of Notre Dame. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Michigan Political Science Association meeting at Aquinas College, October 30, 2015.
This constant state of war is made possible by the processes of globalization, which as the British political scientist Mary Kaldor summarizes, “involve transnational networks, based on political claims in the name of religion or ethnicity, through which ideas, money, arms, and mercenaries are organized. These networks flourish in those areas of the world where states have imploded as the consequence of globalization” (2001, 2). In short, the time is rapidly approaching when it will no longer be possible to close the doors of the Temple of Janus and celebrate a period of global peace.

To understand the new geopolitical reality and the possibility for peace today, I build on Sidney Tarrow’s 2015 Hyneman Lecture at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, “Seeking Peace in Wartime, Opposing War in Peacetime: Dilemmas in Activism in an Age of ‘New Warfare.’” Tarrow’s lecture focuses on how the new era of warfare has made it difficult to form meaningful and lasting peace movements in a world locked into a perpetual “war on terror.” Tarrow provides four reasons that a successful peace movement has been unable to form: “new war,” military-industrial complex (MIC), national security state (NSS), and party politics. In this paper, I discuss these challenges to a global peace movement and add an additional factor related to a global regime of warfare preventing the possibility of peace on a global scale: the international arms industry. Here I begin the task of constructing a map of the current global regime of warfare by focusing on the international arms industry. Corporations, states, and non-state actors are profiting from the proliferation of arms across the globe. Is it possible to build international institutions which can regulate the international arms industry and its interrelationship with national governments around the world?

A first step in constituting an international regime of peace is to construct a reliable cross-national map of the global order supporting continuous warfare. I examine the case of the conflict in Syria as a demonstration of the truly global nature of the conflict and the way that a multitude of state, corporate, and non-state actors are profiting from the war. I develop a case study of the war in Syria in order to highlight the nature of “new war” and the complexity of the situation, including the issue of arming rebels by the U.S. and other states. I follow Mary Kaldor’s (2012) account of a “globalized war economy,” and her call for a “cosmopolitan politics” to regulate it. Along with Kaldor, I argue for the building of an effective international regime of peace to regulate the global war industry. With Kaldor and Tarrow, finally, I argue that the power needed to establish and maintain such an international regime for peace will depend on an effective peace movement that crosses state borders and effectively works against the dominance of the international arms industry.

“New War”

In her book New and Old Wars, Kaldor argues that a new way of understanding war after 9/11 is needed if violence and conflict are to come to an end in the 21st century. The problem here is that policy makers, including decision makers in the military, are basing their thinking on an outdated paradigm of modern warfare where “the preferred technique is spectacular aerial bombing or rapid and dramatic ground manoeuvres which reproduces the appearance of classical war for public consumption but which is rather clumsy an instrument for influencing the reality on the ground” (2007, 3). This type of warfare goes back to the World Wars and has been most recently used by the U.S. in its wars against the Iraqi state in 1991 and 2003. This is the “old war” paradigm and it fails to reach its goals because it has misunderstood the nature of what Kaldor calls “new war.” In Table 1, I summarized the differences between “old war” and “new war” as described by Kaldor (2007, 2012).

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2 This talk can be accessed on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yTjZCXzWrA; last accessed October 29, 2015.
Table 1: Characteristics of “Old War” and “New War”

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<th>New War</th>
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<td>Humanitarian Interests (International)</td>
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<td>Interests of Organized Crime (Drugs, Looting)</td>
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<td>The Politics of Exclusion (Fear, Terrorism, Genocide)</td>
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<td>The Fight Over Local Resources</td>
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<td>Terrorist Groups</td>
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<td><strong>Conduct</strong></td>
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<td>Just War Theory</td>
<td>Motivated by Religion and Nationalism</td>
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<td>No Large Force Concentrations</td>
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<td><strong>Mobilizations</strong></td>
<td>Greater Cost in Resources</td>
<td>Apply Ready-Made Technology</td>
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<td>Logistics</td>
<td>Project Power Easily in Local Settings</td>
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<td>External Funding by Like-minded Groups</td>
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“New wars,” as Kaldor says, “have political goals. The aim is political mobilization on the basis of identity. The military strategy for achieving this aim is population displacement and destabilization so as to get rid of those whose identity is different and to foment hatred and fear” (116). This is what Kaldor means by the “politics of exclusion” where local groups seek to expel those who do not share their identity and goals for the future. For Kaldor, incidentally, this is a major explanation for the increasing waves of refugees leaving these war torn areas in Africa and the Middle East (107, 114-115).

Just War Theory and “New War”

In March of 2003, a timely article by Neta Crawford was published in the first issue of *Perspectives on Politics*. Crawford’s article was timely in that it was published the same month that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq began. In “Just War Theory and the U.S. Counterterror War,” Crawford argues that classical just war theory is no longer an adequate test of the legitimacy of claims for going to war (*jus ad bellum*) or for legitimate conduct during a war (*jus in bello*). As summarized by Crawford, there are six criteria that make up *jus ad bellum* (or universal rules for the right to go to war), and two universal principles that apply *jus in bello* (or rules while engaged in warfare):
** Jus Ad Bellum:**
- Criterion #1: Is the War Acceptable?
  - Yes: Self-Defense and Preemption
  - No: Aggression and Preventative War
- Criterion #2: The Pursuit of Peace and Reconciliation (7)
- Criterion #3: War Must Be the Last Resort
- Criterion #4: Only Competent or Legitimate Authorities
  - Classically Understood as Sovereign States.
- Criterion #5: Only If Success is Probable
- Criterion #6: Overall Good of the War Should Outweigh the Harm

** Jus In Bello:**
- Criterion #1: The Proportionality Criteria
  - Violence in Proportion to the Aims of War.
- Criterion #2: Discrimination – To Avoid Injuring Noncombatants
  - “Unintended Consequences”

This discussion is still relevant, as Crawford points out, since the classical understanding of just war theory is “the dominant ethical framework with respect to war – taught at military academies and articulated in international law and the U.S. Code of Military Justice” (2003, 6). Crawford’s focus is on the so-called “war on terror” or what she calls “counterterror war” and how it constitute a new form of warfare that does not easily conform to classical just war theory. I extend Crawford’s argument about the fact that classical “just war theory” is no longer adequate today. A good example is Criterion #4, which traditionally sees the actors involved in decisions of war and peace as nations and states. But in a situation of “new war,” there are many other actors including non-state actors that must be brought into the analytic frame. Also, an underlying premise of classic just war theory is that there are two mutually exclusive conditions: the state of peace and the state of war. As Crawford points out, “in the view of just war theorists, war is an interruption of potential human community, a disruption of peace” (7; Walzer 2015). The problem with this long-standing dichotomy is that under these terms peace cannot be achieved in today’s world. The world is engaged in global warfare, not “total war” but persistent, low-intensity, and deadly conflict. In its current configuration, moreover, this global regime of violence and warfare is increasing in capacity and does not appear to have any serious check on the continued growth of its power. Like traditional just war theory, the symbolism of the Temple of Janus may no longer apply, that is, without the emergence of a truly global peace movement made up of dense networks of overlapping movements all sharing as one of their goals the goal of world peace.

No Peace Movement in an Age of New Warfare?

The comparative political scientist Sidney Tarrow recently gave the annual Charles S. Hyneman Lecture of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. The title of Tarrow’s talk, “Seeking Peace in Wartime, Opposing War in Peacetime: Dilemmas in Activism in an Age of New Warfare.” Tarrow’s title also brings to mind the seemingly paradoxical proposition that the American state is “making war in what at home feels like a time of peace.” For a divided public with little personal contact with the ongoing “war on terror,” it feels like the U.S. is at peace. The media, Tarrow mentions in passing, is largely complicit in perpetuating this illusion of peace at home. The idea of opposing war in a time of peace is indicative of current geopolitical realities in a dual sense. First, it points to our interconnectedness as global citizens, and the fact that even if our home nation state is not officially at war, it is still possible to oppose the war-making behavior of
other state and non-state actors. Second, it points to the global level of analysis and to one of its fundamental characteristics, i.e., constant warfare. Tarrow’s title maps onto this distinction. The phrase “seeking peace in wartime” corresponds to the goal of the peace movement under the old paradigm where war was easier to understand and locate in a definite place and against a certain enemy state; while the phrase “opposing war in peacetime” corresponds to the new paradigm representing the difficulty of conceptualizing a movement for peace after 9/11 and increasingly so after the election of 2008 (Heaney and Rojas 2015, discussed below). The title of Tarrow’s lecture also points to a central reality in the world of global affairs, which is to say that the world has become a global village and one in which a state of war is constant. In this globalized and globalizing setting of new war, Tarrow suggestively points out how in the past it was enough to “seek peace in wartime.” Today one can still protest the state of war in one’s country, but it has also become necessary to “oppose war in peacetime.”

The first major challenge to the formation of a global peace movement is the failure to understand the nature of “new war.” A major part of Tarrow’s analysis concerns the distinction between “old” wars and “new” wars. Here Tarrow is following the work of Kaldor on the phenomenon of “new wars” which she characterizes as a qualitatively new form of warfare emerging after the end of the cold war and consolidating after 9/11 and the “war on terror.” In Tarrow’s view, the war in Vietnam is an example of “old war.” This war could be brought to a close through conventional means, which according to Tarrow, consisted of a composite peace movement which was made up of opponents of a military draft for the war in Vietnam, a civil rights movement, and a pacifist movement, all of which were able to work together and galvanize toward the shared goal of ending the war in Vietnam. In contrast, “new war” is characterized by the absence of a military draft, lower U.S. causalities, non-state actors and “asymmetric warfare” (see Table 1).

The second challenge identified by Tarrow to explain the lack of an effective peace movement is the strength of the military-industrial complex (MIC) today and as newly recounted in Rebecca U. Thorpe’s (2014) *The American Warfare State: The Domestic Politics of Military Spending*. Thorpe argues that the MIC has spread throughout the country over the last fifty years, creating a situation of local dependence on the arms industry and so-called “defense” dollars. Thorpe argues that the distribution of centers for arms production in the context of federalism and democratic elections virtually guarantees continued Congressional support for the arms industry in the U.S. This local dependence translates into citizen support for the arms industry which influences the behaviors and attitudes of their representatives in their state capitals as well as in Washington, D.C. In short, Thorpe argues that the reason that the “war on terror” is so hard to protest is because warfare has become part of the American way of life, and to such an extent that to protest perpetual war is to challenge what it is to be American.

Reliance on the MIC is evident in the behavior of the formal institutions of the American political system. In the first place, summarizing Thorpe’s argument, a large number of Congressional districts are dependent on, in Tarrow’s terms, “making war in a time of peace.” In addition, the president has played a pivotal role in the perpetuation of warfare in what may feel like a time of peace at home. Since 2008, the American president has continued many of the policies of his predecessor, and even extended ways of warfare that make the fact of a state of war less and less transparent at home. These new practices include internet surveillance, including large-scale domestic spying by the NSA and the creation of CIA “dark sites,” as well as the militarization of the borders and police force through the Department of Homeland security. These executive agencies are joined by the Department of Justice who have come up with definitions of “torture” and “enemy combatants” which legitimate an aggressive foreign policy known as the “war on terror” (All three are executive agencies; SCOTUS and the DC Circuit are also complicit). Up to and continuing after the Snowden leak, these practices have had a stifling effect on domestic debate; especially as mediated
through the mainstream media. The practices have further dampened debate and made it hard
to conceptualize the true scope of the state of war in the U.S. is the executive privilege known
as the “state secrets doctrine” and the increased persecution of whistle blowers under
president Obama.

In addition, Tarrow brings in Linda Wiess’s (2014) *America, Inc.* Weiss’ argument is
similar to Thorpe’s only she focuses on what she calls the “National Security State” (NSS),
which goes beyond the military-industrial complex by focusing on the intersection between
government and technology industries. Institutionally, the NSS is made up a variety of actors
from the president to the DOD, NASA, DOE, CIA, ONR, DARPA, NIH, NSF, the US Army,
and more. In Weiss’ terms, the “NSS is a wholly new postwar creation that is geared to the
permanent mobilization of the nation’s science and technology resources for military
primacy” (2014, 4). The goals are technological superiority and “I/T Leadership;” which are
brought about through government support of various private and semi-private agencies.

A final reason discussed by Tarrow that anti-war folks have found it difficult to congeal
into a successful movement is partisan politics. Tarrow points out, bringing in the institutional
forces in the U.S. political system, that whatever movement for peace existed in the early to
mid-2000s was severely dampened after 2006 when the Democratic Party won back the
House of Representatives. The peace movement was dealt a virtual death-blow in 2008 when
the Democrats won the presidency. This story is recounted by Heaney and Rojas in their 2015
book *Party in the Streets*. Heaney and Rojas begin their book by asking what happened to the
peace movement that had galvanized around ending the war in Iraq in the late 2000s. In
January 2007, nearly one-hundred thousand protesters gathered at the Washingto
Monument to press their demands for an end to the war in Iraq. Heaney and Rojas report the common
refrain that “the 2006 elections were a mandate for peace” (2015, 1). These elections had
returned unified congressional control to the Democrats which forced Republican president
George Bush to rethink his foreign policy and “war on terror.” These anti-war protests soon
dissipated, however, and after the 2008 elections brought unified Democratic control under
the leadership of president Obama, the peace movement all but disappeared.

Heaney and Rojas focus on the relationship between party politics and protests
movements and argue that party identification, which is built up over a lifetime of
socialization, trumps “movement identity” which tends to be temporary and fleeting (5). The
focus of Heaney and Rojas’ analysis is the development of what they call a “partisan identity
theory of mobilization” in which there is a symbiotic relationship between protest politics and
partisan politics. In short, what happened to the anti-Iraq war protests was that the Democratic
Party gained power in Washington, D.C. and this fact was sufficient for a majority of
protesters that they ceased being mobilized. Thus, when the Republicans were in power up
until the 2006 election, there was synergy between the Democratic Party and the peace
movement, which worked in opposition and for similar goals. The same is true of the synergy
between the Republican Party and the conservative movement known as the “Tea Party” (6).
It is interesting to note in passing, that during the current period of divided government, there
has been very little large-scale activism in the U.S. organized around the goals of peace.

The mainstream media continued to follow the administration’s lead supporting the wars
and rarely criticizing the ongoing “war on terror” in all its manifestations. Indeed, as Tarrow
points out, the bulk of the calls for peace came from isolated activists including the so-called
“party in the streets.” This is a reference to Heaney and Rojas (2015) who also discuss the
spontaneous movements that came to make up the so-called “Occupy Wall Street” over the
period 2006-2008. Unfortunately, as recounted by Tarrow, these movements were not
successful because they were made up of isolated networks and not tightly-nit coalitions of
like-minded activists. There was no convergence, moreover, within the Occupy movements
on the issues of war and peace. Other activist activities centered on legal action using the
court system to press for change. In Tarrow’s reckoning, isolated networks and disassociated legal actions are not enough to effect a successful movement for peace.

Tarrow has identified four factors which he argues have held back the formation of a lasting and powerful peace movement that might resist war and violence around the world today: “new war,” MIC, NSS, and party politics. It feels like there is no war to protest and if we cling to the “old war” paradigm it is very hard to conceptualize the ongoing state of war in the U.S. In short, the American political system has changed into a system in which it is possible, in Tarrow’s terms, to “make war in a time of peace.” The new state of global warfare is not easily conceptualized in traditional terms and requires a more international and global effort if we are to witness the symbolic closing of the doors of the Temple of Janus. Once again, a viable crosscutting peacebuilding movement made up of dense networks of activists from around the world appears unable to form. How is it possible to oppose war in peacetime? I will return to this central question of Tarrow’s in my conclusion. In the next section, I build on Tarrow’s work by adding the global arms industry, which I argue also works against the prospects for peace in the world today.

Global Arms Industry: What?

In this section, I begin a “regime analysis” of the global arms industry. The goal is to map out who the actors are at the state and non-state level as well as internationally. Two relevant variables in determining the makeup of the global arms industry are the buyers and the sellers. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “the five biggest [arms] exporters in 2010-14 were the United States, Russia, China, Germany and France and the five biggest [arms] importers were India, Saudi Arabia, China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan” (2015, 1). The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, Russia, China, France, the U.K., and the U.S. plus Germany and Italy make up approximately 85% of all international arms sales (Stohl and Grillot 2014, 3). According to SIPRI, “a little over two-thirds of the companies in the Top 100 for 2013 are headquartered in North America or Western Europe. They accounted for 84.2 per cent of the total arms sales in the period from 2010 to 2014” (XX). The top five exporters of weapons was dominated by the U.S. with 31% of the international share, followed by Russia (27%), China (5%), Germany (5%), France (5%), the U.K. (4%) (Wezeman and Wezeman 2015). The top five countries with highest military expenditure were the U.S. ($610 billion), China ($216 billion), Russia (84.5 billion), Saudi Arabia (80.8 billion) and France ($62.3 billion) (Perlo-Freeman et al. 2015, 2). These figures clearly show that the international arms industry is big business which continues to supply the demands of the major powers to increase their military power with respect to their rivals in the international arena. But these numbers do not give a complete picture of the political economy of the international arms industry and of the true driver of the international demand for weapons supplied by arms producing companies.

In the U.S., Congress creates a budget allocating funds to the DOD and other agencies which then spend that money on upkeep, salaries, and upgrades including new weapons systems. These weapons are usually supplied by a private company which is contracted by the DOD or other agencies to manufacture and deliver weapons systems and other arms. Six of the top ten arms companies in 2013 were American and include such names as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, and United Technologies. For example, Northrup Grumman recently won a contract to build the next generation of bombers for the U.S. Air Force (Cohen 2015).

The best source I found to date is Rachel Stohl and Suzette Grillot’s (2009) The International Arms Trade. The authors begin by observing that when a lot of media attention is focused on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), this focus misses the fact that conventional weapons “cause a far more deadly and current threat – one responsible for
hundreds of thousands of deaths a year” (2009, 2). Conventional weapons are those that do not belong in the category of WMD such as guns, ammunition, rockets, and vehicles like tanks and aircraft. The international trade in these weapons is very profitable and one that is “engaged in by virtually every country around the world” (2). These weapons are far more deadly than WMD since they are actually used in conflicts around the world. Indeed, as Stohl and Grillot put the matter, “these weapons are used to kill people in countries experiencing conflict and in countries at peace, and [they] contribute to cycles of violence, trapping communities in endless fighting and bloodshed” (7; Walzer 2015).

One difficulty of Stohl and Grillot’s analysis is the relative dearth of available data on international arms transfers (9). This is especially true for information on the specific companies and agencies involved in the sale or “transfer” of arms from one country to another. Stohl and Grillot compensate for the lack of information by summarizing the export and import of weapons in terms of nation states. Thus, an important part of the picture is missing, which is how and why arms are produced by companies and sold to countries in the first place. Stohl and Grillot’s story picks up after the arms have been purchased by national governments. At this point the arms are either used to provide new or replace old equipment to national militaries and law enforcement agencies. As a consequence of these upgrades, old weapons are often stockpiled and these stockpiles are often a source of international arms transfers. It is also possible that the original purchase of weapons from a company may be for the purpose of stockpiling and future sale to other countries.

Stockpiles of arms can be a valuable source of capital in times of declining revenue. For example, in a post-Cold War world, Stohl and Grillot recount how, “in pursuit of profit, countries began to sell weapons to traditional allies as well as the potential enemies of these allies” (29). The authors provide the example of the former Soviet republics, “in desperate need of hard currency with the sudden disappearance of economic support from the Soviet Union, many former Soviet republics and satellites began to sell previously restricted weapons to countries outside the former Soviet bloc” (29). The Russian Federation also got into the global arms trade and depleted its own stockpiles by selling them “to anyone willing to pay the price, exporting MiG-29 fighter jets to China, Syria and Malaysia in the early 1990s” (29-30). Russia is not alone in increasing its sales of weapons, and after 2001, Stohl and Grillot observe, “the United States has led the post-11 September arms extravaganza, increasing its exports dramatically, as well as existing its existing arms trade policy to fit what it considers to be a new security environment” (34).

**Example of the War in Syria**

The case of the war in Syria illustrates the complexity of “new war” and draws attention to the way that the global arms industry has negatively impacted the prospects for peace in the region. Iraq and Syria are the least peaceful countries in the world according to the 2015 Global Peace Index (Iraq is 161 out of 162 and Syria is 162 out of 162). The civil war in Syria has been ongoing for four and a half years and estimates of the death toll range between 200,000 and 250,000 deaths in that time. According to the U.N. there are 7.6 million Syrians who are internally displaced and 3.8 million refugees – now the world’s largest population of refugees.

At the level of the nation-state, there are a multitude of actors involved in the Syrian civil war. Both Russia and Iran are actively supporting the ruling regime of Bashar al-Assad. Assad

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has been accused of a number of human rights violations including using indiscriminate bombings of the population as well as the use of chemical weapons. But where did the Assad regime get its weapons? One prominent example in the news is the military support of the Russian government who has a record of contracts with the Assad regime and continues to supply it with arms including surface to air and surface to ship missiles (BBC News, 2014). Iran, who is under U.N. arms sanctions banning the sale of arms to other countries, has reportedly been using covert channels to ferry weapons and supplies to the Assad regime. On the opposition side there are at least nine different state actors supplying different groups of rebels including: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Libya, the European Union (EU), the US, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon. The governments of these states have supported different factions depending on their own goals for the region further deepening the crisis and making the prospect for peace in the region quite remote. There are several different rebel groups fighting the Assad regime ranging from the more fundamentalist Islamic State (IS) to the more secular Free Syrian Army (FSA). There are also Kurdish fighters active in the area who are fighting extremist elements like IS. Qatar has sent weapons via Turkey and has supplied more “hardline rebel groups” while Saudi Arabia is actively supporting more “nationalistic and secular factions” of the FSA (BBC News).

After its recent civil war, the Libyan state has proven to be “a key source of weapons” for rebel groups in Syria. According to the U.N. Security Council’s Group of Experts “heavy and light weapons, including man-portable air defence systems, small arms and related ammunition and explosives and mines” have been transferred from Libya to rebel groups in Syria (BBC News). According to James George Jatras of the website Antiwar.com, the U.S. was at least aware of large quantities of weapons leaving Libya destined for Syrian rebel groups. In 2012 a large weapons shipment was sent to the FSA via Turkey. “Those weapons are most likely from Muammar Gaddafi’s stock,” Jatras reports, including “about 20,000 portable heat-seeking missiles – the bulk of them SA-7s – that the Libyan leader obtained from the former Eastern bloc. Reuters reports that Syrian rebels have been using those heavy weapons to shoot down Syrian helicopters and fighter jets” (Jatras 2015). Many of these weapons were sold to Libya by France in 2004, and as Stohl and Grillot observe, these sales “consisted of anti-tank missiles worth $230 million and radio communication equipment worth $175 million” (2009, 1). Shortly thereafter, “Gadhafi visited France – his first trip to the West since he renounced terrorism and nuclear weapons – and announced a $14.7 billion deal for conventional weapons and nuclear reactors. The deal included Rafale fighter aircraft, military and attack helicopters, air defence radars, patrol boats, and armoured vehicles” (1). An important question to ask from this paper’s perspective, but one that will have to await future research, is where did these weapons come from in the first place? In other words, is it possible to trace the path of these weapons from manufacturer to the battlefield in which they are used?

The U.S. and E.U. member states have been active in supplying more secular rebel groups like the FSA. As of 2013 and with the help of the CIA, a large quantity of arms was transferred from a stockpile in Croatia after the 1990s Balkan War (BBC News). These arms “had been sold to Saudi Arabia, and that multiple planeloads had left Croatia since December 2012, bound for Turkey and Jordan” (BBC News). Turkey and Jordan then allowed the weapons to be transferred over their borders with Syria. The border between Syria and Iraq is now quite porous and arms are routinely transferred from supporters of the largely Sunni rebels by their compatriots in Iraq; as well as Al-Qaeda in Iraq reportedly has been supplying the al-Nusra Front, an extremist rebel group fighting in Syria (BBC News). Finally, there have been reports of the Sunni community in Lebanon supporting rebel groups with arms and money (BBC News). Many of these weapons have been discovered and captured on the battlefields of northern Iraq and Syria. Many of these weapons came from the Iraqi Army which surrendered to IS in northern Iraq in June of 2014 (Chulov and Lewis 2014). Indeed, a
recent report by Conflict Armament Research (2014) studied ammunition caches captured from IS fighters and found that it came from a variety of countries including the U.S., Russia, and China. The larger question remains, however, what companies manufactured this ammunition and what path did it take before ending up in the hands of IS fighters in Northern Iraq and Syria?

Conclusion

Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes … known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few…. No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

— James Madison, Political Observations, 1795

[Our country] will avoid the necessity of those overgrown military establishments which, under any form of government, are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to republican liberty.

— George Washington, 1796 Farewell Address

We are not, however, a warlike people. Our historic goal is peace … We maintain strong military forces in support of this supreme purpose, for we believe that in today’s world only properly organized strength may altogether avert war.

— Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953.

Tarrow begins his lecture by noting how the peace movement that helped end the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s was successful because it was not a singular movement but instead was made up of a dense network of multiple movements who shared a common goal. Vietnam, America’s “most inglorious war,” Tarrow argues, was challenged by a peace movement that was characterized by a plurality of movements or a “composite movement.” Today, although the U.S. government continues to fight its “war on terror” on multiple fronts, it is not confronted with an effective opposition, one that can bring together multiple social movements powerful enough to challenge the ongoing state of war.

Since the successful peace movement that helped end the Vietnam War in the early 1970s, there have been no new examples of successful anti-war movements. Why is this the case? In the first place the U.S. is the largest purveyor of war and enabler of warfare around the world. There are really multiple wars going on, several that conform to the traditional nation-state model of warfare, e.g. Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, as well as the ubiquitous “war on terror” conforming to the newer models of war and warfare after the cold war and 9/11 (Kaldor 2007). So why, after fourteen years of warfare and the “war on terror,” is a viable peace movement unable to form?

Tarrow’s answer is multifaceted. To begin with, he points out the ambiguous nature of the current state of warfare in the U.S. The ambiguous nature and meaning of the “war on terror” ensures that would be pacifists and other proponents of peace find it difficult to

4 Thorpe (2014, 3) quotes both Madison and Washington in the Introduction to her first chapter “Perpetuating the US Military Economy.”
conceptualize concrete and effective pathways to protest the seemingly perpetual state of warfare. The American public finds it difficult to understand, much less to find the motivation to protest the ongoing state of warfare. This is the case for a multitude of reasons. In the past, the enemy was easy to identify and proponents of peace could focus on, for example, ending the war against the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong. Today, in the “war on terror,” there is no traditional state actor to focus on and this makes it difficult for an anti-war movement to mobilize. The paradigm has shifted from warfare between nation states to one where a much more powerful state is fighting non-state actors in what is known as “asymmetrical warfare.” There is also the perceived futility of protest movements. There is no more apt example of the futility of contemporary protests against the ongoing state of war in the U.S. than the global protests against the beginning of the Iraq War. More than 2.5 million Americans protested this war, and many millions more protested around the world. These protests, of course, were all for naught, as the U.S. war machine invaded and occupied Iraq in March of 2003.

In Tarrow’s analysis, what is needed is a genuine form of civil society activism in which activists form composite, durable and overlapping coalitions around a broad range of interrelated issues such as fighting against the national security state, domestic spying, diminished civil rights and liberties, drone warfare, imperialism, hegemony, international arms industry, etc. In Tarrow’s understanding, a genuine peace movement will take the shape of an onion with a core and periphery and not a singular movement. What is needed, moreover, is to combat what Tarrow calls “infrastructural power,” characterized as “pluralism from the top and a state that regulates participation.” It is necessary to combat this form of state power which increasingly makes a genuine peace movement hard to imagine. It will certainly require more than internet mobilization, since this type of “event mobilization” cannot be sustained as it is incapable of generating interpersonal trust (Tarrow 2005, 2012; Putnam 2000). Instead, one needs both online and offline mobilization. “Best of all,” Tarrow says, “is to have real mobilization and simultaneous online mobilization.” Despite ongoing efforts of the so-called “global justice movement” and activism on the internet and social media, there is still an absence of an effectual peace movement today.

War is a global venture and there are many powerful actors including states, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and non-state actors who profit from warfare. Building off Tarrow, I identified five challenges to the formation of a genuine global movement for peace. The vision provided in this paper is not a happy one. International relations is understood as a constant state of conflict, and increasingly so in era of globalized warfare. How does this portrait of the international arena change the way we think about the prospect for building a viable and lasting international regime for peace? What happens to the prospects for peace in an era of globalization when local constituencies are dependent on the MIC and are reluctant to organize against the international arms industry?

To combat these forces militating against genuine and lasting movements for peace today, Kaldor argues for a “new form of cosmopolitan political mobilization” (2007, 121). This movement for a global cosmopolitan politics seeks to find solutions to violence and war in partnership with local populations. “What is needed is a new form of cosmopolitan political mobilization,” Kaldor continues, “which embraces both the so-called international community and local populations, and which are capable of countering the submission to various types of particularism” (121). In all conflict zones, Kaldor argues, there are “islands of civility” and “zones of peace” in which national and international organizers can work in order to establish and maintain peace in the wider region. As Kaldor says, finally: “In all zones of violence

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5 Of course, an interesting potential counterpoint to the lack of a specific state to focus on is the Islamic State (IS) which is trying to carve an Islamist state out of portions of the failed states of Iraq and Syria.
there do exist civil society groups who care about the public interest who campaign for security and justice although they are often the first to be targeted. The challenge is now how to bring their voices into the discussion about the construction of new rules of peace.”

International activists for peace must also demand that more international and regional institutions are formed which can police terrorism and other criminal activity rather than using military force and further compounding the problems that lead to extremist violence in the first place. This is the gist of Kaldor’s call for a “new cosmopolitanism” which “is based on inclusive, universalist, multicultural values and the politics of particularist identities” (2007, 7). These particularist identities are cosmopolitan in the sense that they are both local (and “particular”) while also being global, universal, and multicultural. A cosmopolitan politics respects individual rights, maintains both local and international law, seeks to reestablish legitimacy in the cases of failed states like Syria and Iraq and changes the focus from “peace keeping” to “cosmopolitan law enforcement” (7, 12). Especially important is restoring legitimacy to local political structures while preventing the outbreak of future wars. Peacekeeping is an example of an old war paradigm attacking a new war situation which only makes matters worse (138). In a 2012 lecture titled “The New Peace,” Kaldor puts her argument for a new cosmopolitan politics in the following terms:

I am arguing for international law that prohibits the use of force … Those responsible for the attacks are to be arrested where possible rather than killed … When terrorists are treated as enemies in a war, they are elevated and legitimized. In the case of drone attacks, for example, it is not just a problem that mistakes are made and civilians sometimes get killed; more importantly, it escalates the violence. It provides an argument and justification for mobilizing more recruits to extremist causes.

In the current context of global warfare, we see that nations will continue to fight, and so a first step must be to shift the discussion to one of strengthening international institutions given the fact of a powerful global regime of warfare. To accomplish this task will require a sustained and lasting global peace movement that includes transparency in arms sales as one of its demands. In an era of “new war” and increasing global warfare it is essential that the strength of the arms industry in the U.S. and elsewhere is added to the list of demands which might bring together a cross-national network of densely interconnected groups working toward the ultimate goal of world peace.

Future Research

Future research will involve comparative studies where the arms industry in various countries is analyzed and their influence on global politics is assessed. For example, I might extend Thorpe’s (2014) analysis of the MIC in the U.S. to the other major arms producing and exporting countries like Russia, China, Germany, France, and the U.K. In addition, there are two other items on my agenda for future research in the area of peace studies. First, more research is needed on how international institutions can be created and/or strengthened to bring the global arms industry under international oversight and subject to its regulation. Second, it would be interesting to look at the actions of the international arms industry in light of corporate-state crime theory.
References


Killing the Rotten Citric Lump: A Somatic Reading of the Death of Shahrazād’s Hunchback

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Shahrazād’s *Thousand and One Nights* features a strange little story about a hunchback who is assaulted and accidentally killed. Eventually he is brought back to life by a clever barber, but not before he is repeatedly “killed” over and over by various persons around town. While this medieval eastern tale was undoubtedly meant purely as entertainment, and not written for some measured didactic purpose, at its core is a complex picture of the consequences a deformed body potentially encountered: namely, somatic violence.

The hunchback’s song, heard by the tailor and his wife as they first approach him, is sung in praise of excess. What follows is a violent and exciting series of events, disastrous for the hunchback, anxiety-inducing for his many “killers.” Later, when the tailor attempts to defend himself before the King of China, he says:

I invited him home with me and then went out, bought fried fish for him, and brought it back. Then we sat to eat, and I took a piece of fish and crammed it down his throat, and he choked on a bone and died instantly.

He does not hide from the events, and in fact steps forward to confess his crimes in order to save the life of the Jewish physician.

Throughout the narrative, the hunchback is always at the center of the action, yet with the exception of the first time he is “killed,” he is never written as the reader’s focus, except in instances of violence performed against his body. The reader’s gaze is constantly drawn to the killer, rather than the victim, and led to laugh at or empathize with the killers of the hunchbacked corpse, rather than the deformed, ever-abused body. Neither the champion nor the foil, the body of the hunchback functions merely as the catalyst, moving the story forward. Yet throughout the tale, the reader catches glimpses of him among and between the figures looming large over the scene, crouching over, abusing, and concealing the broken form of his inciting body.

As the tailor and his wife return from a day of merriment and sightseeing, they come upon a smartly-dressed, singing hunchback in the streets of their city. Quoting the poet Antarah ibn Shaddad (526-608 CE), Shahrazād describes him:

Lovely the hunchback who can hide his hump,
Like a pearl hidden in an oyster shell,
A man who looks like a castor oil branch,

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1 Many thanks to Dr. Eve Salisbury for her generous feedback and guidance with this article.
3 *Arabian Nights*, 256.
From which dangles a rotten citric lump. As they approach him, the hunchback sings a tune about the joys of imbibing, after which the tailor and his wife invite him, “drunk and reeking of wine,” back to their home for supper. It is here that the hunchback’s story takes the first of many fatal turns. The tailor and his wife escort the hunchback to their home, where the tailor leaves them in order to run to the market to gather up the foodstuffs they will need for their dinner party. When he returns home, the tailor and his wife agree that they will “spend the night carousing, bantering, and amusing [themselves] with this hunchback,” at which point they sit down to dine with their guest. When they have eaten to their heart’s content, the tailor took a piece of fish and, cramming it in the hunchback’s mouth, held it shut and said laughing, ‘By God, you must swallow the whole piece.’ The hunchback, unable to breathe, could not wait to chew, and he hastened to swallow the piece which happened to have a large bone, which stuck in his throat and choked him.

The hunchback dies suddenly as a result of this sudden, violent shift in the narrative. Panicked over having the lifeless body of the hunchback in her house, the tailor’s wife insists that they get rid of the body by taking it and leaving it at the home of the local Jewish physician, allowing him to deal with the repercussions. So begins the tale of the many-times-killed hunchback.

Once the tailor and his wife have disposed of the body, the body of the hunchback is taken to various locations around town and “killed” numerous times. A Jewish physician is made to think that he has killed him, before a (Muslim) steward, and a Christian broker, each believe they have caused the death of the hunchback. Each of the “killers” later tells his own story in order to, like Shahrazād, save his life. The first “killing” of the hunchback, though, the one at that hands of the tailor, stands out among the four not only because it is the first of all the “killings” but because it is the only “killing” to which no motive or satisfactory explanation is attributed. Unlike the physician who trips and sends the body tumbling down a flight of stairs, or the steward who attacks what he thinks is a burglar in his kitchen, or even the broker who beats the hunchback in a drunken haze, believing that the lifeless body is

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4 *Arabian Nights*, 249.
5 *Arabian Nights*, 250.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 *Arabian Nights*, 248-251.
9 *Arabian Nights*, 251-253, 253-254, and 254-255.
10 *Arabian Nights*, 258, 274, 287, 299, 354. The *Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of stories within stories told by a woman named Shahrazād. In the largest framing story, that which involves Shahrazād’s own narrative, a king, Shahrayar, has women brought to his bed chamber each night and, in the morning, has them executed, so as to stave off the possibility of a woman ever cheating on him as his former, late wife had. Shahrazād volunteers to be taken to the king’s bed as she has a plan for not only her own survival but the survival of all the women in the land. Because she knows that she will be a woman fated to die when the king has no more use for her, once morning comes, she tells him stories that never end. Through her skilful storytelling, she prolongs her life night after night, spinning and weaving together a thousand stories, always breaking off in the middle of a tale, leaving her audience, the king, waiting for the next installation of her tale, waiting for just one more day.

11 *Arabian Nights*, 252.
12 *Arabian Nights*, 253.
trying to steal his turban.\textsuperscript{13} Shahrazād does not explain why the tailor would accost the hunchback as he does, accidentally killing him.

For those familiar with the many-times-killed folktale trope and its use in the medieval fabliaux tradition, there is a temptation to read Shahrazād’s hunchback as being the victim of a sexually-motivated (initial) killing as, upon first glance, this story seems to mirror those. Certainly in the Middle Ages, we are often confronted with the trope of the many-times killed corpse in the context of infidelity.\textsuperscript{14} In these tales, violence as a result of an illicit affair, or suspected affair, leads to the slain body of the adulterer/tempter being repeatedly abused and “killed” by various characters around town. This, though, is only one of the major components of folktale trope AT 1537 (\textit{The Corpse Killed Five Times}).\textsuperscript{15}

Rather than read the Hunchback’s Tale as conforming to this western European trope of infidelity and violence, I suggest a somatic reading of the tale is necessary. The hunchback’s abused, deformed body is attacked, not because he is the lover of the tailor’s wife, but precisely because of his bodily variation. That is to say, the violence enacted upon the body of the hunchback is not retaliatory in nature; rather, it is violence for sport, or entertainment. This paper will, in part, explore these two readings, retaliatory violence and violence for sport as these are both motives which a modern reader might attribute to the initial killing of the Hunchback. In the end, though, we will see that a contemporary would have understood the narrative and read the silent motive of the brutal tailor to be rooted in violence for entertainment. Analyzing the tailor’s motive for abusing the hunchback before accidentally killing him is not merely a literary exercise; exploring how deformed bodies were perceived within their societies helps us to understand the ramifications and consequences of those social perceptions. I would argue that in the somatic violence we see inflicted upon Shahrazād’s hunchback, we are one step closer to understanding eastern medieval body culture and ideas about what types of behaviors and practices could be seen as acceptable in terms of engaging with the deformed body.

This paper will first consider the context of the Hunchback’s Tale both within the Thousand and One Nights and as a tale conforming to the AT 1537 trope. Next, I will consider the theme of drunken violence as it pertains to the concept of motive and dispense with the notion that this story mirrors the French fabliaux in terms of motive for the initial bout of violence. Lastly, I will outline the concept of somatic violence as it occurs in the Hunchback’s Tale and explore this form of violence in the abuse of the adorned, deformed body.

\textbf{The Thousand and One Nights in Context}

Because Shahrazād’s tales have been embraced by so many cultures particularly in the West in the many centuries since their inception, western readers have tended to forget that these

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Arabian Nights}, 254.


\textsuperscript{15} AT 1537: \textit{The Corpse Killed Five Times}. AnttiAarne, \textit{The Types of the Folktales}. Translated by Stith Thompson. Second edition (Helsinki: Helsinki Commercial Printing, 1961), 442. This system of classifying folktales takes its abbreviations from its authors, thus “AT 1537” is number 1,537 of the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index. This is the standard system for identifying motifs by folklorists.
were stories that emerged from a particular cultural landscape in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the stories have been read and embraced by the post-medieval West, and as a result, they have often been read in a colonial and, later, a post-colonial context. Such a reading veils and even minimizes the world that actually produced them.

This is not to say that Shahrazād’s stories are the product of a single culture. In the west, the tales are often referred to as the Arabian Nights, though this too creates a misconception which conceals the truth of the stories’ context. Henceforth, I will use the title Thousand and One Nights which more accurately reflects the original text Kitāb ‘alf Layla wa-layla (ليلةوليلةألفكتب) as well as avoiding attributing this collection of folk tales to one particular culture and people, i.e. Arab, when in fact the entire medieval Near and Middle Eastern worlds contributed to crafting Shahrazād’s tales.

The Thousand and One Nights are often described as a corpus of fourteenth-century folk tales. It would, however, be a mistake to think that Shahrazād’s tales were created in the fourteenth century. Rather, hers are popular stories which had been a part of Near and Middle Eastern cultures for generations by the time they were stitched together into the particular collection of interwoven narratives that we find in the fourteenth century Syrian manuscript edited by Muhsin Mahdi. Furthermore, tales such as that of the hunchback follow pan-cultural folk narrative practices to such an extent that it makes it nearly impossible to date them with any degree of certainty. The long oral histories of these tales make it equally difficult to determine their date of origin. While we can be certain that the tales included in Mahdi’s collection existed in the fourteenth century that is all we can be certain of. In other words, Mahdi’s collection can, at best, give us a terminus ante quem for Shahrazād’s many stories.

Knowing that these tales come to us from between the ninth and fourteenth centuries from all over the Near and Middle East allows for more complex, socially contextualized readings of the text. Because we know, very generally, the medieval people who created and listened to these tales, we can analyze something such as the abuse and violence performed against the deformed body of the hunchback in the context of Islamic society, law, custom, and culture and come away with a better understanding of medieval Islamic conceptions of the body, deformity, and somatic violence.

The Many-Times-Killed Corpse

The trope of the many-times-killed corpse (AT 1537) involves the slain body of a man or woman being shuffled among, or smuggled to, or hidden at various locations; at each of these the body is abused and “killed” again and again. This trope appears in dozens of tales from European, Russian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, North American, and South American peoples. The trope requires, simply, that a body be “killed” more than once; though it is often assaulted five times, the version found in the Thousand and One Nights contains only four “killings.”

In the nineteen-thirties, Aurelio Espinosa analyzed the AT 1537 trope by breaking its recurring components down into four groups: A-F. Relevant for the medieval versions of a many-times-killed corpse are groups A and C. Group A considers the motive for the initial killing while group C analyzes various plot points involving how and to where the body is

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16 Allen, *Introduction to Arabic Literature*, 44.
18 Aarne, *Types of the Folk Tale*, 442.
19 Group B considers elements from stories in which a woman or animal is killed; group D entails the exchange of payment for burying the slain body; group E involves laying the blame on another, often involving a female corpse; and lastly, group F deals with any element in which the corpse is put on horseback. All of these elements occur in early modern and modern versions of the many-times-killed corpse.
carried around the town or village (Appendix, Table I). While Espinosa did not include the Hunchback’s Tale in his analysis, we can see that Shahrazād’s story of somatic violence aligns with several of the expected elements in the trope. This variety creates a narrative unique among the tales that conform to AT 1537.

Within Espinosa’s system, element C is concerned with all the “killings” which follow the initial inciting act of violence/first “death.” These are all fairly straight forward in Shahrazād’s tale, conforming at least in part to Espinosa’s system. The Hunchback’s Tale seems to pull from various elements, sometimes turning them on their heads. For example, element C1 is seen in both the physician moving the body of the hunchback, and in the broker stumbling across the hunchback in his neighborhood and, thinking he is alive, he “kills” him. Element C13 is seen as the body is lowered into the steward’s house via his chimney; when the steward sees a body in the kitchen, he believes he has come upon a thief in the act. While the hunchback winds up in the wealthy space of a noble eastern leader, as is seen in element C14, his final scene takes place in the palace of the King of China rather than the harem of a sultan. While he is not ultimately killed as his counterparts in other traditions are, he is, instead, brought back to life by having the fishbone removed from his throat.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly to which element of group A the hunchback’s death conforms. Elements A and A1 deal with a wife’s lover or tempter as the victim. Element A2 holds that the murder was intentional, while A4 says that it is an accident and the cause of death is a fishbone. Certainly, at first glance, element A4 seems the most likely candidate as the fishbone is present and acts as the murder weapon. However, A4 requires that the killing be purely accidental. While it is true that the tailor did not mean to murder the hunchback, the violence he enacted on the hunchback’s body was wholly intentional. None of Espinosa’s elements factor in motives for violence of this sort.

If the motives were following the French tradition, we could be looking at a blending of elements A4 and either A or A1. This, though, is problematic. First, Shahrazād never shies away from shining the light on infidelity, and second, as discussed below, the aftermath of the first “killing” does not fit the cultural norms for a suspected cheating wife. Below, this question of the motive for violence will be considered by addressing why the Hunchback’s Tale cannot conform to element A1, and how instead, it conforms only to A4. In order to understand these motives it would first be helpful to discuss the context Shahrazād has created within her narrative.

**Drunken Violence and the Urban Space**

To my knowledge, no study has yet been conducted on the urban element of trope AT 1537, though such an element does seem to exist. Drunkenness and the urban environment have, however, been thoroughly explored in Mushin al-Musawi’s *Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights*. In the case of the Hunchback’s Tale, as it is throughout Shahrazād’s stories, urban life functions as the context in which excess, drunkenness, and corruption takes place.

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21 *Arabian Nights*, 252-3.
22 *Arabian Nights*, 254.
23 *Arabian Nights*, 253.
24 *Arabian Nights*, 355.
For the tailor and his wife, this influence of urbanity takes the form of drunken amusement and drunken violence.26

Drunkenness and urban corruption explain the temptation to engage in illicit activities, but they also provide the platform for violence to occur.27 The urban environment enables the whole series of events in the Hunchback’s Tale to transpire: from the presence and consumption of alcohol,28 to the multicultural milieu of the hunchback’s attackers. Considering the presence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in this single unnamed, vague space within the realm of the King of China, we can extrapolate that they must be in an urban environment. The professions of the characters, tailor, physician, steward, broker, king, street-performer, are also helpful in understanding their space as urban rather than rural. Finally, the fact that the characters can easily and quickly get from one house to the next in passing off the body onto one another, all within a single evening suggests that they are all fairly close together, as one would expect to find in an urban environment.29

For the story to function as it does, it must take place within the urban space. Al-Musawi notes that in the stories of the Thousand and One Nights, it is always the urban environment “where temptation occurs and …misfortune come[s] in consequence to one’s deeds.”30 It is only within an urban space that the tailor can come across the intoxicated hunchback, take him home, and “kill” him, before dumping him at the house of a local Jewish physician who will accidentally “kill” him before lowering him into the kitchen of a neighboring steward who will beat the hunchback to “death,” and who will, in his own right, set the drunk Christian broker up to come across and “kill” the hunchback. Al-Musawi writes that in Shahrazād’s tales, “wine becomes the trope for absolute abundance, carelessness, and frivolity. It is associated with darkness, [the time when] restraint is put aside.”31 The urban space allows for this varied cultural landscape of “killers,” for these drunken assaults on the deformed body.

This association of darkness with drunkenness with danger is exemplified in the Hunchback’s Tale. Indeed, it is the dark, drunken, urban environment that sets the stage for the violence perpetrated against the body of the hunchback. Of our hunchback’s story, al-Musawi notes that it is the fog of alcohol which “deludes” the attackers into believing they have each, in their turn, murdered the hunchback.32 In addition to muddling the minds of the “killers,” this darkness also prevents the reader from fully seeing the hunchback in each scene. Shahrazād’s audience is so focused on the tailor going to the store that they nearly miss that fact that he is leaving his wife with a drunk stranger, alone in their home.

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26 Arabian Nights, 249 and 250.
27 The prolific amount of alcohol found in a story populated largely by Muslims may surprise some audiences. In addition to creating the framework within which violence can occur, use of alcohol in a narrative such as the Thousand and One Nights functions too as metaphor. According to al-Musawi, instances of intoxication and the defense of intoxication in the Thousand and One Nights, despite cultural/religious prohibitions, can often be read as a social commentary on secular-minded leaders (Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights, 170). He describes the use of wine in the Thousand and One Nights as “carnivalesque,” in the sense that it satirizes traditional authorities (Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights, 171).
28 Alcohol is consumed by the Hunchback, the tailor and his wife, as well as by the broker.
29 There is even enough time for broker, the last to assault the hunchback, to “[pass] the night” in the chief’s house.
30 al-Musawi, Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights, 156.
31 al-Musawi, Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights, 188.
The Problematic Motive of the Jealous Husband

The tailor and his wife had already been out enjoying diversions all day when, on their way home, they run into the hunchback.33 Drunk, he performs music on his “tambourine, singing, and improvising all kinds of funny gestures.”34 This song is the only time the audience actually hears the hunchback, yet even at this moment the darkness seems to be creeping up around him, muffling his voice. The audience hears Shahrazād rather than the hunchback:

Go early to the darling in yon jug;
Bring her to me,
And fete her as you fete a pretty girl,
With joy and glee,
And make her as pure as a virgin bride,
Unveiled to please,
That I may honor my friend with a cup
Of wine from Greece.
If you, my friend, care for the best in life,
Life can repay,
Then at this moment fill my empty cup,
Without delay.
Don’t you, my tantalizer, on the plain
The gardens see?35

It is tempting to read this with an eye straying toward the tailor’s wife. Certainly, the hunchback references pretty girls and virginal brides, but he sings here not of women but of wine. “Don’t you, my tantalizer, on the plain / the gardens see?” he asks.36 Cups of wine are, for the hunchback, the rose colored glasses through which he can see a more beautiful, if artificial, world. His song celebrates the view that alcohol allows life to repay one with all the best things in life. Yet, paradoxically, or ironically, this is contradicted by the events that unfold throughout the rest of the story.

Shahrazād says that the tailor and his wife realize that the hunchback is drunk as they approach him; they invite him home for supper and drinks.37 After they have already walked home, the tailor then goes to the market, presumably leaving the hunchback alone with his “pretty, compatible, and loyal wife.”38 This could certainly be read as either terribly naughty or at the very least highly inappropriate. This is supposed to be a culture in which women were not to be left alone with strange men.39 Nevertheless, the tailor leaves his wife alone with a complete stranger, and strangely, the wife agrees to be left alone with him, in their home. When the tailor recounts these events for the King, he says nothing about his wife being a part of the crime, but mentions her only as being frightened as well. He does reiterate that he brought him home before going out for the food, again, implying that he left his wife alone with the hunchback.

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34 Arabian Nights, 249.
35 Arabian Nights, 249.
36 Arabian Nights, 249.
37 Arabian Nights, 249-250.
38 Arabian Nights, 248.
39 In Sahih Bukarli 4:52:250 ibn Abbas narrates that “It is not permissible for a man to be left alone with a woman.” This is aside from her husband and a mahram (a blood relative). Further, in al-Tirmidhi 3:118, Umar ibn al-Khattab narrates, “Whenever a man is alone with a woman, the Devil makes a third.”
Reading the first killing as retaliatory violence for some unseen adulterous action leaves more questions than it answers. If the wife and the Hunchback are lovers, why does Shahrazād not come out and say so? Despite the fact that King Shahrayar might be sensitive to the topic, she uses the theme of infidelity throughout many of her stories.\(^\text{40}\) When extramarital affairs are mentioned, Shahrazād always explores the consequences of these actions. One could argue that the Hunchback’s first killing functions as such evidence. But why, then, is the wife never punished? Why, when the tailor is being questioned by the King of China, does he not excuse his actions by sharing his suspicions of his wife’s indiscretions?\(^\text{41}\) If there had been a suspicion of infidelity, the tailor’s wife would have been punished and killed, as custom dictated. Yet not only is the tailor’s wife never punished in the text, even for the crimes we know that she does commit,\(^\text{42}\) she is hardly the enclosed, meek woman lacking agency. The tailor’s wife is seen out cavorting in the city after having spent the day wandering around seeking diversions and amusements alongside her husband. After the death of the hunchback, she is wholly her husband’s accomplice and, indeed, it is she who has the idea to get rid of the body lest they fall into trouble.\(^\text{43}\)

When the tailor’s wife is left alone with their guest while her husband goes to the market, we must understand that is not because the tailor is playing the part of the cuckold but because the hunchback is not viewed as a threat to the tailor’s virility. Finely adorned though he may be with Egyptian robes and scarf and hat, he is still

\[\text{A man who looks like a castor oil branch}\
\text{From which dangles a rotten citric lump.}\(^\text{44}\)

Quoting the poet ’Antar, Shahrazād compares him not to any other man nor to some beast, but to a plant which is in decay. He is an asexual being adorned, dressed up as a man of the world.\(^\text{45}\) This perception of the hunchback as a non-sexual entity is clarified further when Shahrazād allows us to hear the hunchback’s song. He sings not of craving women, but only of the bottle. He has no desire for any woman; he hasn’t the time to

\[\ldots\text{Fete a pretty girl,}\
\text{With joy and glee,}\
\text{And make her as pure as a virgin bride,}\
\text{Unveiled to please.}\(^\text{46}\)

The tailor is able to leave the hunchback alone with his wife because the hunchback does not provoke a masculine marking of territory. The hunchback’s bodily deformity removes the potentiality of being a sexual threat to the tailor.

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\(^{40}\) Many of the tales included in the canon of the Thousand and One Nights consider the subject of infidelity on the part of the wife: The Lady and her Five Suitors; Lady and her Two Lovers; Vizier’s Son and the Hammam-keeper’s Wife; The Craft and Malice of Women. These are just a few examples on top of the ultimate frame story, that which contains the affairs of the wives of Šâhzâman and Shahrayar.  

\(^{41}\) Arabian Nights, 256.  

\(^{42}\) i.e. attempting to dispose of the hunchback’s body and pawn the murder off on the Jewish physician.  

\(^{43}\) Arabian Nights, 251.  

\(^{44}\) Arabian Nights, 249.  

\(^{45}\) This notion of the adorned, deformed body will be explored further, below.  

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
A Somatic Reading of the Killing

While out, the tailor gathers the ingredients and soon returns home, where the three will feast. The tailor gives the hunchback fish and bread. Al-Musawi has written that in Arabic literature, the sudden presence of food in a narrative should be considered “the most dramatized sign of socialization that will lead to further complications and to further conflict.” He argues that the within food and drink lies the implicit “implication of immanent menace.” Nowhere is this more apparent and pivotal than when, as the tailor departs in search of an evening repast, we follow him to the market and the hunchback disappears from our sight. When the tailor returns home, the hunchback comes sharply back into focus, just in time for a festive bout of somatic violence and abuse.

Shahrazād notes that the tailor and his wife are delighted to have the hunchback in their home, if only for the sake of their own pleasure. He is both the source of their merriment and the object of their entertainment. The tailor and his wife are “pleased to have the hunchback with them, saying to each other ‘we will spend the night carousing, bantering, amusing ourselves with this hunchback.’” The tailor and his wife are complicit in the violence. This is not a death-seeking violence; rather, it is violence for sport. While much of the violence seen in the subsequent “killings” comes from a place of fear or defense, that which the tailor pursues is violence for the sake of his own amusement.

The dinner scene shifts quickly from a seemingly pleasant evening to one of extreme violence when the tailor forces a piece of fish down the hunchback’s throat and holds his mouth closed until he expires. When the tailor’s jocular abuse turns fatal and the hunchback suffocates, the tailor to freezes, “stunned, and trembling.” His wife quickly comes to the rescue with a plan to unburden themselves of the deceased body.

When it is revealed to the King of China that the hunchback has only been repeatedly assaulted and abused but not actually (permanently) killed, the King “bestow[s] robes of honor on… the tailor” along with all the others who have attacked the hunchback. While murdering the hunchback would have punishable by death, violent acts against the deformed body are rewarded with laughter and gifts from the king. These include forcing food down his throat causing him to suffocate; causing him to tumble head over heels down a flight of stairs; beating him with a club on the ribs and the back; raining blows down upon his neck and body; and choking him. At the center of this tale is one instance after another of consequence-less somatic violence against the hunchback.

It is in these moments the Hunchback’s Tale diverges from the expected narrative plot found in AT 1537 tales; instead of being attacked and killed because of illicit sexual activity or for some wholly unknowable cause, the hunchback is attacked and killed as a consequence.

48 Ibid.
49 Arabian Nights, 250.
50 Ibid.
51 Arabian Nights, 250.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Arabian Nights, 356.
55 Arabian Nights, 252, 254.
56 Arabian Nights 356.
57 Arabian Nights 250.
58 Arabian Nights 252.
59 Arabian Nights 253.
60 Arabian Nights 254.
61 Ibid.
of his very body. We ought to understand the concept of somatic violence like sexual violence: the means by which violence is enacted and the apparent cause or flashpoint for that violence. In other words, somatic violence is physical violence enacted against the body due to the attacker’s perception of that body. Bodily violence perpetrated against a deformed body because it is deformed is a particular form of punishing the other which prevails throughout the Hunchback’s Tale and his many “deaths.”

Shahrazād pays careful attention to the full physical nature of the hunchback, even if she often hides his form between and behind the violent bodies of his attackers. She considers his physicality in two forms: that with which the Hunchback adorns himself and the very body which he adorns. She does not include details about either of these without reason. When we consider the medieval context of the Islamic world with respect to clothing, appearance, and the body, and how these help to construct one’s identity, Shahrazād’s intent with the hunchback’s “death” at the hands of the tailor, of all people, becomes clearer.

Death of the Adorned, Deformed Body

In the final section of this paper, I will explore how the concepts of adornment and body identity come together in this attacking of the adorned, deformed body. The role of appearance in the medieval Islamic world plays a significant role in the subtext of the Hunchback’s Tale. Aesthetic identity and the perception of such are rooted in both the physical body and that with which the individual clothes and adorns the body. Bodily deformity complicates perceived identity already; in the case of the finely adorned, deformed body, the perception of aesthetic identity is a paradox.

Shahrazād’s hunchback is described as being expertly dressed in a mixed Arabian and Egyptian style. According to Hadas Hirsch, medieval Muslim men “defined the body’s aesthetic perception based on physical attributes together with additions of clothing and adornment.” This combination of the natural body and artificial ornamentation functioning together to convey identity and aesthetic presence is used by Shahrazād and is explicit throughout the Hunchback’s Tale. Hirsch explains that “outward appearance is the practice of body construction marking the boundary between the self and the other.” In the case of the hunchback, we see the natural, deformed body clothed in exquisite ornamentation; Shahrazād has adorned the other in the finest of things. This misshapen body is ornamented in the best of the tailor’s world, Egyptian robes, a fine scarf and hat, “with knots of yellow silk stuffed with ambergris.” The other is clothed in the finest things which he, as a tailor, might create. He punishes the finely adorned deformed body because it is both finely adorned and deformed. The presence of his splendid clothing places the tailor beneath the hunchback, the latter being the purchaser of the former’s goods. The markings of the other are draped with the trappings of wealth, inclusion, and normativity. From the tailor’s perspective, the other is clothed as the self, or the imagined self, the highest achieving self. The hunchback’s perceived identity is tied to both his natural deformity and his added refined artifice. Shahrazād pays close attention to the aspects of the hunchback’s appearance over which he can exercise control; this makes for a complex body dichotomy. He is, at once, both deformed and adorned. From the outside, he is both malformed and exquisitely ornamented.

This hybrid natural/constructed identity of the hunchback must be considered within a medieval Islamic context. When constructing one’s appearance and identity, one was guided

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62 Arabian Nights, 249.
64 Hirsch, “Personal Grooming and Outward Appearance in Early Muslim Societies,” 99.
65 Arabian Nights, 249.
by legal authorities, i.e. both the Qur’an and the Hadith. This is due to the fact that appearance and identity were tied together and conveyed something about one’s inner being. Hirsch notes that the internal and external are connected in that they mirror one another, even though “good looks are earthly and transitory, as opposed to appropriate behavior which rewards one with eternal life in paradise.” The notion that the external is a reflection of the internal has far reaching consequences for the body which defies or transcends normativity. If the internal condition shines through and impacts the external being, the hunchback’s deformity can be seen as evidence for his malformed soul.

This logic could speak to how and why the hunchback is treated as he is, not simply with respect to the violence constantly enacted against his body, but also the way in which several characters speak about him. The tailor, the King of China, and Shahrazād, each in their turn, describe him as “roguish.” His killer, his patron, and his creator all refer to the abused, deformed being as “this roguish hunchback.” There is no explicit reasoning for why the hunchback would be described as dishonest or immoral. Nothing of his character is ever detailed in the text, except for perhaps his love of the drink, though this is hardly confined to his person; more than half the characters in the Hunchback’s Tale consume alcohol and no similar judgment is passed on their characters. Should we perhaps take this “roguish” descriptor as connected to his physical body, i.e. the only aspect of his being which has been described in any full and careful way?

We must see these descriptors, roguish and hunchback, the former dealing with his character, the latter with his physical body, as linked. Concerning this connection between the blighted body and the corrupted character, the second-century Islamic jurist, al-Shāfi‘ī, taught: “‘beware the one-eyed, the cross-eyed, the lame, the hunchback… and anyone with a blight (cāha) on his body … Truly he is a friend of deception’.” Kristina Richardson notes that “identifying an entire group of people as deceptive, controversial and distressing marks their characters as fundamentally counter to shari’a ideals.” In this way, the hunchback’s physical deformity is a manifestation of his tainted inner being. Richardson goes on to write that “unlike people with moral failings who can change their attitudes and actions to accord with Islamic ideals, blighted people are condemned by their own bodies and have no hope for moral redemption.” While the tailor and his wife, the physician, steward, and broker are all redeemed and pardoned through their telling of new stories for the king, the many-times-killed hunchback remains roguish to the end. This connection between the blighted body of the hunchback and the corrupted soul within can only aid us in understanding why somatic violence is enacted upon the body of the hunchback consequence-free.

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67 Hirsch, “Personal Grooming and Outward Appearance in Early Muslim Societies,” 106
68 Arabian Nights, 300, 287, 354, and 356.
69 Ibid.
70 Al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) was the eponymous founder of one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence. His ideas and teachings remained relevant throughout the Middle Ages as they were referenced and cited by scholars for centuries afterwards. According to Kristina Richardson, this particular idea is echoed in no less than five separate major texts from between the 10th and 13th centuries. She writes that “more than thirty authors … penned works in the manāqib al-Shāfi‘ī tradition.” Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, Manāqib al-Shāfi‘ī, ed. Al-Sayyid Ahmad Saqr. vol. II (Cairo: Dār al-turāth, 1971) 132, in Kristina L. Richardson, Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 2012), 27, 34 n 18.
71 Shari’a ideals refer to those derived from the religious laws based upon the Qur’an.
72 Richardson, Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World, 27.
Conclusion

When the hunchback is found in the steward’s kitchen, he exclaims, “Wasn’t it enough for you to be a hunchback, but you had to turn thief too?”\(^7\) The Muslim steward expresses his frustration, surprise, and a reluctant incredulity that this creature in his kitchen, burdened already with the fate of the hunchback, deformed of body and character, would stoop to become a criminal as well. He sees the deformed body already as evidence of a corrupt character, now here, in his thieving, he is truly becomes some of the legal dregs of society.

The first “killing” at the hands of the tailor, this violence enacted against the deformed being, is retribution not for some unseen crime but as a consequence of his very existence. This particular deformed body and the violence enacted against it are not unrelated. Somatic violence as a means of punishing the body and the being’s existence is the dominant theme of Shahrazād’s tale of the hunchback. The body, externally deformed, is destroyed as a way of punishing the internal deformed soul.

The paradoxically adorned, deformed body was eligible for consequence-less violence. The hunchback’s attackers and “killers” are all rewarded when the king discovers that they have only suffocated him, sent him tumbling down a flight of stairs, beaten him with a club, choked him, and assaulted his body and neck with furious fists. In this context, we see that there are no consequences for abusing a body which deviates from the norm.

\(^7\) Arabian Nights, 254.
Appendix I: Medieval Elements in the AT 1537 Trope

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| A | “A man kills his wife’s lover.”

| A1 | “A man kills his wife’s tempter. The wife is his accomplice.”

| A2 | “One man kills another. The motive is not recorded.”

| A3 | “A man dies accidentally when a fish bone sticks in his throat.”

| C1 | “When the neighbor finds the corpse, he ‘kills’ it, believing it to be alive and a robber, or he merely carries it to the gate of a monastery, or even to the abbot’s room.”

| C13 | “The corpse is put in a private house through a chimney and is left standing, leaning against a wall. The owner of the house arrives, believes that it is a robber and ‘kills’ it.”

| C14 | “The ‘death’ of the dead man in the sultan’s harem.”

Table 1. Each of the elements from groups A and C come from various fabliaux analyzed by Aurelio Espinosa in his 1936 study of the trope. In the western European versions of the trope, a single element from group A, attributing motive to the first killer, appears in a story, while multiple elements from group C can appear in the same story. In the Hunchback’s Tale, we see a variety of elements from group A working together to hint toward a motive rather than state so explicitly. I have included both A and A1 on the chart here not to suggest that they are at play in the Hunchback’s Tale, but to illustrate where the confusion could lie in falsely attributing the motive of the jealous husband to the tailor. While it was a popular motive in many western fabliaux (see note 5), it is not at work in the Thousand and One Nights. All three elements from group C shown above occur in some altered form in the Hunchback’s Tale. It is this combination of elements that allow me to argue that Shahrazād’s Hunchback’s Tale fits the AT 1537 trope, though in a manner which deviates from the western European model.

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75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
References


Something is Rotten in the Unreal City: *Hamlet in The Waste Land*

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T.S. Eliot’s poem of 1922, “The Waste Land,” lays philosophical ground for the entire Modern literary movement in which human experience takes the performative shape of inner dialog or soliloquy for the benefit of the reader/audience. This essay will argue that Eliot’s poem is a prime example of existentialism and, further, that Eliot’s work is not merely informed by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (possibly the earliest example of British existentialism), but is directly modeled after it, in Eliot’s attempt to rectify the play’s perceived failings.

Existentialism as a key to unlocking the mood of Modern literature is overlooked by those critics who relegate existentialist literature to the years following the Modern period. While the official “start date” of the philosophy begins after World War II, this paper will argue that the questions most posed by existentialism are not new to literature. They are at least as old as Shakespeare, in fact, and we see evidence of “the old questions” (to which Beckett alludes in the 1950s) in *Hamlet*, dated to 1600.

Specifically, *Hamlet* speaks to the Modern British development of inner narrative and the literal translation and evocation of thought. Readers have long referred to Hamlet as the depressive Danish prince, yet his thoughts are reflected in the minds of characters throughout Modern British literature, and such vapors swirl most gloriously in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. It is my argument that, while Eliot’s critique of *Hamlet* concludes with its failure, there are clear parallels between his own poem and Shakespeare’s play. Similarities exist in terms of structure, theme, motifs, protagonist/speaker, and style. Despite Eliot’s critique, within the Modern literary tradition (which at its heart lionizes individual consciousness) *Hamlet* is never far from the page.

Before drawing our attention to specific echoes of *Hamlet* in *The Waste Land* (I will italicize both works as several critics italicize Eliot’s lengthy poem; this measure assigns the play and the poem to the same category of writing for the sake of our thesis, and reflect both Bloom’s argument that *Hamlet* is a poem, and my argument that “The Waste Land” is a play), it is vital that we revisit selections from Eliot’s critique of *Hamlet*, from his essay “The Problems of Hamlet,” published in 1920 in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*.

Eliot begins by separating Hamlet the character from *Hamlet* the play, claiming that he, unlike other critics, views *Hamlet* (the play) as the main “problem,” and Hamlet (the character) as the second problem. In doing so, he positions himself as a superior mind, prepared to address what others have overlooked or confused. Just as quickly, Eliot derides other critics for not seeing beyond their own egos (and they are creatively weak, too, he claims) who overlay their own characters upon Hamlet’s in their attempts to discuss him:

“And Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead. These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization. Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge, who made of Hamlet a Coleridge; and probably neither of these men in writing about Hamlet remembered that his first business was to study a work of art” (Eliot, 47).
If we believe what Eliot is saying here, and if we also hope to prove that the protagonist of *The Waste Land* is a kind of Hamlet, does Eliot himself become “that most dangerous type of critic, with a weakness in creative power”? The argument of my essay is not a popular one, to be sure. For while critics are eager to locate *Hamlet* in other Modern works, few are willing to throw Eliot into his own cauldron of creative criticism on the matter, and perhaps this is due to a difficulty in comparing his highly experimental poem to anything which has come before. Eliot continues:

> “Qua work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards, in comparison to other works of art; and for “interpretation” the chief task is the presentation of relevant historical facts which the reader is not assumed to know” (Eliot, 47).

If we cannot interpret a work of art on its own merits, as Eliot says, we can only criticize it according to standards, and in comparison to other works of art. While I disagree that a work of art cannot be discussed without putting it into a greater historical context, I do agree that greater contexts (standards and comparisons) always exist—no work of art is born in a vacuum, not Shakespeare’s art, and certainly not Eliot’s. Critics tend to regard Eliot’s poem in the context of its “new” self-conscious style, following the previous writing period of distanced realism, or else they dissect *The Waste Land*’s direct allusions to classical sources in an attempt to locate meaning (gaining little, I would argue; a more revealing context/comparison might be an indirect, possibly subconscious one).

It is obvious that an author-as-creator must work with a substance already formed. And we know that *Hamlet*, as it fits into a genre of tragedy and revenge plays, is predicated on the plots of tragic and revenge narratives which came before. Even the specific tale of the Danish prince is not new. Shakespeare didn’t invent *Hamlet*. He did, however, create the consciousness of Hamlet. Still, Eliot is stuck on the form, rather than the spirit:

> “Hamlet is a stratification, that it represents the efforts of a series of men, each making what he could out of the work of his predecessors…Furthermore, there are verbal parallels so close to *The Spanish Tragedy* as to leave no doubt that in places Shakespeare was merely revising the text of Kyd…Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, so far as it is Shakespeare’s, is a play dealing with the effect of a mother’s guilt upon her son, and that Shakespeare was unable to impose this motive successfully upon the “intractable” material of the old play…So far from being Shakespeare’s masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure” (Eliot, 49).

That *Hamlet* is a “failure” because Shakespeare imposes his own motive “unsuccessfully” on a preexisting narrative is the same argument Eliot makes regarding modern critics who impose their own personalities on the preexisting character of Hamlet. From this we might conclude that Eliot’s opinion of a successful artist is one who either shuns pre-existing works altogether, or somehow internalizes all that has come before without showing evidence of it in the new work. Either way, by his own aesthetic critique, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* would qualify as a failure whether or not one agrees that it is an attempt at rewriting *Hamlet*. I will return to Eliot’s essay at the end of my own, but for now let us regard the similarities between Eliot’s poem and the “failure” that is *Hamlet*.

**Hamlet and The Waste Land are Similar in Structure**

Both the play and the poem are written in five tension-building “acts”. A quick review of plot structure by act: *Hamlet*, Act I, introduces the ghost of Hamlet’s father, the murdered...
Something is Rotten in the Unreal City

king (also named Hamlet). In Act II, various characters speculate upon the curious (mad) state of Hamlet, each drawing their own conclusion. In Act III, the “plays the thing,” and Shakespeare inserts a play within the play. Hamlet acts as secondary playwright, inserting his own lines into Murder of Gonzago/The Mousetrap, a device which allows him to expose the guilty conscience of the usurping king, Claudius. After the play, Hamlet confronts his mother (Queen Gertrude) about her wanton betrayal and he mistakenly kills Polonius. In Act IV, Hamlet is sent to England with his school chums/spies (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) under Claudius’ order that he will be killed. Ophelia, rejected by Hamlet, and grieving the death of her father (Polonius) goes (truly) mad. Laertes (Ophelia’s brother) and Claudius contrive to murder Hamlet. In Act V, Hamlet returns from England, and everybody dies.

The Waste Land is a poem in five parts, or, I argue, a tragic one-man play in five acts. Each act builds upon the last, yet includes its own particular framework. Character, dialog, scene and performative theatricality are central components of stage plays, and are at the heart, too, of The Waste Land. Act I is The Burial of the Dead. The land is dead, the trees are dead, the people are grieving and/or dead (A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many / I had not thought death had undone so many) There are ghosts, and implied murder (discussed later in this essay). Act II, A Game of Chess, speaks of a kind of queen (The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne), a sexually offensive king (The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced), nervous fretting and strategizing, a dressing down of an Ophelia-ish character and discussion of the burden of children. There is a call to action (HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME). Eliot includes additional nods to Shakespeare, “Those are pearls that were his eyes” (from The Tempest), and “O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—”. The act concludes with a pointed line from Hamlet, that of Ophelia, (Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night). Act III, The Fire Sermon, begins at the bank of the river Thames. The speaker sings a sad song and contemplates his father’s death and white bones (Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck / And on the king my father’s death before him / White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low dry garret). A dispassionate sex act follows, the speaker then moves to a sea journey, and further existential crisis (I can connect nothing with nothing), and finally references Carthage on fire (burning burning burning burning). Act IV, Death By Water, is short, and the speaker contemplates a dead sailor decaying under the sea. The speaker urges the reader to remember the dead were once “handsome and tall like you.” Act V, What the Thunder Said, takes us to a stony place of no water, a place of lamentation, memory, death (He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying), and graves (Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel / there is the empty chapel, only the wind’s home). Just before the final prayer, The Waste Land concludes with a line from “mad” Hieronymo (Why then Ile fit you), taken from Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, which, as we’ve seen in his critical essay, Eliot assumes to be the forerunner of Hamlet.

Hamlet, as a tragedy in five acts is repeated in The Waste Land, a tragedy in five parts. That there are striking similarities between the format and movement of both works cannot be overstated, and that Eliot is nodding directly to Hamlet at least twice in The Waste Land (first, with Ophelia’s line, and second with the mad protagonist of The Spanish Tragedy) should be enough to warrant a closer inspection of shared themes, motifs, and styles between the two works.

Hamlet and The Waste Land Share a Primary Existential Theme

The encompassing theme of modern British literature (and The Waste Land, in particular) may be said to be that of alienation from others and from the self. At a time when the British nation as a whole is reeling from the loss of a generation of men to World War I, its citizens face an additional loss of identity and meaning brought about by rapid industrialization,
mechanization, and bureaucratic sterility. William Barrett describes modern alienation in *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*:

“…man’s feeling of homelessness, of alienation has been intensified in the midst of a bureaucratized, impersonal mass society. He has come to feel himself an outsider even within his own human society. He is trebly alienated: a stranger to God, to nature, and to the gigantic social apparatus that supplies his material wants. But the worst and final form of alienation, toward which indeed the others tend, is man’s alienation from his own self” (Barrett, 35).

As an artistic response to the “new” malaise, Modern writers turn their focus to the theme of alienation by creating individual character consciousness, expressing existentialist thought through internal dialog.

Awareness of this self-conscious consciousness is integral to reading any Modern work, as *The Waste Land* certainly is, but it is also essential when reading *Hamlet*. (I will bracket the popular oedipal readings of both pieces, which, while interesting, do not speak to Modernism specifically). Critic Harold Bloom refers to *Hamlet* as a “poem unlimited,” a poem in its aesthetic (rather than plot) value, and unlimited in the sense that Hamlet’s consciousness, his self-questioning/philosophizing (and thus his relevance) would not end, but for his death. In his book, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*, Bloom asserts:

“After four centuries, Hamlet remains our world’s most advanced drama, imitated but scarcely transcended by Ibsen, Chekov, Pirandello, and Beckett. You cannot get beyond Hamlet, which establishes the limits of theatricality, just as Hamlet himself is a frontier of consciousness yet to be passed” (Bloom, 7).

Whether the play is “successful” according to Eliot’s standards is irrelevant. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare creates the consciousness of a character which persists through the ages, haunting, in particular, those writers seeking to use character consciousness to express the feeling of an entire era. British Modernists looking for an existential literary source for their writing need look no further than the annals of British canon for a singular character consciousness expressing existential angst from the start: “O, that this too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew” (from Act I). Similarly, the body of the *The Waste Land* is preceded by a Latin and Greek epigraph from *The Satyricon* of Petronius. Translated to English, it reads: "I saw with my own eyes the Sibyl of Cumae hanging in a jar, and when the boys said to her, Sibyl, what do you want? she replied “I want to die.” And while *The Waste Land*’s speaker may use different voices, the keen reader understands that each voice reiterates the same problem. The tone of both *Hamlet* and *The Waste Land* is one of alienation, sorrow, resentment, and impotence.

Both works end, too, with a plea. In *Hamlet*, the plea is that Hamlet shouldn’t be misunderstood or forgotten (he begs Horatio to tell his story), and he concludes “the rest is silence.” This is not unlike Eliot’s speaker’s conclusion, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins,” followed by the wink to “mad” Hieronymo, and finally by a call for “the peace which passeth understanding” (his translation of Datta. Dyadhavam. Damyata.) and “peace, peace, peace” (Shantih shantih shantih). For each hero, the “rest” is silence—which can be both understood as the *death* is silence, or as the *remainder* is silence. The concept of silence after a period of long questioning and internal strife is indeed a peaceful thought, and each author finds it a fitting way to end their tragedies, perhaps making them less tragic than they appear on their surfaces. If alienation is a feeling of disjointed existence from within and without, and if the expression of that discomfort happens in the self-consciousness consciousness (through inner and outer dialog), then the silence offered by death is peace. Of
course, Hamlet’s greatest fear is that death will not be the end of consciousness—“Aye, there’s the rub.”

**Hamlet and The Waste Land Share Other Existential Motifs**

As tragedy plays/poems unlimited, it should be no surprise that the subject of death, and the symbols which represent death, are featured throughout both works. From shadows (Hamlet: “A dream itself is but a shadow” and Eliot: “Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you”) to drownings (Hamlet: drownings of Ophelia, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, and Eliot: the Phoenician Sailor) to burials (Hamlet: Ophelia’s burial, and Eliot: The Burial of the Dead) to bones (Hamlet: Yorick’s skull, and Eliot: “Dry bones can harm no one” and “And bones cast in a little low dry garret”) to dust (Hamlet: “And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?” and “Compounded it with dust, whereto ’tis kin,” and Eliot: “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”) and graveyards (Hamlet: Yorick’s and Ophelia’s graveyard scenes, and Eliot: Death By Water, as well as What the Thunder Said).

Further, both works extensively employ the motif of an “instigating” ghost. Hamlet’s father’s ghost rises up to spur on the entire action of the play. This original murder will result in the deaths of nearly every other character. Likewise, there is an original murder and instigating ghost in The Waste Land, as Eloise Hay claims in *T.S. Eliot and His Negative Way*:

“This traveler who (we see later in the person of Tiresias) has ‘sat by Thebes below the wall/And walked among the lowest of the dead,’ is qualified to terrify an old acquaintance encountered in the street, rising up like a ghost and saying:

> You who were with me in the ships of Mylae!
> That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> Has it begun to sprout?

He insinuates both that a murder has been covered up and that the buried life might be his own. The last line suggests that the buried life, asking to remain buried before, has now risen to confront us all…this voice in Part I charges all those with hypocrisy who deny their roles as ‘buriers of the dead and live in hope of rebirth” (Hay, p 57).

Ghosts exist as a confrontation to us all, offering both a warning and a call to action. Hamlet’s father’s murder foreshadows Hamlet’s death (they share the same name), and the father’s ghost is a motif which reappears in the deaths of Laertes, Ophelia, Gertrude, Polonius, Hamlet, and Claudius. For both Shakespeare and Eliot, it is not enough to pontificate upon the problem of living and dying. The symbols and signs of death must punctuate every level of the narrative, framing each speaker in memento mori, lest he forget the burden and purpose of his questioning.

Both authors also use persistent questions to steer the protagonists’ intellectual/spiritual course—a methodology which can be discussed in terms of authorial style—but questions also reflect the works’ existential drives and serve as motifs to reinforce theme. In *Hamlet* (a work of about four thousand lines), the word “question” is used seventeen times, and there are countless actual questions posed throughout. The most prescient existential question in the English language (or any other) may be Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be?” In his book *Hamlet, Prufrock and Language*, Zulfikar Ghose explores the meaning of the famous soliloquy in terms of its value in Modernist texts:

> “Hamlet is not contemplating suicide but testing the meaning of life by positing its very opposite, and in his conclusions he is very much like a Beckett character who knowing that life is meaningless realizes that death will not solve anything, for it will not
guarantee the elusive meaning but either prolong the anguish in the after-life (‘the dread of something after death…puzzles the will’) or, if there is no after-life, make the one life even more absurdly meaningless. And like many of Beckett’s characters, Hamlet is obliged to pass the time by talking to himself, now testing one hypothesis, and now another” (Ghose, 62.)

While Ghose is helping our argument by linking the character of Hamlet with Beckett’s postmodern and recognizably existential characters from the late 1950s (which fall in step with the philosophy’s generally accepted timeline), we see the same existential soliloquy and self-conscious questioning forty years earlier, in the Modern period. In The Waste Land (a work of about four hundred lines, as opposed to Hamlet’s four thousand) twenty-two questions are posed, and they aren’t incidental questions. Just as Hamlet questions life and meaning itself, Eliot’s speaker could be said to be talking to himself when he (in masked voices) asks questions such as “Do you know nothing?” “Are you alive or not?” “What shall we ever do?” “What should I resent?” Questions in Hamlet and The Waste Land are employed as symbols of the protagonists’ self-conscious consciousness, rather than plot-forwarding, practical devices.

It can be no coincidence either, in two works which explore alienation and death, that madness surfaces as a motif. Questioning that which others do not question is an alienating force unto itself, and while neither speaker is, in fact, “mad,” both Hamlet and Eliot (as the speaker of The Waste Land) refer to themselves as such, and are misread as being so. Hamlet goes so far as to specify that “I essentially am not in madness. But mad in craft,” and we might believe that Eliot’s speaker is mad in a self-consciously similar way (Hieronymo’s mad againe). Eliot’s voices in The Waste Land appear as madness when we unite them within the single consciousness of the poet—this is not an author suffering from split-personalities—like Hamlet, Eliot’s madness is madness in craft. Calvin Bedient argues that Eliot’s original title for the poem, “He Do the Police in Different Voices,” taken from Dickens’ novel Our Mutual Friend, points to the singular consciousness of the speaker, regardless of perceived multiplicity:

“In this poem, Eliot’s apparent “reluctance to communicate,” his apparent ambivalence about being understood (his imitation of Hieronymo in Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, who “fits” his despised audience through a deceptive play of many unknown tongues) is part and parcel of his attempt to turn art itself into a deliverance from words, an exercise in asceticism” (Bedient, 36).

Voices, theatricality, and wordplay are all part of the “madness” shared by both Hamlet and Eliot. Both speakers bait their audience, tempting them to question their own sanity as they follow the speaker down the dark hole of their imagination. Bedient continues:

“‘Why then Ile fit you’ implies that the protagonist is meeting and baiting something or someone—is it us?—as a strategist, and is not to be outdone. Hieronymo, in Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy was out to delude and kill the villains who hanged his son. Who has hurt the protagonist so direly that he should compare himself to “mad” Hieronymo?” (Bedient, 215).

Bedient concludes that no one has wounded Eliot’s speaker, though I would argue that the perpetrator is modern society, in addition to the perceived betrayal by women and by time. Madness, whether feigned or felt, is a by-product of questioning, and another symbol of alienation used by both authors.
Disjointed time, too, features heavily in Hamlet and The Waste Land, as it should in works which ruminate about meaning within the linear confines of existence. From Act I in Hamlet, “The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!” Hamlet is expressing an internal and external conflict, where action and meaning, cause and effect are jumbled and misaligned. He recognizes his call (to avenge his father’s death and set time right), just as he recognizes that it is an impossible task. There is no going back, no fix; he cannot re-order time. There are issues of disjointed time in Hamlet’s own appearance in the play, as well. In Act I, he is a university student, of twenty or so. When he returns from England in Act V to chat with the gravedigger, he is thirty. Yet time hasn’t moved within the play more than a few months. Likewise, Eliot’s speaker moves through time and space in an attempt to resolve his internal conflict. In Act I (Burial of the Dead), Eliot begins in the space of memory, nature and youth, then moves quickly to adulthood in urban London. Act II (A Game of Chess) moves from a bedroom of antiquity to a modern pub, where the barkeep announces HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME. In Act III (The Fire Sermon) Eliot moves from a modern river bank to the Unreal City at noon, to the violet hour, whereupon the speaker becomes “I, Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs”. In Act IV (Death By Water), Eliot inverts time as the Phoenician “passed the stages of his age and youth,” and in Act V (What the Thunder Said), Eliot’s speaker, like Hamlet, underscores that time cannot be undone, “The awful daring of a moment’s surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract.” Still, like Hamlet, he longs to unbury the dead and muses “Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus.” Both works, in concerning themselves with man’s plight and search for meaning, use skewed time to express the repeating loop, yet unalterable nature of existence. 

Fortune personified (as a woman) is another existential motif shared by both works. Both male speakers use their doubt of female constancy to prove that, like a woman, Fortune shows no loyalty, and calamity comes to us all. In Hamlet’s famed soliloquy there are the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” to be suffered, but it is Hamlet’s scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Act II) which makes merry with Fortune’s gender:

Hamlet: My excellent good friends! How dost thou Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?
Rosencrantz: As indifferent as children of the earth.
Guildenstern: Happy in that we are not overhappy; on Fortune’s cap we are not the very button.
Hamlet: Nor the soles of her shoe?
Rosencrantz: Neither, my lord.
Hamlet: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?
Guildenstern: Faith, her privates we.
Hamlet: In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true! She is a strumpet.

Likewise (though not so lasciviously) in The Waste Land, Fortune takes the form of Madame Sosotris, the fortune teller, with a “bad cold” and a “wicked pack of cards.” She shows the speaker all that is to come, including the drowned Phoenician Sailor, the one-eyed Merchant, the rocks, and death by water. Inclusion of the concept of chance or fortune in two works which confront the control that man has or doesn’t have over his own life might be anticipated, or at the very least a coincidence, but that both authors additionally personify Fortune as a woman to be spoken of in terms of her human frailty (suffering a cold), or her sexuality (her “privates”) is noteworthy.

In a similar vein, both works express the protagonist’s dissatisfaction with humanity and with women, in particular. From Hamlet we hear the following phrases: “What a piece
of work is a man!”, “Man delights not me. No, nor woman neither,” and “Frailty, thy name is woman.” In The Waste Land, while the narrative is increasingly disjointed, the speaker is no more kind to his fellow humans, and weighs judgment most heavily upon women. Bedient draws out Eliot’s meaning in the section Burial of the Dead:

“This second paragraph develops, by dramatizing, what is implicit in the first one: the protagonist’s piercing disenchantment with human beings as objects of demand and desire, in particular with the waste place of romantic entanglements. The protagonist recalls a fatal moment when he felt cut off from a woman, indeed from all women…” (Bedient, 28)

Additionally, one can read Eliot’s other female characters (including Fortune) as women from Hamlet. Marie is a stand-in for Hamlet’s mother, as the Hyacinth Girl is Ophelia. According to Bedient, Eliot’s Marie is based on a real person, Countess Marie Larisch, who wrote a memoir in 1913 titled My Past: Reminiscences of the Courts of Austria and Bavaria; Together with the True Story of the Events Leading up to the Tragic Death of Rudolph, Crown Prince of Austria. It is not a far stretch to imagine Eliot using Marie to recall the title The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Bedient delves deeper into Eliot’s perspective on life and women, and draws a clear relationship between Eliot’s speaker in The Waste Land and Hamlet’s Ophelia:

“The true heroism, for Eliot, was to ‘question’ the Absolute, however overwhelming the task, however incongruous in view of human vanity and abjection. Marie is international, but no heroine. The only true heroism is devotional. Marie is a waif with regard to the metaphysical. Indeed, perforce, since she is a woman: women, Eliot thought, are enemies of the Absolute, as are both society (though society in this poem is mostly women) and time. Women, as Eliot portrays them in The Waste Land, are relentlessly self-referenced, whirlpools of vanity, Ophelias on their way down in their own nothingness” (Bedient, 22).

In Hamlet, as in The Waste Land, women are portrayed as time-consuming, inconsequential materialists, whose very existence threatens the peace of the protagonist. Ophelia is as much a problem to Hamlet for her endless devotion to him as his mother is, for her betrayal of his father. Hamlet seeks answers, he seeks the solitude of his mind, and women interrupt with demands. For Eliot, women detract from the Absolute question, they represent society and the wasteland, a construct from which he is eager to break free. Despite their innate majesty, both Elsinore and the wasteland are cesspools of violence, rot and decay. As Hamlet says most succinctly in Act I, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” The Danish prince stands to inherit the throne, but sees only treachery and debauchery around him. Elsinore is a place of death and dying; it is the location of his father’s murdered ghost, the place where Ophelia drowns, it hosts the grave of poor Yorick, the murder of Polonius, and the stabbing and poisoning deaths of Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet. Existentialism promises that all things beautiful will wither, die, and rot; it questions meaning in the face of this promise. Hamlet-the-Existentialist observes outward models of beauty only to undermine them—he reaffirms their base nature, impermanence, and lack of meaning, as here in Act II:

“...this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me then a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”
Eliot’s wasteland exists in the Modern age, yet suffers similar description, from “April is the
cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land” to “And the dead tree gives no shelter,
the cricket no relief / And the dry stone no sound of water” to “Unreal City, / Under the
brown fog of a winter dawn” and, after the stately description of a queen’s bedroom in A
Game of Chess, the line “And still she cried, and still the world pursues / ’Jug Jug’ to dirty
ears. / And other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls.” Here, and throughout
The Waste Land, the speaker sees only ruin in things once majestic. Images of falling towers,
burning cities, and rotting corpses pervade the text. This is the philosopher’s puzzle and the
existentialist’s plight, to anticipate the end and question the present in light of that knowledge.

Hamlet and Eliot’s speakers are philosophers, critics, and misanthropes. We know
from the beginning of the play that Hamlet is a scholar at the university in Wittenberg. We
watch him intellectualize every action of every scene by asking questions (as philosophers
do), critiquing the behavior of those around him, and condemning the circumstances of their
lives. Lest we believe that he holds high aspirations for humanity, he makes clear that he puts
little value in humans, with the possible exceptions of his good (dead) father, poor (dead)
Yorick, and Horatio (whom he needs to preserve his name as Hamlet lays dying). Hamlet’s
misanthropy deviates only in its self-serving nature. Likewise, Eliot’s speaker uses humans
only to cast aspersions upon them, or to use their demise to remind the reader of their
irrelevance, and inevitable failings. In his book which surveys the end of humanism in the
twentieth-century, Bradley Buchanan specifies Eliot’s approach as misanthropic:

“…Eliot often seems to have cast off his common humanity in pursuit of a private,
misanthropic goal. Eliot’s intellectual development (before his conversion to
Anglicanism) is a series of unpleasant encounters with humanistic traditions. Eliot
studied but rejected philosophy; he read but mistrusted anthropological accounts of
religion, preferring a god whose perfection was undiluted by human traits; he disdained
socialism and pragmatism for their focus on human nature” (Buchanan, 64).

Indeed, it is within the individual, misanthropic consciousness that Hamlet and The Waste
Land share protagonists. Both works use the consciousness of a single individual in
rebellion against his doomed circumstances to address the overall theme of existential
alienation. Shakespeare’s Hamlet is larger than life; in the poem unlimited of nearly four
thousand lines, Hamlet speaks roughly sixteen-hundred of them, and those lines he doesn’t
speak are still about him. The play and its supporting characters circle around their
protagonist. According to Bloom, “No one, not even Shakespeare, could curtail Hamlet’s
largeness of being, but Shakespeare had the audacity to keep Hamlet under some control by
immersing us in plays within plays within plays” (Bloom, 21). This could point to another
issue with Eliot’s critique of the “problems” of Hamlet. Where Eliot would prefer to focus on the
problem of the play, rather than the character, I would argue that there is no play without
the consciousness of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The play is meaningless but for its role as a
vehicle for the reimagined hero. Had plot been paramount in Shakespeare’s estimation, surely
the literary genius would have taken more liberties with it. In other words, the play’s not the
thing.

Ironically (for subscribers of Eliot’s view), The Waste Land, too, is but a vehicle for the
individual consciousness of Eliot’s speaker; the play/poem is not the thing. The poem and its
supporting characters exist only as fodder for their protagonist. Eliot, like Shakespeare
perhaps, attempts to curtail his own largeness of being by wrapping the poem in layers of
allusions and put-on voices to distract the reader from being overwhelmed by his personality.
Still, according to Bedient, Eliot is place-able in the poem:
“Eliot’s ‘individual character’ remains so much a matter of hints, inferences, obscure grumbles, that, despite the undoubted exaggeration and broadening of the poet’s own qualities, his surrogate, the protagonist, seems to be playing hide-and-seek in his own story. In the process he darts behind the words of others, and his self-portrait is so defensive and at the same time so distanced that it is scribbled over with multiple fugitive disguises. But this only makes the poet/protagonist more representative of the humanity of his time and place” (Bedient, 59).

Their adoption of poses, of soliloquy, and of internal and external performativity suggests that both Hamlet and The Waste Land find the locus of their existential perspectives in the theatre of the mind. The theatricality in the varied voices of both protagonists points to a drama which exists in the mind, rather than on the stage. Hamlet is at one moment wry, then maudlin, then slapstick, then cruel. His personas change as quickly as his temperament, but this is not to say that he is mad—only that he is many, within one. Hamlet is beyond body, beyond object. He is consciousness itself. Ghose emphasizes that Hamlet’s despair is “that he cannot escape the trivial banality of existence, for after the opening statement, his first thought is one more philosophical proposition” (Ghose, 85):.

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
But this, he reasons, is unacceptable:
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused

Hamlet justifies, here, his perpetual questioning as mankind’s raison d’etre. If he ceases to pontificate, he is no more than a beast. The reader is free to conclude that she, too, must exist for the purpose of exercising her mind. Is this Shakespeare’s intent? To use Hamlet to speak to the collective consciousness of his time? To urge his audience to question their purpose and meaning? And, if so, is this the same provocation Eliot is shaping with his work? It is tempting to read The Waste Land as a treatise concerned with a specifically Modern era alienation, of a specific time and place (post World War I, England), however, we mustn’t overlook the individual artist’s claim to express the anxiety of his own soul. In T.S. Eliot’s Negative Way, Hay examines the author’s intent, and insists that The Waste Land is a personal expression, rather than a universal one:

“A good reading of The Waste Land must begin then, with recognition that while it expressed Eliot’s own ‘way’ at the time, it was not intended to lay down a way for others to follow. He did not expect that his prisonhouse would have corridors connecting with everyone else’s. ‘I dislike the word ‘generation’ [he said in ‘Thoughts After Lambeth’], which has been a talisman for the last ten years; when I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the ‘disillusionment of a generation,’ which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention” (Hay, 50).

Discerning whether the author’s intent is to speak for his generation or only of his private experience may not prove rewarding for generations of readers who have taken solace in Shakespeare’s and Eliot’s words, readers who find kinship with a speaker who is able to name the otherwise unnameable feeling of desolation and despair.
Although the case for Eliot drawing upon (and perhaps rewriting) *Hamlet* in his own poem is, to my eyes, obvious, I will draw this last comparison between the works before pulling again at the thread of Eliot’s critical writing: *Hamlet and The Waste Land share writing styles*. The very aspects of style in *The Waste Land* which critics find “experimental” (read: Modern), can be found centuries earlier, in *Hamlet*. Both authors use copious wordplay to call attention to processes of thought, and to the aesthetic appeal of words themselves. In *Hamlet* we find wordsLooping back and forth over themselves, as in Act V, Scene II, when Hamlet readies himself for his end, saying to Horatio: “We defy augury; there’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all.” This looping back, this repetition, is a style seen throughout Shakespeare’s work and we may call it a “fugue,” likening it to the classical music tradition when we are discussing classical literary works, or we may call it “a jazz riff” when speaking of Modern writing. Both ideas are the same. Just as Eliot reminds us that works of art are built on other works of art, that they are “stratified,” wordplay by a single author within a body of work is a stratification of his own talent. From Eliot’s speaker in the last section we hear: “I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only / We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.” Similarly, both authors use words to “play” in their narratives. The serious subject of the existential crisis finds comic relief when Polonius inquires “What do you read, my lord?” and Hamlet answers, “Words, words words.” Eliot chortles, “O O O O that Shakespearian Rag— / It’s so elegant / So intelligent.” They may not be knee-slappers, but they serve to lighten the mood of otherwise dreary matter.

Finally, and most certainly from *Hamlet* (for I know of no earlier, better, or more famous source), Eliot adopts the use of soliloquy, that style of thought spoken aloud (and not as an aside to the audience) for which the Danish prince is famed. *Hamlet* is considered an experimental and modern play (of its time) primarily for this stylistic device and, I argue, *The Waste Land* owes its similar reputation for the same reason. Hamlet delivers seven soliloquies over the course of the play’s five acts, and Eliot’s protagonist (Eliot in vocal disguises) delivers the entire five-act poem in spoken thought. *The Waste Land* is a single soliloquy, spoken from the protagonist’s self-conscious consciousness. The audience may be listening or deaf or absent. It makes no difference. For, if we are to believe Eliot’s claim that he is not speaking to his generation or for his generation, and that he speaks only of himself, we can interpret the soliloquy as being spoken to himself, the same way Hamlet is often portrayed, talking to himself upon an empty stage. If we read *The Waste Land* in this way, we may give credit to Eliot for succeeding where Shakespeare “failed.” Eliot has taken the offending play out of *Hamlet*, and left the prince’s speeches.

Let us return now to Eliot’s critique of *Hamlet*, and the issue of the “objective correlative,” and examine *The Waste Land* in light of it:

“The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked…and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear…Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him” (Eliot, 50).
We might unravel Eliot’s argument in several ways: we can assert that Hamlet’s disgust is larger than his mother (and not occasioned by it; that, in fact, she is only incidental to the angst he experiences as an intellectual, and that what Eliot is pointing to as a failure of plot is not laziness on the author’s part, but the protagonist’s perennial state of mind which precedes plot), we can point to Hamlet’s “quintessence of dust” phrase and assert that he is quite capable of locating and “expressing” his feelings concerning the failings of mankind, or we can refute Eliot’s very first claim, and dismiss the necessity of an objective correlative altogether. Why do we need a specific object, situation, or chain of events in order to evoke emotion? We are already in a situation: the human condition. Our object is our consciousness. Our chain of events is the persistence of our breathing. Further, using Eliot’s argument against his own work, does The Waste Land’s evoked crisis of emotion flounder, or does it rest solidly upon an objective correlative? What is Eliot’s (as the protagonist) “situation”? He is many voices, railing against humanity. What is Eliot’s specific “object”? He is obsessed with water, to be sure, but does imagined water count as an object? It exists only in his consciousness. What is Eliot’s “chain of events”? We can only describe them as images from the past and present, moving across the screen of his mind. They are not causal, and there is little to correlate them, other than thematically. Man lives, man destroys, man withers, man dies. Hamlet says this before Eliot. Does Eliot say it better? Perhaps by removing the “play” from Hamlet, Eliot allows the reader to submerge themselves in the protagonist’s consciousness. Perhaps there is more intimacy offered in Eliot’s The Waste Land. I would argue that without the trappings of the play, however, Eliot’s work appears as a self-conscious one man show. We cannot know the speaker by the players around him because he is all the players around him. Establishing (rather than imagining) a world “without” may be essential to creating sympathy for the protagonist’s world “within.” And perhaps the world without is Hamlet’s best objective correlative. Ghose offers another answer to Eliot when he says, “It has been stated that Hamlet is the objective correlative of literature” (Ghose, 85). Indeed, it may have been the one Eliot was using when composing The Waste Land. I doubt Eliot would complain about the argument I have laid out here, but for the assertion that he does the voices of himself too clearly. He is, as critics point out, so clearly “Eliot.” That Hamlet is visible through The Waste Land, however, would undoubtedly please him. In his essay of 1920, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot writes:

“We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.”

Does a Modern or historical Hamlet assert himself vigorously in The Waste Land? I believe so, and will give Eliot’s younger self the final word in this essay, keeping in mind the poem he will write in two years, and his later claims (as they contradict his early imperative) that The Waste Land is not of or about his generation, or about anything other than his own experience of disillusion. Here is what Eliot believes before taking up his existential experiment:

“…the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order…No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead
poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.”

References


Advocating for Mother Earth in the Undergraduate Classroom: Uniting Twenty-First Century Technologies, Local Resources, Art, and Activism to Explore Our Place in Nature

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Introduction: Art and Activism -- Moving Beyond the Page and Into the World

As friends since the beginning of our doctoral studies at WMU, we had been looking for an undergraduate class to teach collaboratively, yet as an Americanist and a medievalist, we found it somewhat challenging to find a subject that would dovetail with our unique interests and academic backgrounds. Given our shared interest in the environment and our desire to create a highly interactive course that would encourage our students to view the world around them in a multitude of new and hopefully transformative ways, we decided to design a section of English 3110H (“Our Place in Nature”), which was offered jointly by the English Department and the Lee Honors College in the fall of 2010. Typically, this course is constructed as a survey of the conventional canon of American nature writing, including nineteenth-century naturalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Susan Fenimore Cooper and twentieth-century conservationists such as John Burroughs, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. However, spurred by our desire to provide our students with a learning experience that would move beyond these more traditional explorations of literature and culture, we set about designing our course around a series of interrelated texts, activities, and assignments that would enable our students to gain an understanding of the history of humanity’s relationship with the environment. With visions of the environmental impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico fresh in our minds, we also hoped to underscore the sense of urgency we ourselves felt about human beings’ current relationship with the natural world—a sense of urgency that has only increased in the intervening years since we taught the course as environmental activists and concerned citizens around the world continue to call on their governments to address the now-incontrovertible effects of global climate change.

As educators who have benefitted tremendously from our own experiences in courses which have been taught from an interdisciplinary perspective, we instinctively sought to provide our own students with a similarly enriching and multidisciplinary experience. Most educators now agree that twenty-first-century environmental education will require cooperation between disciplines, as teachers, researchers, and administrators work toward creating sustainable practices on campus and in helping to shape citizens who understand the impact that their choices and actions have on their local and global environments. As Kirsten Allen Bartels and Kelly A. Parker argue in Teaching Sustainability, courses about sustainability or courses that feature components of sustainability are found within many academic disciplines, and such disciplinary-specific approaches are necessary. But what we also need are courses about sustainability that shatter and smash through disciplinary boundaries, not merely because trans- and interdisciplinary approaches are in vogue, but because our students require them to thrive in the multiple careers that most of them will face. [...] Understanding that many of our core communal problems today are not going to be solved through the insights of one discipline, nor of any one theory, is a good starting point toward integration. (21, 34)
Advocating for Mother Earth in the Undergraduate Classroom

Thus, contemporary environmental education must not only meet the varied needs and goals of an interdisciplinary classroom but should also motivate students to think beyond classroom walls to their communities and professional futures. Answering these urgent charges required us to engage our students intellectually, emotionally, and physically with the world by entering into academic and public discussions of environmental literature and issues related to the environment and by providing them with models for sustainable activism that they could employ in their own lives in the years to come. To this end, we encouraged them to engage in lively discussions with us throughout the semester as well as to share some of their coursework, including blog posts and a personal digital-storytelling project, both online and in class. We also provided them with an opportunity to workshop creative writing projects that explored their evolving perceptions of their place in nature and to complete a more conventional research essay focused on topics with which they found a personal connection.

As we exchanged the wealth of ideas that each of us had about the directions the course might take, we also quickly decided that including the voices of a diverse group of guest speakers would complement the conversation we were hoping to have with our students over the course of the semester. We hoped our slate of speakers would broaden the scope of that discussion and provide our students with the opportunity to interact with individuals who were, in many cases, experts in their field and potential role models and mentors. With this goal in mind, we invited individuals with a wide range of experience and expertise to visit our classroom throughout the semester—from writers and filmmakers to environmental policymakers and activists—in an attempt to energize and challenge our students. As one might expect, the experience of coordinating so many guest speakers in one semester was not without its challenges. Overall, though, the presence of these talented and engaged individuals in our classroom helped to motivate and empower our students to think about and respond to the world around them and deepened our own awareness and appreciation of the kind of commitment to the environment that is very much alive and well in an era in which such commitment is vital.

In order to narrow the scope of our class and to take advantage of the wealth of resources available to us here in West Michigan, we also decided to make one of our main themes throughout the semester the importance of the local. To that end, we selected a trio of contemporary texts that explicitly underscore the importance of “living in place”: Barbara Kingsolver’s bestselling 2008 exploration of her own family’s experiment with “locavore” eating, Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life, Alison Swan’s 2006 essay collection Fresh Water: Women Writing on the Great Lakes, and Tom Springer’s 2008 homage to the wild spaces of our own beloved region, Looking for Hickories: The Forgotten Wildness of the Rural Midwest. Though environmental activist Bill McKibben’s 2008 anthology American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau served as our anchor text for the semester and was one to which we returned repeatedly as a touchstone for discussion and reflection, these three texts provided us with a foundation for both of the off-campus field trips (the first to the Kalamazoo Nature Center and the second to the Kalamazoo Farmers’ Market) and many of the in-class activities that eventually became the highlights of our semester and collectively underscored for our students the importance of respecting and nurturing the natural places that are closest to us, a maxim which, if applied globally, would do much to reverse and repair the damage that human beings continue to inflict on the natural world today.

Finally, as academics in training in the humanities during a period in which the value of an education grounded in these vital subjects is being increasingly questioned, we also wanted to encourage our students to understand the multitude of manners in which the environment can be studied and celebrated, as a way of underscoring the commonalities between subjects and as a way of deepening their awareness and appreciation for the arts, in particular. To this end, whenever possible, we attempted to introduce them to works of art and music whose subject matter echoed and enriched their understanding of the topics that we were discussing.
in class. Given the abundance of material that we were attempting to present in virtually every 75-minute class period, we weren’t able to share nearly as many works of art as we would have liked. But we were very pleased with our class’ responses to the pieces that we did introduce and would wholeheartedly incorporate this element of our curriculum into any future permutations of this course we may teach. The article that follows is our attempt to share our experiences with the various components, activities, and realizations that we developed over the course of a rewarding and enriching semester.

Defining Terms

Though the McKibben anthology formed the textual foundation for our class, one of its flaws (for our purposes, anyway) was its structure, locating the start of American nature writing with Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau could certainly be heralded as the father of the American environmental writing tradition, yet our course required us to start at an earlier point, to interrogate the foundational assumptions in Western tradition concerning humanity’s relationship with the natural world. Thus, for the first full day of class, we asked students to read three cosmogonical texts—the Biblical account of Genesis, selections from the Old Norse mythological Edda, and a Hopi Indian creation story, an ancient creation text that was passed down orally and not recorded until the 1950s. In preparation for our discussion, we asked our students to take a few minutes to jot down answers to the questions, “How do you define ‘nature’?” and “What do you think is humankind’s relationship to nature?”

In their answers, students began to unpack words that seem to have obvious meanings—nature, natural, unnatural, human—and discussed their perceptions of where they, and we as a species, stand in relationship to nature—whether inside, outside, or above. Using these responses, we directed students’ attention back to those foundational texts, looking for the origins of American and Judeo-Christian attitudes toward the natural world and discussing how texts such as these can influence or reflect the worldviews of the cultures from which they spring. For example, the Old Norse mythology emphasizes the physical transformations of the earth to its present form and the creation and exploits of the Norse pantheon of gods. Human beings have a relatively small role in this cosmology. The Hopi mythology includes several creations and cataclysms as the world changes form, and an increasing suspicion and hostility between humans and beasts as the human race drifts ever away from the divine presence. In Genesis, however, students observed the divine commandment that
humans are to have dominion over the other beasts and organisms. We also brought in artwork, including William Blake’s illustration of “The Temptation and Fall of Eve” (1808), to flesh out some of these ideas. In this portrait, as Eve bites into the fruit, nature suddenly becomes threatening to humans, with darkness and flashing lightning. Each of these texts provides evidence for a separation between humanity and nature, often connected to humanity’s strained relationship to God or a creator figure. In this lesson, we sought to make students aware of deep-seated Western beliefs about the relationship of humans to the earth, to lay a foundation for our future talks about how nature is depicted in much later texts, and to encourage our students to consider their personal beliefs about their individual places—and the place of humanity as a whole—in nature, moving from the extremely local (the individual) to the global or even cosmological.

Seeing and Walking in Local Landscapes

We tried to keep this balance between the global and the local throughout the course, and one way we focused on the local was to assign readings by Michigan authors, two of whom we were fortunate to be able to bring into our classroom. Three Rivers writer Tom Springer and Saugatuck poet Alison Swan each visited our class to talk about their respective collections, *Looking for Hickories* and *Fresh Water*, as well as the process of writing personal essays and their experiences advocating for Michigan’s natural environments. What we found, which was surprising to us as teachers of literature who like to focus on the text at hand, was that when we tried to direct students to talk about themes, techniques, and descriptions in the texts, they inevitably responded with their own memories of growing up in Michigan and neighboring states. We observed again and again a kind of discussion where the text became primarily a catalyst for students voicing their love of their native landscapes and their reactions to natural or human-caused change in these places. Though we were initially startled by our students’ reactions and sought to encourage them to voice more critical observations about the texts we were analyzing, their personal and often deeply felt perspectives provided a natural link to the kind of activism that we wanted to discuss and encourage. For Alison Swan’s visit, we paired her collection of essays on the Great Lakes with “A Fable for Tomorrow,” a selection from Rachel Carson’s seminal 1962 environmental work, *Silent Spring*. In her “fable,” Carson posits a world devoid of birdsong, a disturbing picture delivered in a familiar literary form that implies a lesson to be learned. Moving from Carson, who published widely on American oceans and marine ecosystems in her own time, to Swan, who opens and closes her collection with a personal reflection about seeing a local beach strewn with zebra mussels, we were reminded of what could be learned by observing both large and small changes in our own local ecosystems.

Drawing connections between observing, reading, and acting, we began our talk with Alison by reading a quote she had given in an interview:

> I hope the existence of this book [Fresh Water] will encourage writers who love the Great Lakes to write about the region. We need the stories; they help us connect. When we connect, it’s easier to care, and when we care, it’s easier to act. Passivity is the most destructive, if understandable, habit of contemporary Americans. (Swan and Dempsey, March 6, 2006)

Here, Swan eloquently encapsulates one of the core principles of our class (and, really, any class in the humanities)—the role of literature and cultural material in helping people to connect to each other, to their society, and to the physical environment around them, and to get them to care enough that they become active citizens, wherever they may be. Following Swan’s suggestion, we broke out of our passive places in the classroom and took our students “into the wild” to encourage them to engage actively with the natural world around them and
to make connections between what we had been reading and discussing in class and the vital natural spaces closest to us.

One of the first books that we had assigned in the course was Bill Bryson’s *A Walk in the Woods*, a hilarious account of his attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail, interwoven with his praise and condemnation of American environmental policy and our nation’s attitudes toward our natural resources. We paired Bryson with some familiar names in environmental writing—notably Thoreau and Burroughs—to create a unit on “Walking and Noticing” the world around us. To encourage students to become the “keen-eyed observer[s]” (146) to which Burroughs refers in his essay “The Art of Seeing Things,” we visited the Kalamazoo Nature Center, where students learned about the Center’s dedication to ecologist Aldo Leopold’s mission of preservation and stewardship, took a tour through a recreated Midwestern prairie, observed migratory birds being tagged, and finished the morning with a quiet stroll through the woods. On what turned out to be a picturesque and almost perfect October day, our students exhibited a near-giddiness as they wandered through the Center and along the trails. Enchanted by this rare opportunity to walk, sit, talk, laugh, and simply observe what was under the sun instead of sitting in a classroom for our standard allotment of time, many of our students expressed a wish to stay longer, so that they might have time to wander, take pictures, or merely sit in a field and do some reflective writing. For us, this underscored our innate need to be connected to the natural world and its calming and restorative effects, as well as the impact of learning that takes place outside the classroom, since our visit to the KNC eventually became one of the activities that our students most enjoyed and remembered fondly as the semester came to a close.

Following this experience, we encouraged our students to write about their outing on their personal blogs that they had created for our class. This outing was the first of several that we planned, and it’s an example of a different mode of learning—place-based and individually-centered—that we felt would appeal to students on a new level as well as get them interested and involved in the resources available to them in their home communities.

**Eating in Place**

As part of our focus on the local, we also decided to introduce our students to a way of living and eating that has been growing in popularity in the United States, and in agriculturally diverse West Michigan, over the course of the past decade: the local food movement. Using...
Barbara Kingsolver’s essay “Knowing Our Place,” which was one of the selections in our McKibben text, and her bestselling exploration of her own family’s year-long experiment with growing and harvesting their own food, Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, as springboards for our discussion, we encouraged our students to think about their own relationships with the places in which they lived and to consider how their food choices affected those places, as well as the larger environments around them. In both of these texts, the Appalachian-born Kingsolver does an extraordinary job of emphasizing the solace and peace of mind she gains from living and working in the beautiful rural region her ancestors have inhabited for centuries and of her “unspeakable sadness” at the burgeoning disconnection she sees between humanity as a whole and the natural world, thanks to human beings’ increasingly urban existence (“Knowing Our Place” 945).

Having spent most of her adult life living in Tucson, Arizona, a place where "[virtually] every unit of food consumed [...] moves into town in a refrigerated module from somewhere far away [...]and where every] ounce of the city’s drinking, washing, and goldfish-bowl-filling water is pumped from a nonrenewable resource—a fossil aquifer that is dropping so fast, sometimes the ground crumbles” (Animal, Vegetable, Miracle 3), Kingsolver makes a compelling case for the reasons why she and her family decided to return to rural Virginia, “to live in a place that could feed us” (3), and for the ways in which Americans’ almost willful ignorance about where their food comes from have helped to imperil the health of our planet and ourselves. In one of the most unsettling essays in Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, a piece called “Oily Food,” Kingsolver’s biologist husband Steven L. Hopp underscores the impact of Americans’ almost nonchalant penchant for consuming out-of-season foods upon the average distance our food must travel before it reaches our plates—a staggering 1,500 miles per food item—and the shocking amount of fossil fuels that are consumed as a result. According to Hopp, “If every U.S. citizen ate just one meal a week (any meal) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country’s oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week” (qtd. in Kingsolver 5), a statistic that would hopefully motivate even the least engaged of American citizens to reconsider his or her food choices.

We encouraged our students to think about the long-term ramifications of this type of eating—on our environment, our economy, and ourselves—and of the benefits of eating foods that are locally produced, which require less packaging, preservatives, and transport, which help to sustain the local economies of which we are a part, and which, more often than not, offer greater health benefits to us physically. To help our students make a direct and meaningful connection with these ideas, we divided them into groups and embarked on what would become our second field trip—to the Kalamazoo Farmers’ Market. Armed with a budget of $20 per group and instructions to purchase “locally grown, seasonally appropriate” foods with which they could create two dishes to share at a potluck luncheon two days later, our students arrived eager to interact with the local farmers who had brought their produce to market that chilly Tuesday in mid-October. Though it was late in the season and the farmers’ market was not nearly as crowded with either farmers or shoppers as it might have been in midsummer, our students were delighted to make their modest purchases and to mingle with the other shoppers and each other. They frequently engaged in conversations with the growers, who seemed both startled and amused by their questions about how to prepare late-season eggplant or squash or how to preserve flowers and herbs.

Our trip to the farmers’ market was fun and informative, but it was a precursor to an even more engaging event the following class period, when we and our students gathered in the lounge of the Lee Honors College to share the fruits of their culinary labors and to view and discuss the West Michigan-focused documentary Eating in Place. Produced by the then-
Eating in Place seeks to trace the origins of the West Michigan local food movement. The documentary also introduces its viewers to many of the key figures who have helped the movement to flourish in recent years, from the growers themselves to the manager of the Fulton Street Farmers' Market in Grand Rapids and the owner of Meijer Foods, whose chain of grocery stores strives to support local growers by making their products more widely available to the public. After enjoying a delicious and varied potluck meal made up of the fresh ingredients they had purchased the class period before, our students, and the visiting professors and students who joined us that day, were treated to a lively discussion with us and our guest speakers about the roles that each of us can play in helping to sustain ourselves and our local economies by eating locally produced foods. We were somewhat startled to realize, as our conversation evolved, that this idea was not as novel as we had expected to our late-teen and early-twenty-something students, a number of whom came from farming backgrounds and all of whom readily acknowledged the benefits of “eating in place,” but our students’ receptiveness to the ideas we discussed—and the relative ease with which they transformed their late-season farmers’ market purchases into a wonderful variety of palatable dishes—helped to underscore the obvious benefits of this type of eating, for us and our planet.
Blogging and Digital Storytelling

Given the postsecondary focus on students’ development of twenty-first-century technological skills, we also wanted to include some projects that would allow our class to develop and polish their writing skills using technology that would enable them to share their work with a broader audience. To this end, we challenged our students with three interrelated projects that would build on their work from one project to the next and that would employ different kinds of writing and presentation skills: a personal blog, a work of creative writing that they would generate during a two-day writers’ workshop (ideally using one of their blog posts as a starting point), and a digital story that would represent the culmination of all of their writing and thinking about the world around them that semester. Since each of these projects would probably be worthy of an essay in and of itself, we have decided to focus our attention here on the blogging assignment, since it was the only semester-long project with which our students were engaged and since it is also a project that could be easily duplicated by any instructor regardless of his or her discipline.

As one of the primary objectives of our course was to encourage our students to become more aware of the world around them, we asked them to create and maintain personal blogs, or online journals, in which they could record their reactions to texts and class discussions, as well as their evolving perceptions of their own place in nature. Though most of our students expressed a real anxiety about the prospect of posting their writing in such a public venue, we reassured them that we, too, had experienced similar anxieties but that these fears had lessened as we became more confident of our own writing and took ownership of our online personas and the information we chose to share with our (admittedly unknown) readers. Modeling the kind of online writing we were looking for on a class blog that we maintained as instructors, we encouraged our students to write about any and all aspects of the environment and their observations about the natural world around them, which resulted in some very moving responses, particularly in students’ final blog posts, in which we asked them to reflect on what they had learned over the course of the semester and taken from the class as a whole.
In reviewing those responses now, two strike us as being worth sharing, for they truly underscore the outcomes that we had hoped for when we first sat down to design the class earlier that year. The first, written by a then-graduating senior, and the only non-honors student in our class, is one that any teacher would be delighted to read at the end of a long and labor-intensive semester like ours:

English 3110-Our Place in Nature is a course that should be offered to all students at Western Michigan University. This is the kind of class that can make you a better reader, writer, thinker, and a more environmentally conscious person. This could be the class that reaches out and breaks into people’s consciousness about what they are doing to our planet. This could be the class that gets a person into recycling, an activist role, and even gets a group of people to care more about saving a tree. This class taught me so much, and I am glad that I could be negotiated into the course. It was a real joy, and I enjoyed going to every class.

However, the second, written by one of our most deeply engaged freshman, underscores one of the main themes that we had hoped to convey to all of our students throughout the semester:

Finishing up the book Looking for Hickories, written by Tom Springer, I found one of my favorite quotes that will stick with me long after this class is over. [...] It almost sums up all I want out of life and what I have learned from this class. I am leaving Our Place in Nature as a more well-rounded individual from all of the different views and experiences that I have been exposed to, and this quote is going to help me continue to positively grow and learn what I want from nature. Not only do I hope that I will be able to figure my life out and experience all the world has to offer, but I hope that I will find a way to give back and help nature. It is also important to me to help others experience nature and learn to live in harmony and love it for what it has to offer. This quote profoundly swayed how I think I will live out my life. My favorite quote award for this class goes out to Tom Springer, who put it best when he said, ‘May the treasures we have at hand—in a world so filled with real need—always be enough.’

May they be enough indeed.

Handling the Challenges

For the most part, as we reflect on the variety of activities and events that comprised this whirlwind semester of ours, we remain pleased with how most of our course evolved. However, the semester was not without its challenges, one of which was not immediately clear to us until the class was well under way. Though our students that semester were wonderful and a delight to work with, we did not anticipate that most of them would be incoming freshmen still learning to navigate their first semester as undergrads, a reality that became clearer to us when a few of our students would routinely come to class unprepared or bleary-eyed from all-night confabs with their roommates. We knew we were planning an ambitious class, but we were frequently reminded that freshman-level students needed more time to read, digest, process, and ask questions about assignments, which was sometimes frustrating, given how tightly we had scheduled the course and how eager we were to jump into textual analysis and more complex discourse. Five years after the fact, we can now laugh about this, but at the time, we often felt frustrated and perhaps overly anxious about the amount of time that these protracted logistical discussions required.
Another issue we had not anticipated also stemmed from the youth and inexperience of our students that semester. Accustomed to the kind of higher-level reading and discussion skills that students typically acquire over time and are able to employ as they are nearing the end of their university experience, we found that many of our students were at times reluctant to engage critically with the texts we were introducing, often defaulting to the kinds of personal reflections we observed when they discussed non-fiction texts. As former honors students ourselves and instructors with experience working with talented-and-gifted students at both the secondary and postsecondary levels, we adapted our discussion methods in class to encourage our students to look more critically at the texts we were reading, even though we recognized that not all of our students would become as adept as others at this type of analysis, particularly in a general education course. Though, like most teachers, we both delight in working with such highly motivated and able students, we also noted, both in this class and in other honors courses we have taught, a frequent disconnection between students’ expectations about the grades they will earn and the quality of the work they actually produce. While largely well prepared and capable of submitting often impressive work, a number of our students came to class with higher expectations regarding the grades they would receive and lower expectations regarding the amount of time and effort they would have to devote to their studies in order to earn those grades. Walking into a course with the scope and pace of assignments that we designed was no doubt a wake-up call for a number of them. We are thrilled to report that most of them rose to the occasion.

Another of the challenges we encountered is the significant amount of time and effort that was required to coordinate so many guest speakers and events in a single semester. Though neither of us was a novice at event planning, the sheer volume of emailing and phone correspondence that was required to assemble our lineup of visitors ended up being quite time consuming. Beyond the time required to coordinate our guests’ visits and the logistics of getting them parking passes and escorting them around campus, we also didn’t want to become stage managers for an increasing cast of visiting characters. While we were delighted to have such a variety of speakers, we realized that we needed to remain in control in order to shape our classroom discussions according to our vision of the class. We also were reminded that students, particularly incoming freshmen who were still finding their own voices in the classroom, needed some time to acclimate to the varying personalities of our speakers. Our two local writers, despite their radically different personalities, ended up being two of our most successful visitors. The soft-spoken Alison Swan, whose writing we were already smitten with, ended up being so warm and approachable that her visit to our classroom resulted in one of our most rewarding and fruitful discussions, with students eagerly volunteering to add their voices to our conversation, while the towering Tom Springer’s boundless energy and infectious good humor completely charmed our class.
who happily lined up after our time together had come to a close to have Tom sign copies of their books and give them additional tips on how to begin writing careers of their own. Not all of our speakers connected with our students in such an immediate and personal way, but we realize now that a certain amount of serendipity is always involved when inviting others into one's classroom, and we are tremendously grateful for the energy and expertise all of our speakers added to the dynamic discussion we were able to have with our students that semester. Our class simply wouldn’t have been the same without them, and we look forward to working with many of them again in the years to come.

Final Thoughts

Though we would be the first to admit that our course was probably overly ambitious, we really wouldn’t have done too many things differently over the course of this first semester. As we had intended they would, all of our activities, field trips, and events, including our cadre of guest speakers, dovetailed into one another well, offering our students a pedagogically sound and intellectually challenging educational experience that will probably rank as one of the most unique of their undergraduate years.

We ended our class with Timothy Egan’s book, *The Worst Hard Time*, an account of the greatest environmental catastrophe this country has ever seen, the American Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Our students complained that this was far too much of a downer on which to end the semester, and to be fair, the book does provide an emotionally wrenching but well-researched chronicle of the mismanagement of resources, labor, and land that resulted in natural devastation on what must have seemed an apocalyptic scope to the residents of the American Plains. This account of the creation of an American wasteland served as a warning and a wake-up call for a class concerned with humanity’s place in and impact upon the natural world, however, and we were able to come full circle with our curriculum, as the creation texts with which we began our discussions also contain apocalyptic visions of the world’s end. And, perhaps most importantly, what we sought to emphasize throughout this course was that these visions of environmental ruin are *not* inevitable; that our students, if informed and passionate enough, could use activism, purchasing power, community involvement, and creativity to write a *new* future for their local landscapes and for the global community.

We learned a tremendous amount about environmental issues and about teaching throughout this exciting semester—information that we hope, ultimately, to share in a textbook focused on many of the pedagogical strategies that we employed with the help and hard work of the honors students with whom we were privileged to work. Given the urgency of our topic, we had expected to be able to find a wealth of material on teaching environmental literature at the college level and strategies for making these texts relevant to students' concerns and values in their day-to-day lives. However, a survey of recent pedagogical scholarship reveals that, while environmental education has become increasingly a part of many pre-K and K-12 programs over the course of the past several decades and students at post-secondary institutions have seen a dramatic increase in environmental education programs themselves within the past decade, colleges and universities in general have been slow to incorporate environmental education as a core component of their undergraduate curricula. Moreover, what seems to be conspicuously lacking in environmental education, particularly when it is taught in humanities courses at this level, is the activist component that links classroom readings, activities, and discussions to the realities of the wider world—something which we viewed as being critical to the success of our own course. In our experience as college instructors, we have found that most undergraduate students are well aware of the challenges facing our planet and are looking for ways to channel their concerns about the environment into sustainable actions. Their pre-K and K-12 teachers have done an admirable job of instilling in most of them a deep sense of environmental empathy and urgency. It is our obligation, as they enter this critical stage in their development as global
citizens, to provide them with new and more expansive ways of looking at the world and with viable avenues of empowerment.

Acknowledgments

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the huge debt of gratitude that we owe to our then-department chair, Dr. Richard Utz, and the recently retired Dean of the Lee Honors College, Dr. Nick Andreadis, whose enthusiasm, encouragement, and financial support of our class made so many of the units, field trips, and classroom visits we have outlined here possible. We are also tremendously grateful to our friend and colleague, Dr. Gwen Tarbox, who provided us with a wealth of ideas about ways in which we might enrich our class throughout the semester, including tips on how to organize our class website, and who also took the time to gather our students’ feedback about this very experimental course at the end of the term. Our class wouldn’t have been nearly as dynamic without the contributions of our wonderful guest speakers: Pen Campbell, Alison Swan, Dave Dempsey, Tom Springer, Nurya Love Parish, Ruth Stein, Kate Dernocoeur, Christoph Irmscher, Bill Davis, and Geoff Kempter, who, for little to no compensation and the promise of lunch and good conversation with us after their visits to our classroom, took time out of their own busy schedules to come share their love of and concern for the natural world with our students, for which we remain very thankful. We had a wonderful time teaching this class and hope that other graduate students, in departments throughout our university, will be similarly empowered to experiment with what is possible within the classroom—and beyond it—in the future.

Editor’s Note

Due to editorial error, this article was printed incorrectly in the fall 2015 issue of The Hilltop Review. The text printed under that title was actually an article titled “The Problem of Nomological Impossibility for Epistemic Structural Realism,” by Patrick Manzanares, and was originally published in the spring 2015 issue of The Hilltop Review. The fall 2015 issue has since been corrected, and “Advocating for Mother Earth in the Undergraduate Classroom” is reprinted here.

Christina Triezenberg and Ilse Schweitzer VanDonkelaar are alumnae of Western Michigan University’s Department of English, where they both earned PhDs in English. This article was originally accepted for publication in the Spring 2013 issue of The Hilltop Review, when they were both graduate students. Unfortunately, that issue was never published. The authors have revised the article for publication. Christina Triezenberg is now an adjunct professor in the Departments of English and Liberal Studies at Grand Valley State University and has accepted an assistant professorship at Morningside College, where she can be reached in care of the Department of English and Modern Languages starting in the fall of 2016. Ilse Schweitzer VanDonkelaar is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Grand Valley State University and a Commissioning and Technical Editor with Medieval Institute Publications, Arc-Humanities, and Amsterdam University Press.

I would like to personally thank Drs. Triezenberg and VanDonkelaar for their patience, and to apologize for the problems getting their article to print.

References


Texts Used for Course


The Future is Fire

Winner of Artwork Award, Spring 2016

By Ariel Berry
Department of English
ariel.e.berry@wmich.edu
Lake Michigan Lighthouse

By Charles Lein
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Hope

By Stephanie R. Goodman
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Interdisciplinarity

By Christina G. Collins
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Most days I think of myself
as failing. To reconcile this I say things
like leaves grow and die over and over—
the cycle I am running is my own and I find
consolation in that;
but after grease
popped out of a pan I was browning chicken in
and put a blank dot on my retina
I stopped looking so closely
at unimportant things. That helped
for a time,
but soon most things
seemed unimportant:
another night
out, a visit up the coast, sitting
snowed in with a book—
does this affect the way I love?
Sometimes I think I am not capable
and undeserving.
Sometimes
the hour is late and I think
of the past: like another life
I have died and lost
everyone
and myself:
a person familiar with a certain
arrangement of homes and the spaces
between them.

I have given up, left myself behind.

Why is being erased such an obsession?
How you die is not a matter of how you lived.

Have you been with someone who is sick and waiting for death? What did you talk about?
On the banks of the Yangtze tour boats churn towards sunset. On board the Eastern Star, Western tourists sip vodka and snap photos of mountaintops. The boats’ workers, men and women born on failing farms, practice their English in restroom mirrors. They mouth smiles next to leaky sink faucets that drip consistently like metronomes.

In the workers’ lounge, black and white television sets rest on Formica countertops. At the top of every hour, a supervisor lectures on common American idioms. Behind him, the televisions run loops of Die Hard, Dirty Dancing, and Gone with the Wind. The supervisor says watching is the best way to learn. Americans can be generous tippers when drunk.

In a room with four bunks, a new worker changes into his uniform. The room has a window that, with a little muscle, opens. Thick river air floats like smog through his window. Carried on this stream, an almost microscopic dobsonfly buzzes onto his window sill. The new worker remembers a letter he once received from his brother who moved to Chengdu, where pollution is low and the waters sparkle in Morse code. Dobsonflies translate these messages, sucking on the sparkles and growing as large as human hands. The worker looks at his hand and suddenly it seems rather small.

Down river, in Sandouping, work has finished on a new manufacturing plant. Fertile soil replaced with concrete, farmlands become slums. Workers march in sync, the stomp of their boots echoing like gunfire. The smell of chemicals from the plant hangs in the air for miles. Toxins seep into townspeople’s skin, turning their fingertips a dirty white. Two lovers, holding hands, stop in an alleyway during the warmth of late afternoon. They hold their hands, entwined, up to the sun as rays of light drain through their bleached skin. After the plant stands for ten years, life expectancy in the town decreases by the same amount.

The plant produces a new synthetic material. Scientific journals report that the material, when tested blindly, can only be distinguished from human skin by four out of every twenty people. Vats of acidic cocktails hum while blending. In mechanic valleys of grey and black, oil-marked tarps cover fresh molds of the synthetic, molds made to look like life size women and men. Women with dainty frames and large breasts. Men with chiseled chests and long dicks. Women with curves, men with dimples. Men with blue eyes, some women without any eyes at all. The plant, at full capacity, births over ten thousand dolls a day. After the synthetic is molded, small motherboards are inserted into the bodies. The dolls are then shipped to another plant for a special glaze of paint. It is said, by some workers, that without the paint the dolls appear soulless.
“You can choose the name,” she texted.

“No—Really?” I texted back, incredulous that this woman, an old school chum and a poet, would charge me with naming her third child. Poets do love to name things.

I, neither poet nor parent, have only ever named mongrels. I used to foster death-row dogs from a local shelter—shelter being that soothing euphemism for extermination camp, because we need to be soothed, don’t we, when it comes to dogs, and that’s why they don’t die. They’re not put to death. They’re put to sleep. So whenever I got “the call” (the foster group’s version of a governor’s pardon), I would cart home the tired, the poor, the huddled masses of mangy fur. I would bathe the dogs, love them, socialize them. Finally, I would name them. I always chose Irish names. I don’t know why. I’m not Irish and none of the dogs were Irish breeds. Nor did they sing sea-shanties. But they’d had hard lives. They were scrappy. They were survivors, often found rooting through dumpsters or wandering the streets, eating rocks to feel full. Maybe I was thinking of the potato famine.

Anyway, it worked. My Irish-branded mutts were adopted in record speed. Oona, Fergus, Seamus, Aengus, Dooley, and Finn all found homes in a matter of weeks. Perhaps there is a correlation between Irish names and sympathy-response that says something about mythmaking and American ideology (and I am not prepared to formalize a theory without conducting further experiments with death-bound dogs using Mongolian, Aztec, and Viking names), but I will say that all the new owners kept the Irish names and sent photo-Christmas cards (often with locks of fur enclosed, which is weird, I’ll grant you). And for some reason, the dogs in the photos are wearing shamrock sweaters and grinning idiotically.

So my old friend may have been thinking about dogs and locks of hair and little idiots when she asked me to name her child. Or maybe it’s true what they say about the third child: the trivial things matter less. You’ve kept two children alive at this point. The third is a coaster. If so, I could name the kid Pain and no one would blink.

Here’s the catch. This woman belongs to a peculiar caste of Gen-X-ers in their thirties and forties who have begun (at an alarming rate) to name their offspring after dead authors. The babies of these people are called Ezra or Eliot; Fitzgerald, Flannery or Faulkner. There’s Bronte and Beckett, Chandler and Carver. And let’s not forget the Russians (they haven’t). I’ve been to the birthday parties of a young Anton, a Leo, and a Fyodor. Yes, Fyodor (whose parents are California WASPs). I’m confident that a birth announcement for baby Ishmael or Bartleby is forthcoming, because when parents find that all the good authors are taken, they turn to the names of troubled literary characters.

Fun fact: Cate Blanchett named her third child Ignatius. The actress claims she ran out of steam after naming her first two kids—Dashiell (after Hammett) and Roman (after Polanski). Proof of my hypothesis, I thought, but she clarified the record. She found Ignatius (that famed ne’er do well of A Confederacy of Dunces) in a children’s book called Captain Underpants. To her credit, she is not a poet. And it was, after all, her third child.

I’ve been informed that my friend’s third child will be a girl. And (in this age of increasing gender-fluidity) I wondered if I ought to choose a name that is less likely to result in identity-oppression. Andy or Parker, perhaps. Or should I follow the blazed path of celebrity babies with neutral, organic names like Lake or River, Apple or Rainn or Leaf (but...
of course, Leaf Phoenix changed his name to Joaquin, so clearly his parents didn’t do him any
favors).

Go for Seinfeld, I’m thinking. No, Seinfeld is a terrible name for a child. I’m talking
about the episode from 1996, where the gang discusses baby names. George Costanza (master
of such monikers as Art Vandelay and Buck Naked) says he’s got a secret baby name he’s
been hanging onto, just in case. A real original, he says. Seven. A beautiful name for a boy or
girl. Mickey Mantle’s number. George defies Jerry to think of a better name and, looking
around the kitchen, Jerry immediately counters with Mug. Mug Constanza. Or Ketchup, he
offers, Pretty name for a girl…How ‘bout Bisquick? Pimento? Gherkin?

Another fun fact: Victoria Beckham (formerly “Posh Spice”) and her footballer husband,
David, gave birth to their fourth child. They named the girl Harper, and given my theory of
extra children, we may assume the child is not named after the author of To Kill a
Mockingbird. Indeed, the couple claims she was named for a character in a Disney show.
Added bonus: the child’s middle name is the same as Mr. Beckham’s famous jersey
number… Seven.

So, given that the world is now a giant club for weirdly named children, it should be no
surprise that I entered absurdist territory, especially when my friend texted: “How about a
flower? Rose? Lily? Daisy?” Her two boys are Tolstoy and Proust, so I snapped: “Why name
the third child after a flower just because you’re tired and she’s got two x chromosomes? Do
you want people to say of her Oh, how like a FLOWER she is? How lovely to sniff her before
she loses her bloom and rots on the stem? She deserves a name that suggests profound
potential!” And, thinking of Seinfeld, I came up with THE. PERFECT. NAME. Ready? Get
excited.

H2O. Because it doesn’t get more significant than water, right? The planet is primarily
water. The human body is primarily water. Without WATER, we cease to exist. I mean, sure,
we need oxygen, too, but hydrogen molecules give it more oomph, don’t you think? And
scientific names are cool. Maybe she’ll grow up to be a scientist, I thought. We need more
female scientists. The world needs this name! I was giddy with self-congratulation. I
wondered if it was too late to change my own name. My friend stopped texting long enough
to appear to be considering it.

Me: So we’re done, here? H2O? Because, I mean, I looooooove it.
Her: My oldest thinks it’s a great name.
Me: Excellent. I always liked him.
Her: But he used to eat paste, so keep the names coming.

So H2O was out, just because Tolstoy ate a little paste! Keep this in mind, parents, when your
kids get hungry during arts and crafts. Every genius idea they agree with afterwards will be
immediately discounted because of their early fetish. It’s just not fair. A week later…

Me: Andromeda! After the galaxy!
Me: She should be named after a planet, at the very least. But maybe not Uranus.
Her: Maybe not.
Me: On the other hand, a difficult name builds character. Don’t you want her to be tough?
Her: Not that tough.
Me: So not Eva Braun.
Her: No, not Eva Braun.

And on and on, through the weeks. I suggested to my friend that she could wait until the child
is old enough to choose her own name. Like when she’s twenty or so.

Me: Just give her a placeholder name. Like Blank. Or TBD.
Her: I’m not calling the baby BLANK. If you’re not good, I’ll name her after you.

And maybe this is the real problem. Neither of us like our own literary names. My friend
is named for a biblical character who suffers perpetually. Coincidentally (or not), my friend
has suffered a great deal in her life. I’m named for a character in a Waugh novel; a gullible, love-addled girl who commits suicide because someone suggests it. People are always hiding pills and knives from me.

I like the idea of waiting, I’ve decided. I suggest a three-to-five year mandatory waiting period for naming children (because naming a child should take longer than buying a gun). Why doom a baby with a used (soiled) name that they might grow into (and do you want your kid’s life to resemble Fitzgerald’s?) when you could capitalize upon your child’s particular brand of neurosis? Think of the youthful peccadilloes that could provide both entertaining names and promising career paths: Sticks Things In Sockets. Have you met my friend Sticks Things In? He’s a gynecologist, now. And then there’s Flushes Weird Stuff. Flushes is the civil engineer who made it possible to flush entire Russian novels without clogging city pipes. Wears Cape Everywhere. Cape is the head of a fashion house. And a superhero. And a Truman Capote impersonator. And you’ve met my dear friends, Poops In Front Yard, Sings Christmas Carols While Pooping, and Refuses to Poop, Ever? Okay, yes. Names that arise during a child’s formative years will often relate to poop. And yes, you’ll know at least three kids called Eats Paste. But isn’t that better than knowing three kids called Cheever?
More than One Way to Measure: Masculinity in Zurkhaneh of Safavid Iran

Winner, 2016 Graduate Humanities Conference

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The zurkhaneh is a uniquely Iranian institution that claims a social history extending at least back to the time of the Safavid Empire. The closest modern corollary is the gym where wrestlers trained and competed, though the activity of the zurkhaneh was much more highly structured than modern gyms. While the zurkhaneh has undergone a substantial amount of change from then until now, the ethos of the zurkhaneh has remained relatively untouched. Indeed, Lloyd Ridgeon (2007) writes of the zurkhaneh as caught “between tradition and change” describing that the modern perception of the zurkhaneh is of “an old Iranian institution where “ancient sports” are performed in an environment of ideal masculinity and ethical behavior in which normal social structures are transcended through processes of social leveling (p. 243).

This ethos of manliness and manners, I suggest, is a vestige of the zurkhaneh’s history, embedded in the structure and encoded in the logic of the institution. As such, it provides a window into the lives of its members through a physical culture of early modern Safavid Iran, making it possible to gain insights about the subjectivity of non-elite males as well as understand their position in the social economy of Safavid society.

This paper will offer a sketch of the zurkhaneh, paying special attention to the physicality and materiality of its culture and construction as well as to the significance of its embodied practices and the authority it derives from textual practices. Through this sketch, I hope to suggest that the athletic rituals of the zurkhaneh, together with the recitations of the Shahnameh, and the valorization of Rustam, Ali, and Purya-ye Vali constitute what might be called a cultural liturgy, a ritualized way of the formation of the whole self. As a cultural liturgy, the practices of the zurkhaneh operated as pedagogies for the formation of both the ethical self and the body of the zurkhaneh athlete, known as a pahlavan.

By showing how the zurkhaneh operated as a public site for the cultivation of the self this paper attempts to theorize the zurkhaneh as a site of the construction of a subaltern masculinity in Safavid Iran. To accomplish this, this paper will combine the themes of publicity, the social utility of the body, and the authority of textuality with an examination of the physical culture of the zurkhaneh to theorize the utility, representation, and experience of

There is a dearth of texts and images of the early modern zurkhaneh, when considering literature available in English. Because of this, the sketch of the zurkhaneh I am working with relies heavily on more recent descriptions offered by scholars. While these descriptions are of the more modern zurkhaneh, it does not seem unreasonable to assume some level of continuity with those of the early modern institution, especially an institution so invested in tradition. Further, Luijendijk (2011) notes the continuity between Francklin’s description from 1786 and his own modern experiences. So while this is a less than ideal way of pursuing history, I believe there is value in attempting to reconstruct some of this history, even if imperfectly, to try and tease out some of the implications of the zurkhaneh as a rich site of physical and material culture for non-elite males in the time of Safavid Iran.
non-elite male bodies in early modern Safavid Iran. Insights gleaned from this will be applied to theories about the subjectivity of male commoners in early modern Indo-Persianate society and juxtaposed against scholars like O’Hanlon (1999) who take masculine modes of comportment as a construction of the imperial court for managing the nobility.

I will argue that though situated on the fringes of society (Rochard, 2002), the pahlavans were able to participate in the social economy of javanmardi or “young manliness” and masculine comportment through the cultural liturgy of the zurkhaneh. Extending this analysis further, it will be suggested that the physical strength of the pahlavans publicly marked their masculinity in a way that connoted the strong man with the ideal of “young manliness,” and this combination inscribed and invested authority into and upon the bodies of the pahlavans. Observing the political utility of the pahlavans and the participation of certain nobles in the practice of the zurkhaneh it is possible to show at least one way that the construction of Persian masculinity occurred non-hierarchically.

Situating an Indo-Persianate Masculinity

In her article on Mughal masculinity, O’Hanlon (1999) notes that studies of Indian history—following trends in the humanities and social sciences more broadly—have realized the significance of gender as a field through which to analyze society (p. 47). However as is often the case, “gender” tends to refer to identities that are other than masculine (O’Hanlon, 1999, p. 47). This is significant, because as O’Hanlon indicates, it has lead researchers to ignore “men as gendered beings and gendered bodies” despite the fact that masculinity defined many of the social ideals of early modern society (1999, p. 48).

O’Hanlon’s suggestion is that there were specific “modes of comportment” for men in Mughal India. That is, there were specific ways of being masculine, ways that were embodied, lived, and engendered. Necessarily, masculinity is enacted against a social backdrop; it is a fundamentally gendered way of social being and relating, and thus of being and relating to others. O’Hanlon’s work is concerned with the Indo-Persian discourses on masculinity, and she adeptly shows how these discourses featured in the religious and political economy of Mughal India. Ideal manhood is constructed in terms of kingship, imperial service, and statecraft and O’Hanlon makes clear that the Mughal state played an active role in shaping masculinity after the “ideal imperial servant” (1999, pp. 84-85). “These codes,” O’Hanlon argues, “emerged in the context of a court culture which consumption and display were important indicators of authority” (1999, p. 84). Of course, masculine modes of comportment were composed of many complex factors, all clamoring to claim authority over the male body. These codes were not strict, and were negotiated individually according to personal tastes. Eventually, according to O’Hanlon, the result was that men from different classes and stations attempted to usurp the masculine social convention to try and act like individuals of high culture (1999, p. 84). This became problematic as these individuals misinterpreted the codes and behaved according to unorthodox convention. Such men were seen as imposters, and they were often accused of dressing like women. Clothes and accessories as a function of material culture marked these men as women, or non-men, much as physical barriers and materiality were used to mark of the harem as the property of the emperor. Matthee (1994; 2014) make similar observations, writing of the norms of Safavid male nobility in their navigation of taverns and coffee houses and theorizing the significance of the two establishments and their associated beverages in terms of their level of publicity and social status.

While analyses of these different social institutions and the modes of comportment expected of imperial servants offer a rich picture of male life in early modern Indo-Persia, it is a picture restricted to males that were explicitly associated with imperial courtly life. This paper is an attempt to critique this position by offering a subaltern construction of
masculinity, showing that non-elite male “negotiation” of masculinity was a complex process and one that was not exclusive to courtly constructions. Not only were subaltern males able to participate in the social economy of masculinity, they were able to contribute to it.

The Zurkhaneh

The history surrounding the Iranian zurkhaneh and the pahlavans who frequented it is fraught with ambiguity. Some scholars have advanced the notion that the zurkhaneh and its rituals originated out of Aryan Mithraic “religion” but this evidence seems circumstantial until the archeological record establishes otherwise. More recently this argument has suffered severe criticism, causing at least one prominent scholar to claim that the Mithraic thesis has been thoroughly debunked (Ilahi, 1994; Cited by Rochard, 2002). The nature of the pahlavans (also known occasionally as luitis) is similarly ambiguous as these members of the zurkhaneh are frequently associated with a range of character assumptions and activities from chivalry to thuggery, sometimes also taking on explicit sexual connotations of homo-erotic or pederastic activity (Floor, 1971).

Luijendijk (2011) suggests that the zurkhaneh is an Iranian institution, especially with the symbolic belt tying practices, which are reminiscent of Zoroastrian rituals (see also Zakeri, 2009). A number of scholars find the zurkhaneh originating out of the futuwwas, especially those that were active under the Abbasids (Hanaway, 1989; Zakeri, 2009; Luijendijk, 2011). Chehabi (2006) acknowledges the tradition of the futuwwa in the zurkhaneh, however, he finds the zurkhaneh to be a unique institutional development under the Safavids. Phillippe Rochard (2002) notes this controversy, and follows the history of wrestling as a “profession” in order to elucidate the origins of the zurkhaneh. Rochard (2002) indicates that wrestling obtained its “letters of nobility” sometime between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, and makes mention of several chapters on wrestling dating from the fourteenth century, including sections of the Badayi al-Waqayi (1349/1970) and the Futuwwat-namah Sultan (1350/1971). Rochard (2002) takes the existence of these two texts and the “professionalization” of wrestling at this time to infer that it seems likely that the zurkhaneh was formalized as an institution around this time—though this is somewhat speculative since the earliest known mention of the zurkhaneh in Persian texts does not occur until the late seventeenth century (p. 321).

What is uncontested is that the zurkhanehs were a place of physical training, and that this was a distinctly male public space frequented primarily (though not exclusively) by the lower classes (Chardin, 1686/1988; Francklin, 1811). Taking these three seemingly obvious aspects of the zurkhaneh and situating them within the unique milieu of early modern Safavid Iran, it is possible to offer a reading of the zurkhaneh as a unique public site of cultural pedagogy for early modern Persian masculinity.

The Zurkhaneh as a Public

John Hardin, in what is to date the earliest European account the zurkhaneh, writes during the Safavid period. Hardin writes that, “wrestling [is] the exercise of people in a lower condition; and generally speaking, only of people who are indigent” (Chardin, 1686/1988, pp. 200-201). From this, we gather that unlike the coffee houses, madrasas, and many of the other public institutions that are available thanks to European travelogues like Chardin’s, the zurkhaneh was a public space primarily frequented by the lower or non-elite classes. This is not to suggest that the nobles had nothing to do with the zurkhaneh. Chardin (1686/1988, pp. 200-201) notes that it was common for noblemen to patronize a zurkhaneh with the purpose of

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2 See Amirtash (2008) and Rochard (2002, p. 3) for a brief overview of these positions.
“training his people,” and nineteenth century traveler Gaspard Drouville suggests that nobles participated in the activities of the zurkhaneh (Cited by Chehabi, 2006).

This is an interesting phenomenon, because it would have violated the norms of noble or courtly sociability. Theorizing the zurkhaneh as an alternative public, similar to the kind that Hasan (2005) discusses in the context of Mughal India, the voluntary association of a noble with and in a specifically lower class institution stands out. Interestingly, as Ridgeon (2007) points out, it seems possible that some nobles associated themselves with the zurkhaneh as a matter of social or political utility, possibly trying to associate themselves with the ideals of javanmardi. In this way the zurkhaneh acted as a site of social leveling, and the rituals and construction of the zurkhaneh reinforced this. Ridgeon (2007) describes the logic of the rituals of the zurkhaneh as engendering a “loss of status, class, race…” (p. 245). As the athletes status is checked at the door (literally, as he strips, performs ritual ablutions, and dons the uniform apparel of the zurkhaneh) this creates the possibility of establishing a new social order inside of the zurkhaneh, where social status is achieved through the merits of physical ability and moral comportment (Ridgeon, 2007). As an alternative public, the zurkhaneh enabled its participants a means through which to exercise their own subjectivity, even in the presence of nobility while also allowing them to demarcate the boundaries of their discursive community.

The power of the zurkhaneh as an alternative public and social institution in its own right can be observed in its patronage. Local officials and even kings patronized the zurkhaneh, and used them as a means by which to maintain order in the neighborhoods of the city (Luijendijk, 2011). Local wrestling heroes could be viewed as Robin Hoods or local mobsters, depending on their affiliation and activity. Significantly, such affiliation was varied—Luijendijk (2011) notes that along with merchants and artisans, both Sufis and “ruffians” frequented the zurkhaneh.

Schools of Bodies, Schools of Virtues

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the zurkhaneh is its ideal of javanmardi, or ethos of young manliness, closely associated with what might be conceived as a kind of “chivalry.” As O’Hanlon (1999) notes, the notion of javanmardi would have been widely known and circulated during the Safavid empire, and implied a wide range of both physical, material, social, and spiritual affectations.

Daud Ali (2004) offers a similar analysis of courtly culture in early medieval India writing that, “moral action was not simply a matter of following rules and ethical norms, but also in developing an ethical sensibility” (p. 91). Ali borrows from Foucault to develop this ethical sensibility as it is expressed in early medieval Indian treatises, suggesting that these treatises operated in a “‘subjectivising’ manner… enjoining individuals to constitute themselves as ‘subjects’ of ethical conduct” (2004, p. 92). Significantly, much of the remainder of Ali’s book presents the ways in which physical and material cultures contributed to the formation of this ethical sensibility in the courtly life of early medieval India.

Though the Safavid Empire was several centuries and some geographical distance from the time in which Ali’s work is set, he introduces Foucault’s theoretical framework in a redolent way by coupling it with explorations of physical and material cultures. These tools can be put to further use when coupled with Foucault’s (1979) observations in Discipline and Punish as to how bodies become sites of knowledge and power through political “technologies of the body.” It is important to note that while Foucault focuses on the disciplining of the public through the spectacle of public punishment and the corporeal forms of capital punishment and torture, these technologies may also involve non-violent yet nonetheless strategic technologies of the body. In describing the “political technology of the body” as a strategy, Foucault’s work is not only relevant to studying the penal system but can

The Hilltop Review, Spring 2016
also be applied to other institutional deployments of these technologies. This is possible because these “technologies” or “strategies” are not specific to any institution or state; instead, each institution “select or impose certain of its methods” (Foucault, 1979, p. 26).

Hasan has written that, “We are… ignorant about the complex mechanisms through which discursive sites, communities and identities were established and destroyed, and their significance in the overall organization of socioeconomic life” (2005, p. 84). But by adopting Foucault’s conceptual toolset, it is possible to theorize the zurkhaneh in terms of a technology of ethical selfhood, which sought not only to form ideal bodies but also to impart virtuous character and even a more general ethical sensibility. In doing so, it is possible to contribute to the picture of discursive and communal identity formation that Hasan refers to, even if only in one small way. As an alternative public, it is possible to view the zurkhaneh as a place of place of non-elite male subjectivity through which the ideal of young manliness operated as a social leveler, enabling nobles and peasant men alike the opportunity to seek the ideal of javanmardi and participate in the social economy. To support this idea, this paper will only briefly consider the architecture, geographical location, and interior design of the physical structure of the zurkhaneh as well as the textuality and musicality lead by the morshed, and how these interact with the physical and embodied practices of the athletes.

The Construction of Space

The zurkhaneh seems to have been a common feature of the bazaar, located alongside of coffee houses, taverns, and madrasas in the center of the city (Rochard, 2002). Such a location reflects that the zurkhaneh was both a popular and central structure to urban life in early modern Safavid Iran, and bolsters the notion that it operated within the mainstream of the public sphere. Babi Rahimi’s work on early modern/publics supports this idea, and he specifically mentions the zurkhaneh along with public baths, the bazaar, and coffee houses when he writes that “this ritual spatialization identified a type of public characterized as an informal sphere of civic cultures and cognitive networks of relations” (2012, p. 13).

The actual structure of the zurkhaneh possesses a number of features reminiscent of a sacred space, and the features work together to act upon and physically orient the body of the pahlavan. The first feature evident is that there is one single entrance to the zurkhaneh, purposefully built so that anyone entering is obliged to duck down, and with a set of racks for shoes (Luijendijk, 2011). No one is allowed to enter with shoes on, reinforcing an aura of awe in the zurkhaneh. By forcing a prostrated position upon entrance the subject is compelled into a posture of humility, and thus forced to embody—or at least enact—the virtues of humility and respect (Chehabi, 2006; Luijendijk, 2011).

Another feature is the interior organization and decoration of the space. Situated near the entrance is the sardam, which an elevated platform where an individual known as the morshed leads the exercises from (Luijendijk, 2011). The sardam carries the same symbolic meaning as a lectern or pulpit in a modern church, a space that serves to set apart the morshed from the participants as well as to focus their attention both on him and on the texts which he is reading. Subtly, the sardam reinforces the centrality and authority of these texts by elevating the platform from which they emanate.

At the center of the space is the gowd, which is octagonal and is recessed into the floor (Luijendijk, 2011). This is the area where the exercises take place, the central stage of the zurkhaneh. Significantly, the athletes arrange themselves around a senior practitioner called the miandar who stands in the center of the gowd and leads the exercises in conjunction with the morshed (Luijendijk, 2011). This arrangement reinforces hierarchical notions of authority and invests the miandar with a sort of power as the rest of the athletes revolve around his center.
Significantly, the zurkhaneh are covered with pictures and photos of past athletes and saints, taken to be exemplars both in terms of physical and moral prowess (Partow Bayżā’i, pp. 35-3; Luijendijk, 2011). Portraits of Rustam, Ali, and Purya-ye Vali are quite common, and these photos function as icons of ideal young manliness, fit of body and capable of superhuman feats of strength while also possessing superior moral virtue. Rustam is considered a hero, the equivalent of the Greek Odysseus of Homer’s Iliad, and functions as a mythical hero of Persian culture. Purya-ye Vali is also often recognized as a hero tied to the founding of the zurkhaneh, and poetry attributed to him essentially problematizes hierarchical understandings of masculinity—the lines of one quatrain attributed to him read, “… Study baseness when in search of grace. Since the water you drink from the ground is never high up” (N. Tabor, personal communication, December 22, 2016). The figures represent the ideal that all the members of the zurkhaneh aspire to, and give faces to the heroes in the epic poetry that the morshed recites during the exercises. These portraits and pictures help to anchor the members of the zurkhaneh in the history and tradition of young manliness, providing them with role models as well as offering something to attain and aspire to in their own practice.

Authority, Textuality, and Embodiment in Practice

Bashir writes that “the body as an artifact [is] constructed at the conjunction of ideological and material factors… in various socio-historical contexts” (2010, p. 73). Fusing together the idea of textuality and body, we can thus look at the body as a text, or as Bashir offers, as a kind of tool that is “implicated in… human attempts to construct knowledge” (2010, p. 73). Through the reading of bodies we can come to understand better the ways that these texts interact with bodies. We can observe what types of “tools” bodies are posed as and can in turn interpret the ways that they are used. Thus it is possible to “read” how texts enact themselves on bodies, or even, as Bashir suggests, the way that certain doctrinal elements of texts “encode” the body of the subject (2010, p. 72).

Within the zurkhaneh, the morshed is the individual who guides the overall ethos and direction of the practice. The morshed does this by reading or reciting texts from the shanameh as well as other hero and epic poems, some steeped in tradition like the shanameh and others of more modern origin. Chehabi (2006) cites poems by Sa’adi, Hafez, Rumi, and Ferdowsi and also notes that there was “a type of mathnawi specific to the zurkhaneh, the gol-e koshhtī (‘flower of wrestling’), of which the most famous is that of Mir Najat Esfahani.” According to Luijindjek (2011), the lyrics serve an “educational purpose… as a guide and motivation to accomplish the path of the javanmardi” (p. 105). Others have noted that the one of the most common recitations is of the section of the Shahnameh, which features Rustam’s heroic exploits (Bahmanesh, 1993).

Rustam is often viewed as the father of the zurkhaneh, just as he is one of the fathers of Iran. The story of Rustam grounds the practice of the zurkhaneh in Iranian history and roots its practices in a kind of “hero practice.” The content of the lyrics serve to provide the zurkhaneh with a history and a culture as well as operates as an “authority,” as texts often do, for the practice of the zurkhaneh.3

Musicality: Bridging body and text

Significantly, these lyrics are accompanied with music. Musically, the morshed plays a drum and bells accompanying the poetry (Kiani & Faraji, 2011). The drumming serves to set the

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3 Lloyd Ridgeon looks at the Shia, Sufi, and Iranian symbolism in detail and notes how stories about these heroes reinforce different ideologies. For example, he suggests that references and veneration of Ali take on a strong nationalistic Shia flavor.
tempo of the exercises, thus creating a motivational frame for the exercises as well as helping to push the athletes harder than they would train on their own (Luijendijk, 2011). As the athletes reach a state of what Csikszentmihalyi (1996; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and modern sports psychologists refer to as “flow”—a liminal state sometimes referred to as “being in the zone”—practitioners were supposed to achieve a temporary state of mental and emotional purity. And while it is the morshed actually performing this music, the tempo is actually dictated by the miandar, standing in the center of the gowd and the other athletes.

The connection here between body, text, and music is striking and multi-directional, working together to create what Henning Eichburg (2014) calls a palpable “energy.” This energy is physical and physiological as well as social and psychological. Eichburg (2014) notes that studies of body cultures tend to focus on bodies constituted in space and time; but he suggests that this is too limiting and posits that attending to the “energy” of bodies and between bodies can help to illuminate important features in the theory of movement science and bodily cultures by looking at “a field outside narrow space-time rationality” (p. 244). In this way body, music, and text work in concert to create the ethos and energy of the zurkhaneh. The morshed performs the music and poetry, but relies on the miandar, an athlete and the trainer of athlete bodies to dictate the pace of play. Working in the other direction, the text and music work together not only to frame the “ethos” of the zurkhaneh, but also to frame the bodies of the athletes.4

The zurkhaneh provided a way for men, both nobles and peasants alike, to pursue the goal of javanmardi, which was an ideal that transcended class or status categories. Such an egalitarian ideal pervaded the entire ethos of the zurkhaneh creating the possibility for a subjectivity of non-elite male practitioners and establishing the zurkhaneh as a place of social leveling. Islamic understandings of the virtues and the body contributed to this possibility as the ideal of javanmardi was something that was cultivated through practice and the discipline of the body and soul, marking the zurkhaneh as a technology of the body and of the self. Taken together the physical and textual practices of the zurkhaneh aimed as they are at the formation of the complete ethical and even spiritual self constitute a collection of ritual activities that can be referred to as what James Smith (2012) has termed a cultural liturgy.

The liturgy of the zurkhaneh reflected early modern Islamic understandings of the body as a microcosm, and these musical and textual practices combined with the physical exercises of the athletes to shape and form the fullness of their physical, moral, and ethical selves in the fashion of young manliness. The progress of the athletes towards this ideal was marked and recognizable through the development of the bodily physique, and physical strength became a marker of the masculinity of the men who participated in the exercises of the zurkhaneh—in a similar way as O’Hanlon suggests clothes and other physical and material markers did for the men of the Indo-Persian courts. These ideal bodies of the athletes then became invested with power as they were assumed to also possess the moral and ethical aspects attributed to the javanmardi. This may partially explain the conscription of zurkhaneh athletes by political leaders as well as the role of pahlavans as leaders in local neighborhoods. The authority gained through physical prowess would have caused respect and the assumptions about the virtues of javanmardi would have inspired trust in the pahlavans as moral and virtuous individuals.

Significance and Conclusion

This argument acknowledges that the origins of the zurkhaneh are unknown and ambiguous. Far from advancing the raison d’etre of the zurkhaneh, this essay seeks to

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4 See Eichburg (2014, p. 246) for an overview of recent research which shows tangible ways that drumming not only affects, but constitutes the body.
understand the bodily practices of the zurkhaneh athletes and the ways in which they operated as pedagogies of the self, forming the physical attributes of the pahlavan’s body as well as shaping the moral and ethical self, in turn contributing to the formation of the social self and subject. This thesis expands on both the work done on early modern conceptions of masculinity and embodiment and offers a critique of O’Hanlon’s hierarchal notion of a courtly Indo-Persian masculinity by suggesting the zurkhaneh as a site for the construction of a subaltern masculinity. Acknowledging the sociopolitical import of the zurkhaneh inscribed into the bodies of the pahlavans counters the idea of a strictly top-down flow of “true” masculinity by showing one case where masculinity was constructed from the bottom up.

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Facing Our Demons: Psychiatric Perspectives on Exorcism Rituals

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The belief that humans are capable of being possessed or inhabited by spirits appears in many religions and cultures throughout the world. The particulars of such belief vary from context to context within and across traditions and cultures. Depending on the particular context, possession may be voluntary or involuntary; considered beneficial, benign, or detrimental; and the possessing spirit may be identified variously as some sort of ghost, deity, alien, angel, or demon. The belief that one has been involuntarily possessed by a malevolent spirit can serve as an explanation for a variety of psychological, emotional, and even physical afflictions. Traditional remedies in such cases often involve exorcism rituals, which are believed to expel spirits from a person’s mind and/or body. In the psychiatric community, the same afflictions may be attributed to one or more mental disorders and treated with psychotherapy and/or medicine. For some in the psychiatric community, then, exorcisms and their use by patients are viewed as problematic due to their potential for interference with conventional treatments. Others point out their effectiveness, in some cases, at improving symptoms, or advocate increasing cooperation between faith healers or religious leaders and clinicians. This paper takes a critical look at the diversity of opinions within this debate and illuminates the points of contention and overlap among the various perspectives. Some suggestions for future directions in research are suggested by way of conclusion.

A major difficulty in subjecting spirit possession and exorcism to scientific study is the large and diverse set of beliefs concerning the nature and symptoms of spirit possession throughout the world. While there are many cases of belief in benign and beneficial forms of spirit possession, often pursued voluntarily, this study is concerned with those forms that are involuntary and considered detrimental by the possessed subject. A wide range of symptoms – some quite mild, others severe – may be attributed to involuntary spirit possession, and there is no one psychiatric disorder under which these fit (Cardena, Duijil, Weiner & Terhune, 2009, p. 172-3). Some of the more severe cases that have been diagnosed in contemporary psychiatric terms fall either under schizophrenia or some form of dissociative disorder (Pfeifer, 1994; During, Elahi, Taib, Moro & Baubet, 2011). Some who view possession as a distinct phenomenon employ the term “possession syndrome” to refer to cases where symptoms are attributed to some form of possession (Diamond, 2010; Khan & Sahni, 2013). Khan & Sahni (2013) define possession syndrome as “a paranormal diseased state in which a person is said to be possessed by a spirit, demon, animal, extraterrestrial being or disincarnate objects including God, resulting in noticeable changes in health, behavior and appearance” (p. 253). Cardena et al. (2009) suggest viewing possession as a particular form of trance:

Possession trance is a temporary alteration of consciousness, identity, and/or behavior, attributed to possession by a spiritual force or another person, and evidenced by at least two of the following:
(1) Single or episodic replacement of the usual sense of identity by that attributed to the possessing force
(2) Stereotyped and culturally determined behaviors or movements attributed to the possessing identity
(3) Full or partial amnesia for the event. (p. 173)

Under this definition, the authors acknowledge a need to distinguish “nonpathological possession trance phenomena” (PTP) from pathological PTP, the latter including any case which “causes dysfunction and/or distress, and is not part of a culturally accepted practice” (p. 174). The most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013) includes apparent possession under the diagnostic criteria of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), and describes typical “possession-form” presentations of DID as those in which it appears “as if a ‘spirit,’ supernatural being, or outside person has taken control” (“Dissociative Identity Disorder”). The manual further specifies that in order to fall under the diagnostic criteria of DID, the apparent possessing identities “present recurrently, are unwanted and involuntary, cause clinically significant distress or impairment, and are not a normal part of a broadly accepted cultural or religious practice” (APA, 2013, “Dissociative Identity Disorder”). What is common among all the above descriptions/definitions is the theory, belief, or assumption (held by the subject or a third party) that certain symptoms are attributable to spirit possession. In psychiatric terms, then, possession is an etiology rather than a diagnosis, which perhaps explains why it does not fit easily into any one set of diagnostic criteria. Nevertheless, the above descriptions serve as a framework for understanding some of the more marked and severe sets of symptoms attributed to spirit possession, and therefore, those most likely to be treated by exorcism.

Just as the beliefs concerning the nature of spirit possession range widely throughout the world, so too do the traditional methods employed in treating it. Exorcism often refers to forms of faith healing in which spirits are expelled from a subject’s mind and/or body or in which a subject is otherwise liberated from the detrimental influence of spirits (Trethowan, 1976, p. 128). While there are a number of studies which address the effects of exorcism on psychiatric patients (Schendell & Kourany, 1980; Tajima-Pozo et al., 2011; Khan & Sahni, 2013), there is a lack of attention paid in these studies to the specific methods employed by exorcists in their treatments. There do, however, seem to be some common exorcism methods that cross cultural and religious boundaries. Trethowan (1976) and Khan and Sahni (2013) both note the similarities between many exorcism techniques and the “psychotherapeutic principle of abreaction wherein undischarged and constrained emotion expressed covertly in the form of possession symptoms is released” (Khan & Sahni, p. 254). In clinical practice, abreaction is achieved through drug therapy and/or techniques such as hypnosis, which help to bring the patient into a state of heightened suggestibility (Trethowan, p. 133; Khan & Sahni, p. 254). Trethowan points out the dangers inherent in this procedure, such as the potential for behavioral manipulation, and indicates that clinically, it has limited applicability aside from the treatment of battle neurosis (p. 133). Writing almost 40 years later, Khan and Sahni acknowledge the dangers and complications of hypnotic suggestion but maintain that exorcisms involving abreaction have been successful in significantly improving symptoms (p.254). They further argue that in cases of “true Possession syndrome, exorcism appears to be the only help possible” (p. 254).

Other studies assessing the benefits and risks of exorcism have yielded mixed results. In a critical review of literature involving trance and possession disorders between 1988 and 2009, During et al. (2011) analyzed the data of 402 patients diagnosed with Dissociative Possession or Trance Disorder (DTD), a disorder in the DSM-IV-TR containing criteria involving attributions of symptoms to spirit possession. Of these, 7% underwent exorcism for treatment.
which resulted in mixed reports of efficacy (pp. 239). By contrast, 59% underwent some form of psychotherapy, which resulted in reports of symptom relief in all patients who completed treatment (238-39). The authors state that their conclusions are tentative and caution against giving too much weight to the differences based on treatments due to the limitations in sample size, scope, and control groups (pp. 239-40). They advocate the need for future treatments of dissociative trance and possession disorders to consider both psychiatric and sociocultural factors affecting patients and, if necessary, to combine psychotherapy, traditional healing methods, and medication (p. 240).

There are several studies illuminating the potential problems with exorcism as a form of treatment due to its lack consistent efficacy and/or its interference with conventional psychiatric treatment. Schendell and Kourany (1980) describe 5 case studies of children presenting with cacodemonomania, “the delusion of being possessed by a demon” (p. 119). The clinical diagnoses of these cases are variable, and the authors suggest that the cacodemonomania in the children may have been the result of displaced hostility over childhood trauma. As all 5 families ended psychiatric treatments prematurely, possibly due to a distrust in conventional psychiatry, the authors indicate the importance of working within cultural/religious belief systems, and specifically advocate working with a “religious consultant” (p. 122). Hale and Pinninti (1994) describe a case of a man who attributed his criminal behaviors to the control of a possessing spirit. The man underwent exorcisms by both a Hindu priest and a Muslim peer and later consulted Christian priests. None of these measures succeeded in relieving symptoms, and in fact seemed to worsen them. The authors made “a differential diagnosis of dissociative state or paranoid schizophrenia,” and treated the man with medication, which resulted in an apparent remission of the condition (p. 387). Tajima-Pozo et al. (2011) describe a case in which a patient's psychiatric treatment seemed to be interrupted by her participation in exorcisms. The patient, originally diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, was admitted to a hospital several times and prescribed medications (p. 1-2). The patient consulted a Catholic priest, who performed several exorcisms on her, which seemed to provide limited relief of symptoms. During this time, however, the patient ceased taking her medication and was later admitted after the appearance of additional symptoms. The authors had unsuccessfully attempted to enlist the help of the priest in encouraging the patient's continuation of medication. For this reason, they stress the importance of educating religious professionals on mental illness and psychiatric treatments. They also note the patient's high scores for histrionic and narcissistic personality disorders, suggesting that these personality traits may impact the effectiveness of exorcism for treating some symptoms (p. 2).

In spite of some of the difficulties listed above, a few members of the medical community view exorcism in a more positive light, suggesting it may be an effective treatment of some possession-like symptoms and disorders. Khan and Sahni (2013) describe a case of a mountaineering trainee who, while on a climb, experienced symptoms consistent with a possession trance as described by Cardena et al. (2009). The subject underwent an exorcism performed by a fellow climber, which resulted in total remission (Khan & Sahni, 2013, p. 254). Citing the success of exorcism in this case and others, the authors emphasize the need for greater awareness on the part of both medical and religious professionals of each group's explanations of possession-like symptoms. They also advocate viewing possession syndrome as a distinct disease and harmonizing the two perspectives in order to develop a holistic approach to the problem of possession (p. 255). Such a harmonized approach is also advocated by M.K. Irmak in an article published in the Journal of Religion and Health (2014). Irmak discusses beliefs about spirit possession as they relate to schizophrenia, pointing out that possession serves as a reasonable etiological explanation for many symptoms associated with schizophrenia, in particular hallucinations and delusions (p. 773-76). He describes the work of a faith healer who treats psychiatric patients by expelling
demons, whose “patients become symptom free after 3 months” (p. 776). Based on this observation, Irmak argues that “it would be useful for medical professionals to work together with faith healers to define better treatment pathways for schizophrenia” (p. 776).

The proposition that psychiatric and religious approaches should be integrated in treating possession-like afflictions is criticized heavily in a response article by A.N. Karanci (2014). Karanci points out that Irmak’s position seems to be based on thin evidence -- mostly the testimony of a single faith healer -- and argues that to provide treatment without scientifically verified evidence is fraught with ethical problems (p. 1691-92). A response article in the next issue illuminates some of the factors complicating the argument over integration (Scrutton, 2015). Scrutton acknowledges that the best treatments ought to be pursued scientifically, but points out that the existence of demons is something currently beyond the realm of normal scientific testing (p. 1964). More important to Scrutton are the practical and ethical considerations. She maintains that both conventional medical explanations and religious explanations for mental afflictions can be either emotionally disheartening or empowering depending on the beliefs and outlook of the subject. Furthermore, she argues, schizophrenia is a socially constructed category that includes many different symptoms, and as such, may follow different courses of development depending on its cultural or religious context (p. 964-66). In light of these considerations, she advocates differentiating types of possession from one another (e.g. malevolent vs. benign) and discerning the therapeutic utility of any healing approaches “on a case-by-case basis and by the role they play in the lives of believers” (p. 1966-67).

In summary of the information just outlined, I would draw attention to a few observations. Studies measuring the effects of exorcism on psychological health have yielded inconsistent results. The usefulness of existing results is diminished due to a lack of attention given to understanding and differentiating the actual methods employed in exorcism procedures. There are significant practical and ethical issues concerning the use of exorcism to treat psychological afflictions, including interference with conventional psychiatric treatments and the possible exacerbation of symptoms. In spite of these concerns, there is evidence suggesting exorcisms may improve symptoms in some circumstances, and some advocate integrating faith healing approaches such as exorcism in the treatment of psychiatric disorders. Even many of those expressing caution of such an integrative approach nevertheless acknowledge the benefit considering the religious and cultural beliefs of subjects and with communicating and cooperating with religious leaders (Karanci, 2014, p. 1691; Schendel & Kourany, 1980, p. 122; Tajima-Pozo et al., 2011, p. 3). What is clear is that the beliefs of an individual can have a profound impact on the effectiveness of any treatment. The question under debate seems to be to what extent and under what circumstances religious and cultural beliefs should be integrated with treatments.

If the psychiatric community is to take the above question seriously, I suggest the following points be taken into consideration. First, more attention needs to be paid to the nature of exorcism rituals themselves. It should be recognized that there are many different procedures that fall under the category of exorcism. These differ from one another not just in method, but in theory, being grounded in different metaphysical frameworks. To ask when and how religious beliefs should be integrated with psychiatric treatments begs the more primary question: “which religious beliefs?” This requires that the practice of exorcism be considered in all its diversity and that different exorcism procedures be identified and differentiated. Additionally, this goes against the tendency of secularized disciplines to treat all religious traditions on some sort of equal standing. However, if maintaining such an egalitarian position out of sensitivity to religious traditions means abandoning lines of inquiry that are likely to result in increased patient well-being, then perhaps a change of priorities is in order.

A second point to consider is that paying more attention to the nature of exorcism rituals also means considering in more precise detail the actual procedures involved, the methods
tied to the theories. In many cases this may prove to be no simple task as religious and cultural traditions don’t necessarily hold to clearly delineated sets of procedures. However, there are some traditions with more standardization in place than others, and completing the first step of recognizing the differences between various exorcism traditions can help identify those that might best lend themselves to systematic study. Isolating one particular exorcism ritual on which to perform research, while controlling for as many variables and confounders as possible, could plausibly yield results that are generalizable and repeatable. This is not to say that such results wouldn’t be limited in their applicability, and many factors would have to be carefully considered in the analysis.

One example of an exorcism ritual that might lend itself to systematic study is that performed by priests of the Catholic Church. The leadership of the Catholic Church has established regulations and specific procedures sanctioned for use within the institution. The most recent version of these procedures, adopted in 1999, is codified in a document titled *Exorcisms and Related Supplications*, available in its entirety only to bishops and exorcists (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 2014, p. 41). There are two types of exorcisms recognized by the Church. Minor exorcisms, which involve prayers to protect from or remove the influence of evil or sin, may be used by someone preparing for baptism or “one of the baptized faithful” (p. 44). Major exorcisms, are those “directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession” and may be “performed only by a priest with the permission of the bishop” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p. 416-17). This second type of exorcism is that which would most likely be under consideration. The codified procedures for major exorcisms include readings from scriptures, prayers to God, commands aimed at the possessing spirit, sprinkling with blessed water, breathing on the afflicted person’s face, and making the sign of the cross (USCCB, December 2014, p. 47-48). While there is some flexibility within these procedures, these are set within limits, and the procedures amount to a set of conventional practices that are followed by Catholic exorcists throughout the world (p. 47). For the purposes of the present study, the benefits of such internal regulation are that the particular methods can be more readily examined and results could more likely be generalized.

An additional benefit of focusing on Catholic exorcism rituals is that the Catholic Church currently encourages cooperation between exorcists and conventional medical establishments. Exorcists are cautioned against mistaking psychological or physical illnesses for demonic influence (CCC, 1994, p. 427) and are encouraged to utilize “whatever resources are available to [them] when investigating a claim of demonic possession along with input from medical and mental health professionals” (USCCB, December 2014, p. 46). The protocols for determining whether symptoms are due to demon possession are determined by each diocese, but the USCCB recommends that all individuals first undergo “a thorough examination including medical, psychological, and psychiatric testing” before being declared possessed (November 2014, p. 44). The fact that this level of cooperation is already in place would help to reduce the likelihood of conflicting diagnoses between psychiatric and religious professionals and could serve as a means for collecting patient information, especially prior to the performance of exorcisms.

In the event that such a study yields useful results, the important question remains as to how these results might be applied in psychiatric treatment. As mentioned above, several authors have called for greater communication and cooperation between religious leaders and psychiatrists (During et al., 2011; Irmak, 2014; Khan & Sahni, 2013; Schendel & Kourany, 1980; Scrutton, 2015; Tajima-Pozo et al., 2011). However, the specific nature of such cooperation is not clearly defined and continues to be a subject of debate. Ultimately, this will depend on the results of any studies. Several different relationships are possible. If, for example, exorcism is found to benefit subjects with cases of schizophrenia resistant to conventional treatments, this may suggest that psychiatrists recommend patients to a religious
consultant in such cases. Alternately, if the benefit seems to be more closely tied to patients with certain beliefs or personality traits, this may suggest that psychiatrists recommend patients based on those factors. It may also be the case that exorcism in combination with conventional treatment is found to be beneficial in a certain population, in which case religious consultants could be available to administer treatment concurrently with psychiatrists. Beyond these and other such cooperative relationships, additional applications are possible that depend more heavily on understanding the actual methods employed in the practice of exorcisms. If particular methods are identified which seem to succeed in the relief of symptoms, these might inform or be partially integrated into future psychotherapeutic practices. There are in fact some therapists who employ exorcism-like procedures based on beliefs in spirit possession in treating patients (Baldwin, 2002; Modi, 1997). Of course, if future studies demonstrate a significant risk associated with patients undergoing exorcisms, this would suggest psychiatrists should be aware of the potential for patients to pursue exorcism and they should advise against it on these grounds.

Any possible clinical applications of exorcism bring up legitimate concerns over the integration of religious beliefs and conventional medicine, and there is certainly a need to approach them with cautious consideration. To clarify on this point, the suggestion that certain types of exorcism may be effective in relieving mental afflictions and that they should be integrated in some way with clinical psychiatry does not amount to an endorsement of the metaphysical beliefs informing them (even if, for some, it implicitly lends credibility to those beliefs). Rather, it is possible to view the issue from a pragmatic perspective as simply adopting those procedures which most effectively benefit the patient. One can remain agnostic as to the mechanisms ultimately behind exorcism-like treatment while recognizing its practical utility, its usefulness in making people healthy. However, here too there is a need for caution. For, it must be recognized that evaluations of health and illness are not absolute or self-evident, and there is certainly not one conception of health shared universally among all people. Suffice it to say that in many cases, clinical psychiatrists and religious healers do seem to share a sufficient number of beliefs about psychological health to make cooperation possible and potentially beneficial. For both psychiatrists and exorcists, our demons, whether metaphorical or metaphysical, are very real. The question is how best to face them.

References


