GLOBAL METAMORPHOSIS

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Cover Art and Design
by Easha Fatima

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Introduction: Looking for Hope in Our Metamorphoses

Mosammat Sultana

> "...they had so much to worry about at present that they had lost sight of any thought for the future."
> **— Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis***

In this issue of the *Humanities Review,* we center academic, creative, and art works that reflect the theme of "Global Metamorphosis," in an attempt to tackle the metamorphosis we see in the world around us. We live in a time when we are surrounded by positive and negative changes and in hoping to normalize these changes, we grapple with the consequences these transformations cause for our present and future. The *OED* defines metamorphosis as "the action or process of changing" in appearance, circumstances, or condition. To understand these changes, we question what transformations are and how they transform our academic work. The texts selected for this issue present ways for us to understand change while also looking at the future with hope.

This issue begins with the artwork on the cover by **Easha Fatima,** which explores how animal and human bodies live interconnected on a planet they both call home. This is followed by a poem by **Amal Ahmad** which forces us to recognize the female human body's ability to transform from adversary and trauma. Next is a scholarly piece by **Abbie Davis** where she investigates how nature has evolved by analyzing nature writing. Following the theme of nature, we have an essay by **Dr. Vera Alexander**, who unpacks the contradictory entanglements of humans and the metamorphosis experienced in garden narratives.

Anjeanette Ang's "New Molt" follows the theme of transforming nature and leads us to **Chantal Eyong**'s autoethnographic essay following Cameroon's political crisis and shifting landscapes. **Victoria Santamorena** imagines the ocean as an archive, a site of memory and transformation. The themes of land and ocean lead to **Dana Livingston**'s poem which culminates in our poor environmental choices and questions whether we have any hope for the future. Her poem blends into **Kelly Liu**'s book review of *The New Naturals*, where the characters are searching for utopia, place, and time that is a promise of sanctuary and protection. Anjeanette Ang's next art piece, "GRWM" forces us to look ourselves in the mirror and at one another.

Dr. Stephanie Montalti analyzes the metamorphoses students can embrace in their First-Year writing courses through her anecdotes, pedological theory, and sample lessons. Her pedagogical essay is a stepping stone to **Tina Gurcharan**'s poem "CORRUPTFILE" in which she tackles the growing disconnect between artificial intelligence and literature. Anjeanette's last art piece, which is left untitled, is her rendition of Billie Eilish. **Daman Khalid**'s essay analyzes the

introduction of Pakistani literature into the realm of World Literature. We conclude with **Andrew Schlosser**'s essay on using video games to foster critical literacy in students.

I am grateful to the authors and the artists who contributed their work to this issue. From poetry to academic journals, personal essays, to art pieces, this Issue is a blend of fantastic hope for a better future. I would like to give a big thanks to Seán Griffin and Khalid Islam for their hard work and diligence during this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Amy King, Dr. Jennifer Travis, and Dr. Granville Ganter for their guidance, advice, and support.

Easha Fatima (*The Dalton School*) is a student at the Dalton School in New York City. Easha is interested creating surreal art using different mediums including graphite, colored pencil, and watercolors. Her surrealist approach has allowed her to explore various textures and develop her own style when exaggerating textures. Easha also enjoys exploring architecture as well as the humanities.

Lady Hemiptera

Amal Ahmad (*St. John's University*) is a graduating senior at St. John's University majoring in legal studies, with minors in creative writing and critical race & ethnic studies. She's currently a consultant at the University's Writing Center and an intern at the non-profit Teachers & Writers Collaborative. She's also currently debating between (and hoping to pursue) either law school or higher education in the realm of English or Cultural Studies. She's hoping to finally spend some time after graduation looking into Muslim & South Asian literature, which motivates her work, and begin her own personal education in decolonial studies as she gets more involved with her home community in Queens. While she figures that out, you can find her playing with her cats, Luna and Keke!

al-Qiyamah

The pulse in my
stomach beat down
hard, the insertion of a soul & womb
awakening me to the world around
once blurry

thump
thump-thump
and again
she tugs at my
insides drawing from the breath
in my throat the energy
in my veins the blood
in my soul,
i heave.
the sickly trees
shake in the wind around us
their stems
uprooted from the ground, I grip her
tight to hold her
stable amidst the chaos

Qari Sahb used to

grunt the threats
of Qiyamah of resurrection and of the wounded soils of the day
of judgement, but we
never
did speak about abortions,
because it was too evil and it was too
despicable to even imagine, not even in our most
sinful realities, could he envision those
wounded souls. but he knew the
words of Al-Qiyamah,
he knew them well,
sword-like lullabies of Quranic verses
blowing fire into my baby ears, a
warning of the
next phase
the earth's transformation into flames,
spreading from border to border until all is
ash and all is swallowed and brought back
down to the
dirt.

The bleak yellow of the center's walls
conjured flames,
dangerous whispers from the
soul in my
morphed tummy,
sparks of
ruin
flying from my very
own fingertips,
as I dig inside deep
to snatch her
out and release her, I
bleed. I
weep at her escape as she
enters the ground again,
a land of ghosts,
she's out of my
grip again, vanished.

Now, your
eyes are open but you

inhale a foggy smoke any chance you get to
fog your brain and clog your thoughts and throat and stop your heart because
I
never got to feel her kick and
I
guess
I
stripped her and the
world of that chance.

You were young when you learned
haram from good, but
you never really believed did you? and
now you'll never forget.
it dawns on you late, as you
yearn the feeling of her sucking and
taking every last breath of
air
left in you
grip your womb
tight, not wanting to let her
go, until you realize there is
nothing left, and
she took something more with her.

The flames all around are
engulfing, ashes fog your
vision, but you still
see clearly now. Smoke in your
veins, your throat's done for,
your tongue once swift & slick,
you can never find the right words
anymore.

the warm burnt flames, have now
travelled across the skies, travelled from
your fingertips into a cloud, close and
blanketing you. You almost welcome it.
I rub my finger over her spot of life in
the picture they let me keep before I
toss it into the
fire and start to
bleed tears

You walk barefoot, womb
empty,
body and soul,
so heavy you may
collapse, you
bend,
trace your fingers along the
tiny cracks in the dirt until they
deepen,
slowly ripping
        ripping
tearing the ground
underneath you

finally, it swallows
you
feel warm,
your heart
slow,
grounded, as you fall
down
she's
resurrected and you're
reunited among the
withered ashes of the earth.

Abbie Davis (*St. John's University*) is a Ph.D. student in the English Program at St. John's University. She is interested in environmental humanities, specifically early American travel narratives and ecocritical theory. Abbie is currently an adjunct professor and the Director of Academic Success & Advising at Centenary University.

NATURE'S EVOLVING PURPOSE: LANDSCAPE AS THERAPY IN MODERN NATURE WRITING

Multicolored sunsets, echoing canyons, and undisturbed landscapes are conventional terms of nature appreciation. But their significance has shifted greatly over the course of American history. Does landscape exist to provide people with resources to live productive lives, or is it there as a refuge to be protected? Since the first explorations of America, nature has been understood in many ways. As explorers navigated their way to America's shores, their detailed travel narratives presented an abundance of land and resources. What once seemed unexplored quickly became a place to conquer and own. As writers then developed a deeper sense of connection with the land, it was viewed as a place of refuge and reflection. The wilderness was now a space to be valued. In recent travel narratives, the role of landscape has changed yet again. Instead of it being a product to be used and consumed (although that certainly still takes place), a new strain of nature writers seeks to immerse themselves in nature as a form of personal transformation. Land is seen as something to protect and preserve, so it can be enjoyed by those who seek to use its beauty for internal and physical change. Cheryl Strayed and Ken Ilgunas set off on two separate journeys across the country in order to find deeper meaning in their lives. Although they begin their hikes for different reasons, they both ultimately find nature to be therapeutic because it facilitates reflection, emotional healing, connection to the earth, and self-transformation. This paper sketches the development of American writers' use of landscape, from early explorers such as Arthur Barlowe and John Smith to modern writers like Cheryl Strayed and Ken Ilgunas.

EARLY AMERICAN WRITING AND LANDSCAPE

This study begins with the writers who first set the tone of American nature writing. Possibly the first English-speaking explorer in America was Arthur Barlowe, part of a 1584 expedition to what is now Outer Banks, North Carolina. Barlowe's narrative of this expedition is

found in *The First Voyage Made to the Coasts of America* where he describes the land as something to be used for convenience and profit. Barlowe is quick to note the numerous resources available for consumption. He describes grapes growing in "such plentie" on the sand, soil, grass, and shrubs (228), as well as the forests with an "incredible abundance" of flora and fauna (229). The descriptions of what seems like a vast, never-ending landscape are used to convince future colonists that what he describes is theirs for the taking, without any thought of resource depletion. His goal is to make the land appealing and desirable to show others where they can live fruitfully.

Like Barlowe, John Smith also documented his travels through descriptive narratives. In *A Description of New England*, an account of Smith's 1614 expedition to Massachusetts, he describes an environment ready to be claimed. Smith writes in great detail about various kinds of abundance and the decreased labor required to profit from such plentitude. He describes Cod as being "in abundance" and "clams or lobsters, or both, at your pleasure" (19). The woods are full of wolves, foxes, and other creatures, and Smith points out that "these and divers other good things do here, for want of use, still increase, and decrease with little diminution, whereby they growe to that abundance" (19). He moves on to describe the land as extremely fertile and capable of "producing any grain, fruits, or seeds you will sow or plant" (11). Through these descriptions, Nature and its creatures are items ready to be used for profit and as luxuries. Smith does not present this land as in need of preservation but instead uses exaggerated descriptions of nature and wildlife to convince others to settle here in order to prosper. Barlowe and Smith both present nature and land as something to be captured and claimed and most certainly not as a place to be protected.

In later writers, Nature becomes "sublime," evident in Thomas Jefferson's description of the Natural Bridge in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Jefferson reveals the beauty of this structure and feels that "It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated…the rapture of the spectator is really indescribable!" (148). In great contrast to Barlowe and Smith, Jefferson describes the grandeur of the bridge not in connection to profit but in relation to human emotion and experience. Jefferson was so taken by the magnificence of this structure that in 1774 he acquired a piece of land that included the Natural Bridge. He could then frequent the bridge as often as he desired. Although Jefferson's description of the Natural Bridge is brief, he emphasizes nature's capacity to produce awe. His appreciation for the bridge is in no way connected to what can be extracted or produced from it. Jefferson simply wants others to understand how to internally appreciate nature's beauty.

This admiration for the environment is exemplified by Henry David Thoreau, who in 1845, chose to separate from society and immerse himself in nature by spending two years at Walden Pond. He sought to gain a deeper appreciation for what nature had to offer and to absorb all he could learn from it. When he published *Walden* in 1854, he described his solitude, his

encounters with visitors and animals, and his inability to tame nature. Although he used the land for food, shelter, and survival, he did not view these resources as profitable, as Barlowe and Smith would have. Furthermore, he was not using *Walden* as propaganda to entice others to claim and use the land. Instead, he was proving just the opposite by discussing the deep connection that can be established with nature when eliminating material desires. He even points out that "village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it" (251). Thoreau is not encouraging others to destroy these forests for timber or to build upon the land. His point is that nature is invigorating and provides a sense of awakening that will allow for the participation in emotional and internal connections to the environment.

John Muir, a 19th-century ecological thinker and nature writer, also wrote about intense connections to nature. However, Muir's nature writing straddles the ability to help readers glimpse the aesthetic beauty and power of nature while also showing the landscape as a commodified item. Written in 1894, his chapter "Near View of the High Sierra," from *The Mountains of California,* embodies similar qualities as other Romantics in depicting the pleasure and bliss associated with the human connection to nature. Muir focuses on the picturesque views of the Yosemite Valley and provides aesthetic descriptions of the pristine, natural world: "Down through the midst, the young Tuolumne was seen pouring from its crystal founds…. now leaping in white cascades as if turning to snow" (345). When staring at the landscape, he says, "Pursuing my lonely way down the valley, I turned again and again to gaze on the glorious picture, throwing up my arms to inclose it as in a frame" (345). Although this kind of aesthetic writing may bring Muir's readers a sense of pleasure, it also turns an existing environment into a commodified space. A landscape that is natural and unique becomes an item that can be reproduced over and over for human satisfaction. Even this brief sketch suggests the range of American nature writing from commercial greed to the inspiration for philosophical musings.

NATURE AS THERAPY IN *WILD*

Cheryl Strayed is an example of someone who sees nature and landscape as therapeutic and transformational. In her 2012 book, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, Strayed chooses to walk the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) with the expectation of saving herself and achieving realizations that could only happen by leaving the somewhat troubled life she currently lives. She informs readers that her past is littered with drug use, divorce, and separation, but her tone quickly changes when she talks about the possibility of this hike being "full of promise" (Strayed 4). She feels as though something "bloomed inside" of her when she looked at her trail map (4). Her dark past is the reason she's seeking transformation on the PCT. She sets this expectation before stepping foot on the trail, as if she knows that being secluded and surrounded by nature will provide her with the necessary experience. She starts off on the trail being a "woman with a hole in her heart" and ends her hike feeling as though she has healed herself (38). Strayed's difference from past explanations of nature takes several forms: much of *Wild* focuses

on how nature is used as therapy, as an environment in which to heal, and as a way to push her physical limits in order to experience internal transformation.

An especially significant innovation in *Wild* is the relative lack of nature description and its strategic location when it does appear. As Strayed continues to build stamina, she gives less attention to her physical pain and nature becomes more central to her internal transformation. Strayed does not often give detailed descriptions of landscape, but when she does, it signals the coming of a transformation or reckoning. On her way to the Oregon-Washington border, Strayed reflects on the intimacy of walking each mile: "Miles weren't things that blazed dully past. They were long, intimate straggles of weeds and clumps of dirt, blades of grass and flowers that bent in the wind, trees that lumbered and screeched. They were the sound of my breath and my feet hitting the trail one step at a time and the click of my ski pole. The PCT had taught me what a mile was" (191). For wanting so badly to be healed by nature and her hike, she is more focused on her frustrations rather than the landscape in front of her. However, here Strayed connects more with her surroundings. She is attentive to the details of the grass, the movement of plants, and the sounds she hears. Here nature becomes teacher, as Strayed has learned to be more in tune with the steps she takes and her purpose on the trail. As she absorbs the detailed landscape, she realizes that she is being mindful of her current situation.

Although there are many moments when Strayed describes the beauty of the landscape before she experiences a transformational moment, this happens when she encounters a destroyed landscape. Even a damaged environment on the trail still provides healing or realization for Strayed. At one point in the book, she comes across an area of the woods that had been logged and cleared by machinery. As seen in previous moments of emotional realization, Strayed provides a detailed description of the scene, pointing out that it was "rubble, a landscape ripped up by its seams and logged clear" with trees showing "rough hides newly exposed, their jagged limbs reaching out at absurd angles" (209). This destruction immediately reminds her of her family and her past. After becoming angry at the sight of the woods, she stops for the day and thinks about her siblings: "I wanted to have a family again, to be folded into something I believed was safe from destruction. Right alongside my longing for them, I felt something as hot as hate for each of them now. I imagined a big machine like the one that had mawed up this forest mawing up our forty acres in the Minnesota wood" (210). In previous moments on the trail, Strayed has described the beauty of a view or her surroundings, followed by a moment of healing. Here, darker, less pleasing views of the earth signal a moment of reflection, but it's a more difficult process and memory for Strayed to work through. She expresses a desire to be with her family but also for the destruction of her old home and its land. In her mind, she believes a clearing away of her family, similar to the clearing away of the woods, would help her progress. Although this might not be a fully resolved issue, her encounter with the damaged landscape causes her to confront these feelings.

A striking inversion of past nature writing is Strayed's focus on the effect of nature on her body, namely the pain it inflicts. Strayed's experience in nature pushes her to extreme physical limits which in turn often provide her with a sense of mental or emotional healing. There is often a connection between the physical difficulty of her hike and the internal changes she experiences soon after a painful or exhaustive stretch of trail. Strayed's hope that nature would act as therapist during her hike on the PCT becomes a reality. Over time, Strayed's body begins to adapt to the weight of her hiking pack, and once she realizes it's no longer causing her body distress, she says, "I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And, most surprising of all, that I could carry it. That I could bear the unbearable. These realizations about my physical, material life couldn't help but spill over into the emotional and spiritual realm" (92). As she immerses herself in a challenging landscape, she begins to realize that her life does not need to be as complicated as it was or is. Her life is simple on the trail. She carries all she needs in one hiking pack, the physical burden that is representative of her internal fears and past demons. As she learns to carry the weight of her pack, she unburdens herself with the complications she has made of her life. Here, nature acts as therapy for Strayed as she begins to realize connections between her physical changes and her emotional transformation. However, although Strayed says that she is forced to focus on her physical suffering, it is hard to imagine that she would not have expected this difficulty. Without proper training, she knew she would encounter physical challenges that would push her beyond her current comfort levels. It is possible Strayed chose to hike the PCT specifically to experience the physical difficulty of the hike knowing it would force some kind of realization to occur. After all, her goal was to have nature challenge her in ways that would cause her to heal.

Strayed often worries that physical pain is distracting her from her real purpose on the trail (to save herself), but she is unaware that her constant concern about the physical toll of this hike is another way she is transforming. It is as though every time her body overcomes a challenge or adapts to a new physical condition, she heals on the inside as well. This occurs a few times toward the beginning of her hike: "Every time I moved, it hurt. I counted my steps to take my mind off the pain, silently ticking the numbers off in my head to one hundred before starting over again" (63). Instead of focusing on more significant thoughts, such as her purpose on the trail or participating in a life-changing adventure, she fixates on pain. It is soon after these thoughts that nature is already serving as a sense of therapy. After dwelling on her aching body, Strayed begins hiking up a mountain and thinks, "As I ascended, I realized I didn't understand what a mountain was, or even if I was hiking up one mountain or a series of them glommed together. I'd not grown up around mountains…They'd seemed like nothing more than really big hills. But they were not that. They were, I now realized, layered and complex" (63). Strayed uses similar language about deserts in her surroundings and thinks, "I didn't really understand what deserts were. I'd taken them to be dry, hot, and sandy places full of snakes, scorpions, and cactuses. They were not that. They were that and also a bunch of other things. They were layered and complex and inexplicable and analogous to nothing" (63). Based on Strayed's one-sentence

paragraph after this that tells the reader "I was in entirely new terrain" and her use of repetition during her descriptions of the mountains and deserts, she appears to be making connections between her experience on the trail and her challenging past (63). The mountains that she used to think were hills could be the rough spots in her past that she thought were easy to solve with destructive behaviors. The desert that she thought was full of dangerous creatures could be representative of the toxic individuals she encountered in her past. Only now does she realize how "layered and complex" her past really is (63). What she thought were simple fixes might be seen as problems with deeper roots that she avoided confronting. As she makes her way up the mountain, she is navigating through her past and making realizations that can only occur by being surrounded by or hiking in this landscape.

Once Strayed ends her journey on the PCT, she recognizes that she has been changed with help from the landscape. However, when examining more modern conversations about the role of nature writing, critics like Timothy Morton argue that thinking about nature in a way that idealizes it will distract people from understanding nature on its own terms. In his book *Ecology without Nature*, Morton focuses on the Romantic period's fixation on an aestheticized, idealized Nature. He argues that removal of this "Nature" is necessary in order for people to have a clearer understanding of ecology, because their tendency to think about nature and preserve it paradoxically separates them from a deeper understanding of it. Although the goal of nature writing always seems to be a deeper attachment to nature, Morton believes this is impossible, and in his chapter "Romanticism and the Environmental Subject," he says, "Nature writing partly militates *against* ecology rather than for it. By setting up nature as an object 'over there'—a pristine wilderness beyond all trace of human contact—it re-establishes the very separation it seeks to abolish" (125). Does Morton's critique invalidate Strayed's project? Strayed does not spend her novel idealizing nature or providing continuous aesthetic descriptions of her surroundings. Instead, there are specific moments of intense aesthetic beauty or descriptions of her navigating the terrain where she feels most connected to the land. Although Morton argues that this would result in feeling separate and disconnected to nature, Strayed makes it seem possible to view the PCT as an environment both separate and connected to her.

Spaces like the PCT are what Morton calls "reproducible commodities" as a result of Romantic consumerism that "influenced the construction and maintenance of actually existing environments" (113). Because the PCT is a Public Land that is protected and created for public use, mostly because it is viewed as a beautifully preserved environment, Morton is correct in that it was produced partially for aesthetic pleasure. However, Strayed's experience shows that even in these places constructed for beauty, there is the ability for individuals to build a connection to the landscape. As she travels home, she describes her thoughts post-hike: "Thank you. Not just for the long walk, but for everything I could feel finally gathered up inside of me; for everything the trail had taught me" (310). The changes she experienced and the ability to process and work

through her past were all possible because of her willingness to immerse herself in nature and allow it to assist her in moving forward.

NATURE AS SOLACE IN *TRESSPASSING ACROSS AMERICA*

Ken Ilgunas, in *Trespassing Across America: One Man's Epic, Never-Done-Before (and Sort of Illegal) Hike Across the Heartland*, decides to hike the 1700-mile proposed Keystone XL pipeline route. His motivation for this hike is a combination of advocacy, adventure, and knowledge of the pipeline and its impacts. Throughout the book, Ilgunas describes the history of many geographic areas he hikes through, as well as environmental issues and policy. These descriptions further emphasize why he feels that his walk is important. The nature that is seen in abundance in the early writings of Barlowe and Smith has now become the property of corporations and is worth defending. Although readers are set up to believe that the full intent of his hike is to advocate for the land, there is a part of Ilgunas that also wants a sense of adventure, made clear at the beginning of the book. He describes his town, Deadhorse, as "cold, lifeless, cheerless," while also feeling unhappy with his job and current routine (2). However, his attitude shifts at the mere mention of hiking: fall foliage is "colored with squash yellows, apple reds, and pumpkin oranges," and the birds are "summer swarms of flying life" (5). These descriptions signal from the beginning that nature is going to offer Ilgunas a sense of adventure and satisfaction. An adventure is what he gets, but he also ends his XL pipeline hike realizing that nature has provided him with an opportunity for more personal growth and clarity than he anticipated. Ilgunas's stated purpose for his hike is relatively straightforward; his book reveals more complex, interesting motivations.

Although this is not a hike to save himself, there is still a part of Ilgunas that hopes to experience an internal shift and gain a sense of freedom while immersing himself in nature. Ilgunas sets out to hike the Keystone XL pipeline as an advocate for the land and to learn more about how the pipeline will impact its surroundings. His walk becomes a call to action. He even points out that he is not walking to "take pictures of pretty landscapes or even to see those last vestiges of a once-wild continent" but instead to gain as much knowledge as he can (18). However, many times during his hike, he describes the detailed beauty and awe of his surroundings right before he finds a calmness and clarity when reflecting on his own life and frustrations. He even mentions his excitement about abandoning schedules, bosses, and his unfulfilling lifestyle to embark on something new and adventurous. By the time he concludes his thoughts on his hike, it is clear that advocacy is not his only motivation.

Ilgunas's passion for nature and wilderness becomes more clear when, during his travels, he questions the purpose of his hike. After reflecting on policy, politics, and other aspects of environmentalism, he says, "Why was I suffering for a pipeline that will probably be built and probably won't make all that much of a difference in a world already crisscrossed by pipelines

and powered by fossil fuels?" (109). At this point in his hike he is questioning whether he is doing this for the pipeline or for himself. As he questions his purpose, he may be searching for something more meaningful behind what he is doing. Perhaps he now desires a personal transformation that would take him away from his routines and awaken new ideas and motivations. His ability to come to this realization and reflect on his purpose is made possible because he has been surrounded by landscape and wildlife for many days. Nature has provided him with a place to reflect and come to these realizations, all of which would not have been possible if he were still in Deadhorse.

Toward the beginning of Ilgunas's hike, he strays from his claim that he would not be caught up in landscapes and views, as it becomes apparent they provide him with a sense of comfort. While walking the Alberta prairie, Ilgunas describes his view as "autumn colors and the sepia twilight cast onto the hills by rays of the setting sun" (65). He immediately says that he could now, "momentarily forget my day's many scares and feel a tired thankfulness—a reminder that despite whatever trials lay ahead I got to be struck dumb every day by sights that felt like they'd been made for me" (65). The beauty of his surroundings is what provides him with comfort at the end of the day. He reveals his emotional connection with nature, the kind that Jefferson and Thoreau discuss and encourage, in his belief that the vivid landscapes and scenery feel like they were made specifically for him. This is the start of what becomes a consistent experience for Ilgunas, as he finds himself caught up in landscape that he describes as making him feel safe, comforted, and protected. Nature takes on a larger role in personal and internal changes that he does not expect to experience, and the description in this section shows that his attachment to land and nature is slowly developing or may have already been there to begin with.

As Ilgunas hikes further on the pipeline route, nature continues to provide him with a place to eliminate criticism and self-doubt. Ilgunas reflects on conversations with townspeople he has encountered along the way. He notes that many think he is ridiculous for taking this hike and that their comments make him feel insecure for making this choice. He describes the criticism as "burrs stuck in my pant leg, prickling me every few strides" (139). He questions himself and his decision to set off hiking the pipeline route. However, this sense of doubt quickly begins to fade once he arrives at a resting place and takes in his surroundings: "It wasn't until I got out onto the open prairie or under the frozen fireworks of a starry night or in an unusual place like this abandoned barn that I'd finally be able to shake them off. When the ground is hard, the landscape half-wild, the weather pleasant, and the pain of walking gone, I'd feel a wild joy swell in my chest" (140). Nature again becomes a place where he can ease worry and calm his frustration. He points out that once he is away from the busy town and its people he can rest and gain better clarity. Again, he claims this kind of joy as unique to him, since he points out only a "solitary traveler" would gain this kind of pleasure from nature (140). Each time he experiences an internal conflict like this one, Ilgunas describes his surroundings in detail, as if to emphasize that the landscape helps form a sense of comfort and awe.

Even at the end of his hike, Ilgunas cannot help but explain how his mind has been shifted by nature into a calmer and simpler place compared to when he started. As he is sitting alone in the woods at night, he realizes how deeply he will miss his travels. He talks to the prairie saying: "How I'd dream about the days spent walking over you, feeling the long feathery talks of your green grass waving against my legs, the cloud mountains sailing across the deep blue sky, the chatter of coyotes, the groans of cattle—and the stars, oh the stars. I'd feel melancholic thinking about you, about how I have you, yet don't have you at all" (257). He then exits the XL pipeline path and begins his journey home. This is the first time Ilgunas talks directly to the earth, showing an intimate connection he has developed with the land. He also points out that his mind was "no longer an assembly line or an art studio" but instead had become "at ease, peaceful, uncomplicated…a little simpler than it had been before" (250). The experience overall has been transformative. Ilgunas became more informed about the pipeline as he interacted with various townspeople. Despite this knowledge he obtained along the way, he gained much more in the way of confidence and simplification. He realized more of what nature could offer him: a place of comfort, an environment to sort out his thoughts and make realizations, and a place of safety and reassurance.

Strayed and Ilgunas both extend and complicate the earlier writers. In contrast to the earliest writers, Barlowe and Smith, Strayed and Ilgunas have no interest in commercial gain from nature. Jefferson and Thoreau see nature as a place of sublimity and a space that evokes emotional change; likewise, Strayed and Ilgunas connect to the land and use it as a refuge and a space from which to learn. But the contrast with *Walden* is illuminating. Thoreau too experienced mental clarity but the focus was not on self or healing. Rather, Thoreau's goal was to "front only the essential facts of life" (72). The significance and innovation of Strayed and Ilgunas is in the healed, joyful self as the ultimate metric of environmental experience. In order to achieve this experience, Strayed and Ilgunas could be said to extract from nature what they needed in order to better themselves. In her book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Katharine Yusoff touches on this idea of extraction and says, "I seek to undermine the *givenness* of geology as an innocent or natural description of the world, to see its modes of inscription and circulation as a doubling of the notion of property—property as a description of mineralogy and property as an acquisition (as resource, land, extractive quality of energy or mineral)" (10). Here Yusoff's ideas merge with Morton's as they both identify people's tendency to double the purpose of nature—to see it as an environment but to also commodify and make it useful, whether for aesthetic pleasure or for extraction (in the form of both resource and pleasure). Perhaps Strayed and Ilgunas complicate these critics' ideas. Strayed and Ilgunas both see their landscapes as environments and sources of pleasure, and even if this helps them on their personal journey, it is important to recognize the ways that their double usage of nature contributes to this ongoing conversation of extraction and commodification. Their experiences demonstrate why it is important to preserve space, because

leaving civilization and being able to explore areas that aren't developed have more to offer than others may think.

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METAMORPHOSIS AND BECOMING-WITH IN GARDEN NARRATIVES

In an essay on the beginnings of modernism, Virginia Woolf uses a garden analogy to illustrate the challenges involved in coming to terms with change:

> On or about December, 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might, into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910. (Woolf 91)

A down-to-earth garden constitutional such as Woolf's imaginary one can be a healthy response if, more than a century later, we collectively experience ongoing change as one crisis upon another. In current times of VUCA[1], we are faced with planetary change, multiple entangled mutations happening at a pace and scale we cannot fathom, "vaster than empires and more slow", in Ursula LeGuin's evocative phrase, with the addition, from Robert Nixon, that this particular slowness is systemic violence.

Metamorphosis mostly refers to biological processes of maturation, as in the almost proverbial development from caterpillar and chrysalis to butterfly, or to an individual creature's

[1] This acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity originated in leadership discourse but has since begun to spread into other contexts, such as cultural studies, see (Sabina, Colwell and Tager)

transformation, framed as near-miraculous (OED). But these are either neutral or positively connotated. The mutations currently ravaging the world cannot be euphemized as metamorphosis. Whereas extinction, floods, forest, fires, and climate change are natural processes, their current anthropogenic acceleration is not. Burning fossil fuels is not a natural process of maturation but a self-destructive extractivist practice.

At the present precarious stage in the Anthropocene[2] a new vocabulary of change and human accountability is emerging, and it is needed to break our collective paralysis before environmental challenges, as Val Plumwood observed:

> We are seemingly immobilized, even though it is clear that at a technological level we already have the means to accomplish the changes needed to live sustainably on and with the earth. So the problem is not primarily about more knowledge or technology; it is about developing an environmental culture that values and fully acknowledges the non-human sphere and our dependency on it. (Plumwood 3)

The term metamorphosis leads us into the heart of our contradictory relation to global transformations. We need and want to control change, and at the same time we need and want narratives in which change is miraculous, where there is newness to be found and where discovery leads to transformations beyond what we now know. Narratives of progress are difficult to let go of, despite their problematic roots in rogue Enlightenment ideals that are partly to blame for current disconnections between humanity and the natural environment.

Gardens can accommodate the paradox of human beings trying to think "definite" and "arbitrary" together, being sites made by human beings, where the real work that leads to such an event as a rose flowering is being done by myriads of non-human critters. Garden narratives show that transformation in the garden is reciprocal: gardens profoundly influence bodies and minds of human makers and visitors. Besides offering healthy exercise and building communities, gardens can teach attention to detail, sensitivity towards other lifeforms, phenology, and trust in indirect approaches and symbiosis, among other things.[3]

In an attempt to help with such learning processes, this essay brings garden narratives into dialogue with vocabularies of change emerging in environmental studies. The notion that gardening is healthy (Theodorou et al.) and rejuvenating is as ancient as it is poetic. Thomas Jefferson describes himself as an old man, but "a young gardener" (Jefferson and Betts), and gardens can indeed give a new life of sorts, as demonstrated by Marjorie Fish (Fish) and Elizabeth von Arnim (Arnim *The Solitary Summer;* Arnim *Elizabeth*), for both of whom garden encounters launch writing careers and new identities. But we need to go beyond such exceptional

[2] Or Plantationocene, Capitalocene, Symbiocene and similar (Albrecht; Wu and Xu; Edwards, Graulund and Höglund)

[3] Gardens can even be used for personal development, to reconnect to one's creativity, as Fran Sorin demonstrates (Sorin)

cases in order to understand the potential of human/more-than-human relations in the garden. To this end, I unpack the contradictory entanglements of humans and metamorphosis as experienced in selected garden narratives with reference to three concepts: Donna Haraway's becoming-with (Haraway *Species;* Haraway *Trouble*), Lucy Jones' matrescence (Jones) and Valentina Lozano Nasi's transilience (Lozano Nasi, Jans and Steg). All three deal with transformation and more-than-human relationality as well as human creativity and ingenuity, for instance in the form of writing. After all, the myths of antiquity, Ovid's trickster stories and much more recent poststructuralist critiques[4] demonstrate that metamorphosis is a metafictional conceit that helps us come to terms with some of the disconcerting mutations in our lives by linking these to writing and storytelling as creative strategies to embrace change as a growth.

GARDENS AND TRANSILIENCE

In mapping the contradictions that underpin present-day discourses of metamorphosis it is helpful to begin with processes of change which are rarely framed in terms of metamorphosis. Healing, transforming a body or mind from a state of illness and regaining health, is largely a physical process of change, but do we call it a metamorphosis? If anything, through healing, order is restored, and normalcy affirmed. The term metamorphosis is even less readily applied to developments governed by *logos* that fit the OED's reference to changes in "condition or character". Among these are cognitive transformations through education or personal development. These more easily fit narrative frames of progress and success than myth, as very little here is left to supernatural forces and the process involves overcoming chaos and establishing clear categories, signposted by academic degrees and certificates that affirm individualism rather than relationality.

Environmental psychologist Valentina Lozano Nasi has coined the term "transilience" to gauge people's perceived capacity to respond positively to climate change. Going beyond resilience, transilience encompasses the notion that people not only have the ability to cope with the changing climate but find new opportunities, nurture flexibility in switching between different modes of adapting, and ultimately "positively transform by adapting to climate change risks" (Lozano Nasi, Jans and Steg 101947). In view of initiatives such as the Solarpunk movement or the Symbiocene, this is an optimistic rather than a utopian assessment.

[4] Metamorphosis and writing have long been considered as related, especially, of course, in (post)structuralist contexts. Bruce Clarke's *Allegories of Writing* (1995) examines "the metamorphic body in a literary narrative" as "an allegory of the allegorical: the metamorphic agent is a personified text split into incompatible components" (Clarke x) and titles his first chapter "Writing as the Daemonic". But in the 2020s it is no longer possible to explain and analyse metamorphosis in terms of an "interfusion of sense and nonsense" (Clarke 2). This kind of binary that juxtaposes "meaningful" humans and "meaningless" non-human lifeworlds derived form Enlightenment categories is part of the current monstering of the natural world and the climate. It is the ideology which has underpinned a tendency in WEIRD cultures to disregard the non-human as a resource and a commodity rather than a live other with needs, rights and rhythms that deserve respect and recognition.

"Transform" here is an active verb, underlining that human agency is a matter of embracing the materialities we have, actively making and actively receiving transformative experiences. As outlined below, this dynamic concept aligns with ways in which garden narratives depict encounters with more-than-human lives: the contact zone of the garden induces individuals to open up to emerging non-linear, non-verbal and indirect answers to many of the questions arising from current disconnections between human lifeworlds and more-than-human beings.

Gardening and writing about gardens have helped individuals confront a wide range of personal challenges in addition to the ones discussed so far. Canadian gardener Mark Cullen processes a cancer diagnosis with the help of trees:

> The day the doctor gave me the bad news I drove slowly, in search of some green space… When I arrived home, I sat on the front porch and watched the feathered wildlife while I continued to ask questions, this time directing them to no one in particular. But the big oak tree in our front yard seemed to be listening. (Cullen and Cullen 78-79)

Communing with plants on a small balcony helps Alice Vincent overcome a traumatic break-up:

> There was a dawning recognition that unexpected changes didn't always have to be bad. That poppy was the beginning of a translation. The language of plants and of growing them was one I barely understood but found myself scrabbling to understand. I wanted to navigate the means of life that surround us silently every day. And when I began to try to translate it – clumsily, slowly – it helped me to make some sense of what had happened to my life; not just in terms of the break-up, but in what else I had expected from it and where I wanted it to go. (Vincent 38)

Both examples depict individuals who take their personal problems to a plant audience, and both eventually discover that what starts out as a monologue is met with a non-verbal reciprocity that leads them into unknown developments: "Yes, I changed all right. Not in ways that I had predicted a year ago, nor for reasons that I anticipated" (Cullen and Cullen 81). Redirected out of their respective comfort zones, both writers undergo transformations which blend processes of personal growth and healing: gardening-induced self-reflection and writing contribute to personal transformations which are layered and go beyond mere restoration of a previous state. Personal crises enable new more-than-human relations, and in committing them to writing, both writers reflect on their growing "persistence, adaptability, and transformability", the triad of criteria Lozano Nasi uses to define transilience.

BECOMING-WITH AND COMPOST

"Becoming with" is a term by Donna Haraway which defamiliarizes the multifarious entanglements between human and non-human beings in order to encourage us to actively

overcome human exceptionalism.[5] Haraway's term refers to encounters across the boundaries of individual species, such as petting a dog, but it also encompasses the mingling of human and non-human cells that occurs in eating (Haraway *Species* 4, 295), as well as the fundamental symbiotic and biodiverse reality of human bodies that contain more non-human than human cells (Gilbert et al.). Calling for different ways of being in the world, or "becoming worldly" (Haraway *Species* 3), the term challenges autopoietic notions of anthropocentrism and individualism (Haraway *Trouble* 30) to foster a perspective that accords non-human lives greater respect than they have conventionally been shown, especially in WEIRD cultures. Like other terms coined by Haraway that cultivate a cheerful disdain of anthropocentric assumptions, this one, too, is located in the mud, "the humus of sympoiesis" (Haraway *Trouble* 140), a figurative down-to-earth operating space that removes any clinical distance between humans and "nature", highlighting our inseparability from the material world and replacing binary oppositions with imaginaries of more-than-human kinship and sharing. Like metamorphosis, Haraway's sympoiesis is deeply unsettling because it threatens clear definitions. Shape-shifting confuses notions of uniqueness and singularity which are necessary for identification in post-Enlightenment cultures. Shape-shifters are hybrid and multiple, they cannot be reduced to neat entities, or even dichotomies. At the far end of metamorphosis lie death and extinction: if we look at narratives such as Ovid's Baucis and Philemon, metamorphosis for humans involves change upon or after death. Robert Graves' "Earth to Earth" dramatizes a similar trajectory: our final metamorphosis into compost signals the end of the self as we know it (Graves). Compost is Haraway's preferred metaphor for the kinship that becoming-with enables, and the figurative new soil it yields plays on images of composition, including written ones. Haraway mostly focuses on becoming-with animals; I complement this by suggesting that garden writings add becoming-with biodiversity at large: gardens enable humans to become-with plants and fungi and the myriad critters alive and busy in the soil. More indirect and thereby mysterious than such tangible acts of petting a dog or cutting a steak, becoming-with garden lives exposes humans to lifeworlds that reconnect us to mythical transformation stories.[6] But more-than-human becoming-with (in) the garden involves more than just engaging with plants. Acts of reflecting on them or artistic responses, such as writing, painting or photography, need to be included both as a connecting process and also as vibrant spaces of emerging newness.

In keeping with the importance of storytelling, Haraway illustrates the affordances of becoming-with and compost with a piece of speculative fiction. Her scholarly discussion in *Staying with the Trouble* ends on a creative-critical coda about a future humanity spliced with the DNA of other creatures. The eponymous hero*ine of "The Camille Stories: Children of the

[5] With defamiliarisation as with many other things, less is more, so to make this phrase syntactically digestible, I have added a hyphen.

[6] The cultural history as well as practical psychological and therapeutic backgrounds of such reconnections are analysed and comprehensively illustrated in Sue Stuart-Smith's *The Well Gardened Mind: Rediscovering Nature in the Modern World* (2020).

Compost" is a chimaera whose genetic makeup contains cells from the endangered monarch butterfly, and the future history of Camille and other "children of the compost" depicts a turbulent four centuries in which more-than-human communities consciously embrace what Anna Tsing has called the "art of living on a damaged planet," (Tsing et al.), of establishing a new global equilibrium while actively and systematically grieving the loss of the old one. Haraway's choice of the monarch butterfly out of all endangered animals underlines the importance of a metamorphosis that encompasses humanity: to adapt to a damaged world, humans must immerse themselves in matter and use their genetic and scientific achievements to engineer a mutually amenable world, at the expense of a bounded human identity seen as distinct from other creatures. Haraway's imaginary future is a sketch that aspires to cocreation rather than closure:

> My stories are suggestive string figures at best; they long for a fuller weave that still keeps the patterns open, with ramifying attachment sites for storytellers yet to come. I hope readers change parts of the story and take them elsewhere, enlarge, object, flesh out, and reimagine the lifeways of the Camilles. (Haraway *Trouble* 144)

Taking up this invitation, in this essay I look for present-day ancestors to the Camilles: humans who have experienced some kind of mutually transformative togetherness with more-than-human lives and reflect on the generative potential of such permeability. The particular ramification woven in this essay explores concrete and down to earth examples to take Haraway's considerations beyond the speculative realm.

But not beyond the magic of the unknown: the transformative power that grows a tiny seed into a flower, fruit or tree is often described as miraculous, and nature epiphanies of this kind can border on the transcendental. Journalist, writer and gardener Debi Goodwin is a case in point. Her memoir *A Victory Garden for Trying Times* (2019) starts as a record of growing healthy food in order to help her partner, fellow author and producer Peter Kavanagh, fight cancer, but the eponymous trying times worsen dramatically when he suddenly dies, leaving her in shock. The following vignette depicts the moment she perceives the garden reaching out to break her paralysis of grief:

> Around the time I was struggling with all that, I got my first sign. And it was in the garden. Earlier that summer, Peter had said he'd like another Japanese maple tree. I'd planted a small one that a neighbor had started from a slip and offered me after Peter died. I went out one afternoon to take some photos of the tree before it dropped its now vibrantly red leaves. […] As I walked beside the flower beds [...], a butterfly landed near me on the pink flowers of a sedum, a butterfly I'd never seen before in the garden. Its wings were a purply brown with iridescent blue dots at the edge before a yellow border. It stayed on the sedum with its wings open long enough for me to get a good close-up shot. Inside, I searched for the butterfly in Google Images and discovered with a gasp that it was called the mourning cloak butterfly. (Goodwin 167)

This more-than-human encounter, esoteric in tone yet practical in effect, triggers a development that redirects Goodwin from human care to plant care and gradually helps her recover her sense of self: "The next day, I decided I had to get back to the garden. The Victory Garden had become a mess" (167). Sensing a spark of something beyond the human sphere does not immediately create the momentum needed to form new habits of thought and behavior. Following her butterfly moment, Goodwin records wrestling with the bureaucracy of death and feeling at odds with the rhythms of cyclical regeneration that the garden reminds her of. Nonetheless, the narrative moves towards a dialogic perspective that blends human and non-human lives: "as I stood in the peace of our yard, listening for the songs of birds and a single voice that had disappeared, I knew that somewhere inside me I had … a will to push myself into the light again" (Goodwin 189). The memoir shows multiple dynamic exchanges in which human and non-human voices and lives, singularities and polyphonies, entangle, overlap, detach and reconnect in a shared dynamic. Crucially, the voice that ultimately helps the narrator's recovery is non-verbal, non-linear and non-human. Instead, the garden allows for conditions under which change can be approached and adjusted to in a way that redefines progress as motion: "The garden had no clear answers for me that fall day; all it could do was allow me the quiet and the space to jump from despair to hope to despair" (Goodwin 190). As a stage on which to act out the emotional rollercoaster of loss, the garden involves both body and mind in a dance of shifting priorities. Psycho-physical experiences are rationalized, for instance when Goodwin ascribes her improved mental state to a chemical response enabled by gardening: "I couldn't put my finger on what I was feeling until later, when I read some research that claimed that mere contact with *Mycobacterium vaccae*, found in soil, releases serotonin in the brain" (Goodwin 190). Non-human lives such as the butterfly and the various plants she tends to cannot, of course, replace human loss, but they convey hopeful experiences of change and collectively help shift relational patterns in directions not previously fathomed in human versus material dichotomies. Goodwin's garden provides a material target onto which to direct her thoughts, indirectly and gradually helping her envision new goals. This process of recovery, or regrowth, and of non-human lives writing back to the human culminates in her book, which reconnects the process to more linear and rational human frames of reference.

MATRESCENCE, ANTOPHILIA AND HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

Facing death is just one of several liminal experiences that may push individuals into more-than-human company. Giving birth can be disconcerting, too, especially since the psycho-physical impact of this has received surprisingly little attention, as Lucy Jones attests. "Matrescence" is not yet recognized by the OED, suggesting the timeliness of Jones' creative-critical initiative of starting "new conversations about how becoming a mother changes a person, about what it means to metamorphose, about what we can do to recognize new mothers in their matrescence and how we can reimagine the institution of motherhood" (Jones 17). Drawing both on her individual experience of becoming-with child and on transdisciplinary research, Jones explores the metamorphosis of human mothers alongside other critters, affirming our status as

holobionts (Jones 221) and the pregnancy-induced brain reconfigurations mothers experience. Characterizing motherhood as an existential crisis (Jones 222) with little to no support in WEIRD countries, Jones calls for "new, informal ecologies of care" (Jones 230). While offering no closure, as matrescence is an open-ended process, the book ends in a poetic epilogue that celebrates more-than-human connectivity: "Beneath us, the trees are talking, making plans, breaking through soil and sediment. […] We sit underneath the canopy of a beech tree, a mother tree, and rake the earth … and we breathe" (Jones 267).

Jones is far from the first author to contest notions of motherhood as a "natural" and therefore implicitly unproblematic form of female fulfilment. Elizabeth von Arnim's garden romance *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898) derives much of its humor from quirky comparisons between the heroine's "kingdom of heaven" (Arnim *Elizabeth* 7-8), an overgrown garden on her husband's Pomeranian estate on the one hand, and the absurdities of aristocratic society on the other. The satiric genre "on the borderline between fiction and autobiography" (Hapgood 101) lets von Arnim get away with portraying her flowers in loving detail while lumping together her offspring as "April, May and June babies". It was not until von Arnim's feminist retrieval from obscurity (1980 onwards) that the trauma of her enforced pregnancies in exile received critical appreciation, as did the entanglements of creativity that weave garden making, childbirth and authorship together. Beside the garden, what helps "Elizabeth"[7] overcome her dependency on "the Man of Wrath" she is married to is "life-giving writing": having created "Elizabeth" on the page, von Arnim reinvents herself under this name, attaining financial independence through her royalties.

In view of global transformation, it is baffling to come across a large sector which does not seem to change at all, however much the stakeholders involved might wish for it. This is certainly how journalist Rosie Kinchen experiences motherhood, as regression into biology and loss of independence. Faced with an unplanned second baby, fears for her career and anxieties over her professional identity overshadow an already difficult pregnancy, and the lack of institutional and medical support for her infant's life-threatening food allergies exacerbates a postnatal depression. As documented in *The Ballast Seed*, the chief relations that sustain Kinchen in this crisis are horticultural ones. Here, for instance, the unexpected recovery of a drowned house plant makes her feel like a legitimate caregiver when nothing else does:

> The plant was indeed alive – happy, even. I had saved it from its dismal fate. It wasn't just the minor success that lifted me, but the idea that some sort of communication had taken place. I had always liked plants but I thought of them as decoration…. Now I

[7] 'Elizabeth von Arnim' (1866-1941), originally called Mary Annette Beauchamp, was informally known as 'May' and officially titled Countess von Arnim-Schlagenthin. Reconstructing untold details of Elizabeth's life from her daughter's biographical writings, letters and diaries, Karen Usborne suggests that gardening language and imagery may have played a part in conveying explanations of childbirth to Elizabeth's children: when she returns from England after the birth of her fourth daughter, the provenance of the baby is attributed to her 'having been dug up in a parsley bed in England' (Usborne 1986, 78 (Usborne 78).

> realized that they were sentient; they could tell me things, they could react and respond. (Kinchen 49)

Plants are initially anthropomorphized ("I had fallen in love with orchids as a student; I felt they were mysterious and faintly exotic – very me" (Kinchen 18); "Their anaemic appearance seemed to echo my own" (Kinchen 31-32)), but eventually Kinchen's identification with them is revealed as more complex. During a visit to Kew Gardens, she discovers that both she and her ailing baby thrive in one of the greenhouses: "I looked down and saw a hint of colour in his cheeks for the first time. Perhaps the energy of the place was doing something to him as well. Certainly, it seemed to be having an effect on me. I felt a clarity and calm I hadn't for months. I felt I could breathe" (Kinchen 35). Not only does this discovery lead her to reexamine her migratory family backgrounds[8], she also makes a friend in the shape of Victorian traveler and painter Marianne North, "not an obvious source of comfort," Kinchen admits, "not least because she had been dead for over a hundred years", but one whose "impatience and frustration with the world chimed with mine" (Kinchen 4). Through her memoir, North becomes her companion – Kinchen writes about "joining her in 1879" (Kinchen 163) after a "row" over North's racism and imperialist entitlement.

This relationship offers a processing space rather than an escape from present-day crises. Kinchen's troubled motherhood reveals the unsustainability of relegating new mothers to a heterotopia of exclusion. Her struggles to nurture a baby unable to digest food form an atavistic contrast to a modernity in which matrescence still means marginalization, which ejects a successful journalist into precarity for biological reasons. Throughout the narrative, she glimpses the Shard, her workplace, as a symbolic reminder of aspirations to futurity and of her own exile, cropping up from various angles as she pushes her pram around London's parks and green spots which defy modernization and which she identifies with in a present that leaves new mothers to speak with the dead. Narratologist Mieke Bal argues that much of what is usually short-referenced as "nature" or "the environment" serves as setting, distinct from and menial to humans as self-conscious agents (Bal). Nature exists as a backdrop; action and plot largely depend on humans. Her unplanned second maternity pushes, even turns, Kinchen into such a background: demotion from agent to setting generates cognitive dissonances with a 21st century which suggests humans make their own fortune. Caught between an enforced passivity and a perturbed sense of agency Kinchen describes her relationship with North in terms of pregnancy – translated into cognitive terms, but still physical – "her persistence seemed to have wormed its way into the back of my head like a sharp kick through time" (Kinchen 166). Postnatal depression is depicted as a disconnect between body, mind and emotions. If pregnancy reduced her from a professional agent to a breeding ground, her mental health crisis further

[8] ("Plants were at the root of my own family story as well. My grandmother was born in Ceylon, but she was of Italian and Dutch descent. Her ancestors were lured to the 'Spice Island' in the 1700s" (Kinchen 38))

transmogrifies her in ways she can neither comprehend nor control. It is only when she learns that plants have individuality, preferences ("this little plant … had strong views about water" (Kinchen 32)) and complex cultural histories that she begins to develop ways of growing out of her fallow period. With the help of a horticultural therapy group and subsequent horticulture classes and a volunteer gardeners' community, Kinchen eventually recovers, but not without transforming her horticultural healing into a book.

Kinchen's narrative suggests that it may be possible to reconcile becoming-with and matrescence, contesting the provocative slogan "Make Kin, Not Babies!" which reverberates throughout Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (Haraway, *Trouble* 103, 139, 164). What is more, Kinchen's return to her writing career suggests that her experience of more-than-human cocreation enables a successful balance of various creativities. Hélène Cixous names writing and motherhood virtually in a single breath, as related and equally valid forms human gestation can take: "Just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood." (Cixous, Cohen and Cohen 891) Creation, whether it be the growing of new life or the writing of new words and narratives, is human-generated metamorphosis that cha(lle)nges the world and the contexts in which it is received. On an individual plane, Kinchen thereby performs a process that must be faced by present-day ancestors of compost, to confront the trauma involved in having lost touch with but remaining entangled with biology. Current crises of connection[9] begin in the individual self, as a disconnect between body, mind and emotions. If individuals can overcome such crises through cocreation with more-than-human lives, such individual seeds might grow into more systemic creative endeavors. Gardening offers a concrete starting point for such developments.

CONCLUSION

Gardens are paradigmatic sites of continuous metamorphosis; they are living spaces that not only tolerate change but thrive with and because of it. Unless driven to the extremes that climate change is currently bringing about, the environment, or nature, does not have any problems with change. It is humans who do. Proverbially, as a species, we all want things to get better, but nobody wants to change. This is especially true if faced with many disruptive changes, as exemplified by the narratives discussed above. In natural environments, change is synonymous with life itself; even death is part of an ongoing relational and interdependent dynamic. Contemporary garden narratives debate emerging ideas of growth, power, space, biodiversity, sustainability, relationality, interdependency, time and many other fundamental concepts. They suggest that the learning processes and opportunities for growth offered by gardens and gardening enhance resilience, optimism and a sense of purpose, and the act of reflecting on these in writing helps develop the transilience we need to embrace further change. Most of all, they help us understand connectivity beyond human limitations. Because of this,

[9] (Way et al.; Drichel)

garden writings are useful not only for observing change but also for digging below the surface of how ideas, discourses and practices of change are developing.

Many changes in the present are human-generated, and reversing them is never going to be a walk in the park, or garden. But then again, there is more to a garden walk than meets the eye. By examining human encounters with change in garden settings, we can nonetheless arrive at a more nuanced and more open sense of how constructive responses to present-day challenges can be envisaged and be allowed to emerge as part of cycles of connectivities and collectivities. There is mystery and magic left to be discovered in the relations between human and non-human lifeworlds, as the garden narratives sketched above have demonstrated. If the vocabulary of metamorphosis can shed critical and practical light on some of these and thereby help rebuild the "broken feedback loop between the parts and the whole" (Scharmer 14) which characterizes many eco-systems of the present, it needs to be diffracted in order to encourage human and more-than-human cocreation. In this process, creative responses such as garden writings can grow into ways to change oneself, one's perception of reality, and the world itself.

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New Molt

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SO THIS IS HOME: INTERGENERATIONAL DYMANICS AMIDST CAMEROON'S CRISIS, RELATIONAL TIES AND SHIFTING LANDSCAPES

The Douala airport is a furnace. The heat traps itself under our skin as we crawl through the line for customs. I am faint yet giddy. After this checkpoint, I will finally see home. I am thirty-seven years old, and I am finally arriving. If I am not the only first-timer in this crowd, I am definitely the oldest.

The last leg in the customs line, the people have physical features similar to mine. My nose marked by the twenty-plus-hour journey was a flight from Brussels to Douala. I was in the middle seat between two Cameroonian women. On my left, the older of the two asked where my father was staying. When I replied, she lit up. She was going there too, to visit relatives. I was used to speaking about my family history like a buried myth written in an extinct language. I felt like we were exchanging coveted information that we were both privy to. This knowledge of one another made us neighbors. On my right was a younger woman in her last semester of college. She told me she was returning after six years. The two women were delighted for the trip. I was excited for them, with them.

Different growing up. Now, I am among a sea of noses with a round and wide center. We are kin. If I kept my mouth shut, no one would know I was different. I was an outsider among everyone returning home. In the line, I was among migrants who traded their Cameroon passports for a dwelling in Europe or the U.S. Yet, they committed to returning. The woman on the plane returned every year. Despite the most violent points of the war in Cameroon, she returned. For my father, the war delayed him from returning, but only for a while. When word came that the violence was isolated in only certain areas, my dad returned.

At the airport, I do not see the unrest I have heard about over the last eight years. No one is speaking about it here. It is December, weeks away from Cameroon's 64th year of Independence. No one is speaking of that either. However, I do notice something. Although the official languages in Cameroon are French and English, when the airport officials instruct us in line, they only use French. A few people grow anxious. I am not the only one unable to understand the officials. An Anglophone woman asks her queue neighbors for help translating. The airport officials speak little, if any, English. It seems to pain them when they do, not merely because they are not fluent. It is as though they would rather avoid the language at all.

The war began in 2016, hidden from most news outlets outside of Africa. The Anglophone parts of the country protested to have a stronger voice in government. Historically, the differences and post-colonial remnants lingered after being colonized by the Germans, the British, and the French at different times before Independence--on New Year's Day in 1960. Alongside the multinational colonial legacies, Cameroon's identity consisted of diverse tribes and lineages. Dickson Eyoh, a Cameroonian-born professor and scholar who writes about the many facets of African politics, addresses this multimodal identity. He writes that “the intense cultural pluralism (evidenced by the co-existence of Islam and Christianity alongside indigenous systems of belief, and a population divided into more than 100 ethnicities) branded Cameroon as the crossroads of Africa” (Eyoh 253). Cameroon has a multitude of identities. Its politics are equally nuanced. There has been an ongoing fight for the Anglophones to be visible and avoid erasure in government and everyday occurrences.

Migrants returning and returning encounter these complexities, determined to do so consistently while making sure they are well-dressed for the return. Dressing well takes precedence over the long flight and prevailing heat. In line, a man slightly ahead of me is wearing a heavy sports coat and slacks. He is sweat-drenched. A woman behind me notices and pokes fun at him. She is from Belgium, is returning home, and is also well-dressed.

Later, my dad will criticize me for not dressing better at the airport. I will defend myself, explaining I would rather be comfortable on a 48-hour journey than be in heels, and he will tell me I am not arriving well. In my ignorance, I arrived in a t-shirt and borderline pajama pants (as my father will later call them).

I dare to laugh with the woman laughing at the man with the sports coat. He is laughing, too, but defending himself. He is determined to leave the airport with every article of clothing in place. They are speaking in Pidgin.

They remind me of my aunties and uncles. I could see them at the crowded house parties in New Jersey, Maryland, and D.C. Among the reigning Makossa and Soukous artists playing on cassette tapes, between the dancing, the sweat, the Heineken beers, and homemade African dishes, relatives and family friends would laugh about each other, about others, with insults and jabs flying, at maximum volume.

My mother, generally soft-spoken and quiet, would sometimes interject with a piercing but comical critique. Everyone would laugh hard and loudly. These public roasts felt like an improvisational show that would always draw spectators, some joining, everyone laughing or responding to emphasize their investment in the moment. I would always watch, but I was too young, too American to participate. Even if I got it, it was a space reserved for the adults. I never knew how to name the banter, but later, I saw it marked in Ato Quayson's work. Quayson, an English professor and scholar in post-colonial and diaspora studies, describes these spontaneous outbursts among strangers as "misunderstandings." These public jabs are something Ato Quayson reflects on in his writings about Ghana and interactions in the marketplace. In speaking about it, he identifies a relationship "between pedestrian, pedestrian and hawker, pedestrian and motorist, or between one motorist and another. However, the traded insults turn out to be an important aspect of the intersection of spatiality and spectatoriality" (Quayson 17). These relationships include spectators and place. I hear the country's pulse in this banter and feel closer to it.

By the time I leave the airport, it is dark. "Welcome to Cameroon," my dad tells me excitedly after he fishes me out of baggage claim and helps me into a car. Here, the war's effects are present. Within the range of the airport, there is a military presence. A curfew is in place, so we cannot leave the city. Regions are blocked off, including the area where my mother grew up. We stay at a hotel and plan to arrive in Buea the following day. Traffic keeps pedestrians and cars on top of each other. In the dark, the heat persists. I am a blur. When my visa photo was taken, it looked like a funhouse mirror reflection. In my official entry to Cameroon, I am unrecognizable. This photo will later become leverage for bribes and keep me detained at a police stop.

In the morning, Douala looks different and indescribable. Outside are dilapidated buildings, French billboards, red and yellow smog, and unfamiliar bird sounds. I experience most of Cameroon through a window. We drive past open fields that, I am told, once had banana trees and varied flora. They were cleared out and destroyed during the eight years of war. There are homes beyond disrepair. The war scars are everywhere, on people's faces and the energy around me. I think of a quote from Veena Das, a research scholar and anthropologist who does ethnography work in India and places everyday life beside/against theory and literary traditions. She writes, "The crucial point here is that the experience of or encountering of violence reveals one's vulnerability not only to an external world but also to the other with whom one inhabits the world" (Das 200). The violence has left everything and everyone vulnerable. I do not see the violence, but I notice its effects.

In Buea, my father takes me to a house he has been building for our family for several years; I register his excitement and wish to match it. I take a phone recording of him pointing at the large cathedral windows near the stairway, the multiple kitchens, bedrooms, and the marble tiling. He is proud. I learned that this house is the talk of the town. The expenses and labor poured into the project are ongoing. From morning to evening, my dad fights with contractors to ensure the work gets done, as trusting support is complex and contractors are independent. He tells me this is

what he deals with whenever he returns. He tells me the home is for when I return one day and when my sisters arrive. We will have a place here.

He is preparing a home in a country where speaking gives me away, and my passport and visa render me unrecognizable. I may be kin, but I am odd kin. The invitation to return to this strange house feels wrong. However, my father is tethered to this fraught geography.

I thought of birds wired for returning—the people at the airport, migrating back and forth, permanently anchored to home. I hoped to have the same wiring. Nevertheless, I was missing home in Los Angeles. I then got sick, which further alienated me. A relative surmised I was ill because I could not handle pepper sauce. Her solution was to spike my food with pepper until I got used to it. Despite explaining that I had no problem with pepper but with contaminated food, she insisted I needed to acclimate more and endure a trial of spice and solid food, which I had trouble keeping down. I was not too fond of this treatment and wanted to leave. I was ready to give up a kinship with this place. I entered the country believing that my differences could create a beautiful tension.

I was toting interventions from Haraway and her methodologies about string figures and interspecies relationships, potential fabulations needed for a viable future. I hoped to see myself as an outsider/insider in Cameroon's identity. However, I did not and still do not know what to fabulate out of poverty, the war, the returns, and the lack of longing for this place (after longing for it for most of my life). I point to historian and scholar Achille Mbembe and his reflections on blackness and being human. Something is isolating and politically/biologically divisive about it (Mbembe 14). I intended to embrace the different world that held the promise of home. However, I felt more isolated and sick. “Welcome to Cameroon, I was told,” in a way that suggested Cameroon was a frustrating anomaly. It also hinted that my being is not built for this place. I realized then that if I am an odd kin in the U.S. and an odd and sickly kin in the place that was supposed to be home, there would be no hope for a home that truly felt welcome. Thinking of Mbembe again, I wondered if this friction spoke to a deeper political unrest as Cameroon changes. Cameroon is changing, and our humanity is changing with it.

When I got better, I spoke at a slower pace. The sadness morphed into a kindling anger. I had different, more mature conversations with my family. My mom shared things that burdened her that she never shared before. She said, “Well, now you are here, so you can understand my feelings.” Despite feeling untethered to this place, I was gaining more access to my family history.

Mbembe talks about the complexities of Black Diasporic experiences, which became more apparent the longer I stayed in Cameroon. I felt the friction in my body, a sign that some new fabulation was forming. I carried the anger for weeks after my return to the States. I recognize now that I was angry because a part of Cameroon I understood through my parents’ stories no longer existed in the present. I am grieving an old promise of back home—a return I fabulated out of my parents' stories.

When I showed one of my aunties the footage I recorded of Douala, she told me the quality of life had worsened since she left in the early 90s. Still, she has every intention of returning one day. When I asked my relative why she wanted to return despite the conditions, she told me, "Home is home." There is no other option.

Our driver, a long-time colleague of my father's, told me he once lived in the States and returned. I witnessed him lose his cool on the road, drive over a road divider after encountering an unmarked dead end, and banter in a not-so-playful manner with marketplace sellers. Despite his frustrations, he chose to return for good.

Black diaspora studies scholar Tiffany King identified migrant returns in the *Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, where she creates a speculative reading for examining Native Indigenous and Black relationships. She describes the witnessing of a Jamaican woman sweeping sand out of her yard. The labor appears futile (King 5). Similarly, I came across something in *Poetics of Space* where philosopher Gaston Bachelard recalls a story he read about a street sweeper taking pride in his broom. The broom mediates nostalgia and aspirations for the future (Bachelard 44). In both instances, the broom enters multiple temporalities. It also signifies a promise. This act of sweeping and maintaining a home and the returns to it ties to scholar Janet Donohoe's work on place and memory. Donohoe writes, "Familiarity arises because of the bodily memory of how to move through and in a place" (Donohoe 29). Donohoe and Bachelard, who speak about the body holding memory, address phenomenological ties to place and contextualize why migrants return. Like the broom, the returns polish childhood and young adulthood memories. Returns offer a respite, a sense of belonging, and the promise to reconnect with kin. I remember the way the woman on the plane recognized me through place. For the migrants at the airport, their returns possibly feel like constant points of recognition. Although Cameroon will be different after the war, the memories and nostalgia are fixtures.

While I hesitate to return to Cameroon, I accept that this might change. On my last day in Cameroon, on our drive to the airport, a policeman stops us to check our documents. He slowly thumbs through each passport page, intent on finding fault and trapping me in a bribe. He lands on the visa photo and takes the time to examine it. "What happened to your face?" My dad, the driver, and our guide rush to my defense. I find myself unable to hold back either. I am erupting with them, glaring at the officer with no fear. After a struggle, he lets us go. As we press on toward the airport, we discuss what happened. The men in the car, including my dad, replay the question, "What happened to your face?"

I reply, "Ask your country!" To my surprise, everyone laughs. Without realizing it, I gave my first roast. As my frictions transform me, I might feel the draw to return, like my parents and the people waiting at the airport, ready to greet Cameroon. Or I may tether to Cameroon differently as we work through our respective differences as kin.

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SUBMERGING THE RECORD: IMAGINING THE OCEAN AS AN ARCHIVE

INTRODUCTION

Reports released in 2022 revealed that sea levels are increasing at alarming rates, with satellite records documenting the global average sea level at "101.2 millimeters (4 inches) above 1993 levels" (Lindsey). Devastating floods in Pakistan in 2022 and in New Zealand in 2023 have made us more and more aware of the ocean's destructive power. Warming temperatures and glacial melting, alongside more intense storm systems, could lead to increases in disastrous floods that will likely become deadly fixtures of our future. In the wake of rising sea levels and mass floodings, we will have to reckon with our conceptualization of water. The closer the ocean comes to us, the more our relationship with and understanding of the marine will change. Without a clarification or a reconstitution of water's place within the Anthropocene, we will be unprepared to assess, accept, and address the ocean's transformation.[10] At the same time, we will have difficulty confronting the intricacies of our watery pasts and our encounters, perceptions, and treatments of the ocean – histories of violence, oppression, pollution, and appropriation; and histories of reverence, fear, communion, and conservation. To help us come to terms with these sea histories, and to construct oceanic representations for our potentially aquatic futures, it is imperative that we find a way to mediate our changing relationship to and history with the ocean. By constructing representational modes through which we can characterize the ocean, we might

[10] For more on the Anthropocene, see Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin's "Defining the Anthropocene" in *Nature*, vol. 519, no. 7542, 2015, pp. 171-180 and Carolyn Merchant's *The Anthropocene and the Humanities: From Climate Change to a New Age of Sustainability*. Yale University Press, 2020.

discover new and more productive ways of existing and co-existing, of remembering and creating.

One productive way to navigate our conceptions of the ocean is to imagine it as an archive. By representing the ocean as an archive, we can better understand its role in our past and present, and we can better comprehend our shifting connections to it. Imagined as an archive, the ocean becomes an unpredictable agent, a collector, collections manager, and record keeper; it also acts as a repository and record of the past – whether that be mammalian, piscine, or geologic. While traditional (dry) archives are concerned with appraisal, preservation, and posterity, oceanic (wet) archives subvert perceived notions of power, preservation, collection, and categorization. The concept of an oceanic archive posits a rich arena for artistic interpretation for how this space and agent might function and what such a record might contain or disclose. By theorizing an ocean archive in contrast to traditional archival conceptions, and by examining Derek Walcott's "The Sea is History" and selections from Ellen Gallagher's artistic oeuvre, I hope to construct and concretize the theory of a marine archive as a site of memory and transformation.

THEORIZING THE TRADITIONAL ARCHIVE AS A SITE OF POWER

To understand theories and representations of the ocean as an archive, and to set it against traditional conceptualizations, we must first discuss the history and theorization of dry archival spaces. The Society of American Archivists defines the term "archive" in several senses. First, archives are records created by or related to specific people, families, or organizations (Society of American Archivists). Archives are the totality of records held within an institution or they are the institutional body itself (Society of American Archivists). Archives are also the physical place or digital repository where records, artifacts, ephemera, or memorabilia are stored (Society for American Archivists).[11] Within the facility of an archive, materials, often flat and made of paper, vellum, leather, cellulose acetate, or cellulose nitrate, are placed onto shelves in acid-free folders and archival-quality boxes for posterity and research, constituting a collection of various histories to be studied and understood over time. These documents form the basis of the institutionalization of knowledge. Theorists of the archive note that archives are not neutral repositories of inactive records imbued with latent historical value; archives and the documents stored, classified, and stewarded within them are sites which "establish and reinforce power relationships in society" (Jimerson 135). Archives, and the archivists whose labor supports them, are not impartial custodians of history; archives and archivists are institutional agents with the power to shape history, politics, and culture in both equitable and non-equitable ways (Collier and Sutherland 8; Cook 170; Derrida 1; Jimerson 202).

[11] As enticing, and potentially rich, as an exploration of "place" in relation to digital archives seems, the scope of my argument will examine "dry" archives in contrast to "wet". Digital archives lie in a complicated zone outside and between these categories, and while a conversation between all three archival spaces is useful, my discussion cannot include digital archives at length.

As Jacques Derrida posits in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* the power instantiated in archival institutions originates in the root word for "archive," "*arkhē,"* from the ancient Greek "*arkheion,"* meaning the "residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons,* those who commanded" (Derrida 1). Derrida emphasizes that these magistrates and their private, domestic spaces were vested with real and symbolic power to both "make and represent the law" (1). Only this select group was granted the privilege to interpret records, to store them, and to give them meaning. Derrida stresses the importance of "residence" for archives, arguing that to house an archive is to align it with both private space and public access (1). In this theorization, archives, and their activities (gathering, categorizing, interpreting, and guarding), originated in power and privilege, which allowed both the organizational site and the records to operate as an institutional memory for the law, its custodians, and its enactors (4). The *archons* privatized and domesticated seemingly public records within their homes and enacted processes of record keeping for public use through acts of categorization and control. In the context of the law, the archive as we know it was born as an infrastructure for the continual preservation, production, and stewardship of "*archivable* content" (17). In gathering and classifying records, in housing and mediating materials related to human activity, the archive served and continues to serve as institutional authority over representations of memory and history.[12]

The notion of power in the archive manifests in the way archives are established as both physical and institutional records and physical and institutional spaces. Dry archives are artificially created locations and systems, with their own order and processes of categorization. Records deposited within archives are carefully chosen and appraised for their value to law, history, scholarship, or culture. Archivists actively construct memory through appraisal, arresting moments and knowledge in time and space (Cook 170;173).[13] In this process of arresting, the archive also isolates memory, sometimes preserving a record away from its contexts, or other media considered unworthy of the archive. Thus, constitutive of the dry archive is the idea of authenticity (Eastwood 127). Archivist Terry Eastwood argues:

> Authenticity is contingent on the facts of creation, maintenance, and custody. Archives are authentic only when they are created with the need to act through them in mind and when they are preserved and maintained as faithful witness of fact and act by the creator and its legitimate successors. To be authentic memorials of past activity, documents must be created, maintained, and kept in custody according to regular procedures that can be attested. Naturally, these contingencies – which endow the document with authenticity – are observable not in the document itself but rather in the procedures. (127)

[12] It is worth noting that archival collections and documents are not "history" or "memory," but "surrogates for memory" (Jimerson 214). For more on archives and the construction of memory, see chapter 4: "Constructing Memory" in Randall C. Jimerson's *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (pp. 190-236).

[13] In a conversation published in the October 2020 issue of *Metropolitan Archivist,* archivists Zakiya Collier and Megan Williams discuss an alternate aspect of the arresting power of the archive when they note that archival practices are closely tied with acts of surveillance. The activities of collecting and preserving, and sometimes even the materials stored in an archive, are part of processes that provide institutions with power through information – information which can be used in oppressive and violent ways.

For records to be considered "authentic," they must have a provenance – a detailed history of their own – that verifies their factualness and the origins of their creation. Based on the materiality of that record, a plan for custody and care is devised; this care must also be agreed upon by others, becoming institutionalized. Through this preservation, the record maintains its veracity and its value. Dry archives are thus spaces of artificiality and appraisal. History is cordoned off, categorized, and boxed – existing in a stratified system. This system maintains an order for records and supposes that the system is accessible and infallible.[14]

While dry archives exist as spaces of power, and while they maintain seemingly ordered systems of fact and authenticity, they also inhabit a tenuous space, balancing between destruction and accumulation (Derrida 12). In creating an archive, archivists both preserve and destroy, resist annihilating impulses, and move towards the preservation of various histories. In this space, categorizations and decisions are made; some documents are excised, and some are enshrouded within the archival fold. Thus, "if the archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record" (Manoff 12).[15] Consequently, the actions of archivists, the policies of archives, and the standards of archival organizations are inherently linked to "memory construction" (Jimerson 218). Acts of memory construction and the methods which support them, no matter how inclusive or transformative, continue to perpetuate the lacunae within dry archives, especially in that such acts can exclude materials which lie outside the archive's agenda.[16] Oceanic archives also manifest their own destructive and conservatory natures, but the dichotomy of annihilation and preservation exists in different ways. Wet archives do not actively exclude materials, nor do oceanic archivists autonomously decide what belongs in the archive or what is preserved.

DRY ARCHIVES, WET ARCHIVES

To begin imagining an ocean archive, it is useful to examine what happens when the dry archive becomes wet. The documents in dry archives form a fragmented narrative, building records from a wide array of materials – consisting of anything from maps and manuscripts to diaries, court records, film, or scientific specimens. Archives can never contain every document or object pertaining to their purpose, and often, they contain rare or unique items. These

[14] For more on the peculiar forms and epistemologies of traditional archives, see Ann Laura Stoler's essay, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form" in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar,* pp. 267-279.

[15] Established archival practices and theories often exclude modes of record creation and recordkeeping significant to marginalized communities. For more on archival elisions and decolonizing the archive, see Collier and Sutherland's 2022 article "Witnessing, Testimony, and Transformation as Genres of Black Archival Practice." Zakiya Collier and Tonia Sutherland discuss the ways critical archival studies and Black studies can transform encounters within the archive for Black scholars.

[16] In her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism,* Ariella Aïsha Azoulay declares the archive as a "regime that facilitates uprooting, deportation, coercion, and enslavement, as well as the looting of wealth, resources, and labor" (170). Archives' practices, she argues, beget acts of violence through appropriation, interpretation, classification, or erasure. The link between traditional archives and imperial violence warrants further discussion, but an inclusive examination lies outside the scope of this paper.

documents tend to be paper or sensitive materials. Usually, these items are stored in climate-controlled locations to preserve their integrity. Documents are placed in folders made of acid-free paper, to further ensure preservation and protection.[17] Water entering these spaces would theoretically be disastrous.

Several years ago, when I worked as an archives and collections management intern at a history, art, and science museum, I was a second-hand witness to water's infiltration of archival spaces. The museum in question rests just inland of the Long Island Sound in an area prone to flooding. Decades before I worked there, water from the sound flooded the archives and collections' storage. In the flood, leather books swelled, pages warping and bending under the rush of seawater. Inks ran and mingled. Mold threatened to grow. Mud and sand from the tide found their way into the bindings of books, obscured islands on seventeenth century maps, scraped the faces on paintings, and nestled into the fibers of hand-woven rugs. In this submersion, objects of human history, science, and art acquainted with water from the sound. In the aftermath of flooding, the archivists and collections manager moved towards drying and salvaging what they could by air drying, dehumidifying, and vacuuming the water away. Physical changes were unavoidable. The archive's materials were warped, stained, and bloated, but most objects survived.

While water can be disastrous for a dry archive, it is the defining element of an oceanic one. Water is a force, a residence, a medium, a repository, an environment, and an agent of transformation. Once a record, object, or substance is submerged, it changes in unanticipated ways, and its materiality dilutes or enmeshes with that of the marine. If we submerge our understanding of archives, if the archive itself becomes wet rather than dry, the possibilities of interpretation and understanding grow through similar processes of dilution and enmeshment. Thus, our connection and relationship to the ocean can transform. Unlike dry archives, ocean archives are divested of power through the very nature of their existence. Ocean archives are not institutional spaces invested with time, resources, and human organizational structures through which narratives are constructed. The ocean, while changed by human activity, refuses neat narrativization and categorization, demonstrating that human understanding of the marine is limited in the wake of the ocean's vastness and depth (Alaimo 154). While the ocean's archival record contains many mementos of human activity, the ocean is a multispecies space, a geologic and chemical space, in which myriad histories interact. The ocean holds fossil records, markers of geological activity such as volcanic clay, and particulate matter older than recorded time. It houses fish and marine mammals, lost cities, wrecked ships, and human bodies thrust into the deep. The ocean's surface was and is the site of conflicts, of imperial histories, and its depths hold the record of those losses.

[17] My discussion of archivists' labor in a passive sense is not careless or accidental; archivists' work is often effaced from definitions of the archive. Azoulay is one of many who remark on how archives are "envisaged as driven by the invisible hands of abstract guardians, independently of the actions of people whose lives were atomized into collectible records" (179). In autonomizing the archive, its laborers and their labor are abstracted.

THE OCEANIC ARCHIVAL IMAGINARY

The ocean's vast and diverse record differentiates it from traditional archival spaces associated with power and knowledge in that the ocean's archival role is a dual one: it functions as both archive and archivist. It collects, curates in non-traditional ways, preserves with its own unusual methods, and serves as a repository of records: animal, plant, geologic, and chemical. It is a receptacle for human artifacts and debris – flotsam and jetsam, rubbish and refuse, bodies, dreams, and histories. The ocean does not choose its record, but neither does a larger organizing entity. It is not a space concerned with authenticity or the valuation of its contents. Human materials are tossed in, drowned, or dumped. Piscine and animal remains become part of the ecosystem; piscine, animal, and vegetative lives continue on in their cycles. In the ocean, non-aquatic objects become saturated with salt, their compositions changing to suit new environments. While this salinity and aquatic materiality can threaten to destroy, it is also a space and agent that works to transform and assimilate that which has been deposited within its record. If we plunge into this archive, we may see its transformative effects and confront the atrocities of our pasts and presents.[18]

We often associate the land with history, with monuments, and with memory. The land is where things of the past are buried and it is where records of events are kept, but Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea is History" refuses the primacy of landlocked histories, instead turning to the sea as a receptacle and preserver of a past that has been expunged from the terrestrial register. Walcott reimagines the ocean as a kind of archive, one which accepts the records of the African Diasporic community. While land archives may have scant evidence, or even have erased these histories through white supremacist structures, "The Sea is History" suggests that traditional material or written records need not exist to legitimize a community's past.[19] Within the sea, history becomes communal and rests on the seafloor – a floor that can be accessed and seen. In the first stanza, an unnamed and unseen interrogator questions Walcott's speaker about this history, prompting the speaker to locate and explain its perceived absence:

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
>
> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
>
> in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
>
> Has locked them up. The sea is History. (lines 1-4)

In these lines, the interrogator asks the respondent to locate physical markers, events, and personages connected to the respondent's history in a way that condescends that history. These

[18] For more on the ocean's histories, and its representative and imaginative potentials, see Helen M. Rozwadowski's *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans,* especially chapters 4 and 7.

[19] Zakiya Collier and Tonia Sutherland touch on a similar theme when they argue that silences and erasures in the archive can serve as testimony, urging Black archivists and scholars to "interrogate the silencing effect of the archives and explore testimony as a Black archival practice" (11). Through such practices, silences can be "witnessed" and "transformed" through reflection and affective experience within the archive (12).

questions attempt to locate the "where" in a telluric "here" – a place in time, a place on a map, a place that can be pointed to, charted, and visited. The interrogator also attempts to arrest this history within traditional records such as monuments that can be visited and read; battles written, recorded, and remembered; and martyrs whose lives have been cataloged.[20] The interrogator knows well that the respondent does not have traditional access to these kinds of surrogates for cultural memory. However, the respondent's reply subverts the shame intended by this line of questioning, locating their ancestral and cultural histories within the sea. The sea preserves these cultural memories within its archive, as a "vault," a space of secrecy, security, and special access. The questioned speaker seems to have access to and knowledge of that vault, of the sea's archive. The speaker reclaims this moment, demonstrating that their past is housed and recorded within the sea. The sea holds and *is* the speaker's history; it has the usual markers of historical presence "locked" within it. The speaker takes us through this ocean archive, this sea history, telling us "I'll guide you there myself" (line 37). The speaker implies that it takes understanding and active looking to immerse oneself within the ocean archive. Once recognized as a repository of history, the sea becomes a rich site to be explored.

In Walcott's imagining, the sea catalogs and houses records of enslaved peoples' forced transport across the Atlantic. Walcott aligns Biblical moments from Genesis and Exodus to the struggles enslaved Africans faced during the Middle Passage. The sea keeps track of the "packed cries, /the shit, the moaning" (lines 10-11), analogizing enslaved Africans' transport experience to Noah's Ark in Genesis. The sea remembers and keeps visible and invisible records of these journeys, of the torture and torment, of drifting moments, of crowding, of dehumanization, of being broken, of physical pain and loss. Within the sea, within the "Exodus," "Bone [was] soldered by coral to bone" (line 13). Walcott's speaker recounts the ocean's unique way of preserving and record-keeping: organisms join, become a part of something larger, intertwine and grow together. The human material, "bone," connects on the ocean floor to the ocean's own material "coral." These two disparate substances combine in this space to transform the remains of the deceased into physical markers within the ocean. This coral eventually becomes "colonnades" (line 39), which lead to underwater caves that Walcott's speaker describes as "cathedrals" (line 45). Under the water, the geologic is metamorphosed into a space of worship and memory for those who have been submerged and whose histories have been drowned. But in imagining the sea as both history and a space of worship, Walcott restructures the relationship to the sea. It is a space of reverence and memory rather than something to travel across, control, or mediate. It is a site of mourning, return, and histories in the making.

Much of the archival material of Walcott's sea is submerged beneath the surface, however his ocean archive does not stray far from the shore, resting somewhere between the epipelagic

[20] In *Memory of the Modern,* Matt K. Matsuda explains, "Though both monument and text locate and preserve the past through visual practices (seeing, reading), words have an explicit pedagogical function which is only implied by the veneration or celebration of commemorative imagery. Monuments guard the past, but words instruct the present and teach the future" (62). The interrogator's focus on monuments and their commemorative quality highlights the passivity of such objects: monuments are surrogates for events imbued with a fixed collective memory.

and mesopelagic zones. When the interrogator asks the speaker "Where is your Renaissance?" (line 33), questioning the value of these histories, the speaker replies:

> Sir, it is locked in them sea-sands
>
> out there past the reef's moiling shelf,
>
> Where the men-o'-war floated down … (lines 34-36)

The "Renaissance" and the history of the speaker's culture lies at a close distance. It exists, and the archives which contain its history require only "goggles" and a guide to enter (line 37). In this way, the speaker notes that this history is not inaccessible. It is near the shore, past the reefs, in an area close enough to swim to. In this closeness, it is also implied that the interrogator never thought to look to the sea, to view the sea as a record, or to take seriously its contents. Walcott's speaker, in focusing on the visible and accessible seashore, imagines an archival space not so far removed from land. While this archive is submerged, it does not lie outside the depths of memory, of access, of visitation. It is a space that, while richly imagined, can actually be seen and apprehended. This is an archive that, outside the world of the poem, requires only one type of mediation: a breathing apparatus.

While Derek Walcott's ocean archive is grounded in the historical and the memorial and looms close to the shore, visual artist Ellen Gallagher's oceanic imaginary is moored in the transformative possibility of the ocean and the mediating possibility of art. In the space between metamorphosis and mediation, Gallagher's paintings imagine and represent a deep ocean archive connected both to Aquafuturist imaginaries and histories submerged in the Atlantic. Gallagher's artworks, especially her water related paintings, are made from combinations of collage, plasticine, penmanship paper, paint, and cutouts – all materials that can be found in most traditional, dry archives. In her art, Gallagher is "attentive to the innate properties of each medium … responsive to their malleability and the productive disturbances that can occur when they are brought into dialogue" ("Catalogue Essay"). In this sense, Gallagher is conscious of the ways in which her paintings evoke the ocean's archival presence. Each layer of the ocean is accumulative, organized in its own way across time and space. Gallagher's work demonstrates this deep understanding of oceanic space and time as mutable, recognizing how it functions as an archive, and building layer upon layer of disparate material into a cohesive, if not always readily legible, whole.

Her works, particularly those dealing with Black histories like *Oh! Susanna* and *Bouffant Pride* often manifest in grid-like structures, working to mediate archival materials, such as Black magazines, or memories of minstrelsy. These foundational works use the elements Gallagher later builds upon in her *Watery Ecstatic* series and other water related pieces. These paintings and collages use painful memories of the past and archival records of Black experiences to transform and play with memory and identity. Gallagher uses plasticine and repeated features, such as eyes and mouths, to reconstitute forms and conceptions, as well as disrupt the viewer's meaning-making processes, leaning into the destructive urge of the archive. Through this method of grid-like organization and material accumulation, Gallagher challenges the traditional notions of dry

archives, reading archival works and spaces as constantly in flux. Archives and their materials can be played with and changed over time. This archival play is central to much of Gallagher's underwater work, especially in the *Watery Ecstatic.*

Fig. 1, Ellen Gallagher, *Watery Ecstatic,* 2001. © Ellen Gallagher. Watercolor, ink, oil, plasticine, pencil and cut paper on paper. 27 1/2 × 39 1/2 inches / 69.8 × 100.3cm. [GALLA 2001.0015]. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

In the *Watery Ecstatic* series, Gallagher confronts and reshapes the painful histories of enslaved Africans and transforms a site of loss in the Atlantic through an engagement with Drexciya.[21] Drexciya is a mythic Black Atlantis configured as a "site of survival" for the "descendants of pregnant enslaved African women who were cast overboard during the horrific ocean crossings of the Middle Passage" (Chan 248). Drexciya is not only characterized as a site of survival in Gallagher's work (wherein the stories and histories of these descendants dwell), Drexciya is also an archival space and a communion with the deep ocean. In *Watery Ecstatic,* 2001 (fig. 1), Gallagher places the floating heads of Black women within a white space. Their placement is horizontal, but their paper cut-out hair pasted onto the page acts as the vertical axis of her grid. This hair is the first accretion, hinting to the layered materiality of the ocean's archive and its organizing principle: bodily remains rest on bodily remains; hair mingles with

[21] See Suzanna Chan, "'Alive … again.' Unmoored in the Aquafuture of Ellen Gallagher's 'Watery Ecstatic,'" especially p. 248.

seaweed; bones become coral. The women's bodies and the marine coexist within the space of the water. In Drexciya, hair transforms into an aquatic plant or a fish. The bodies of the living merge with their new ecosystem, and perhaps in this Aquafuture imaginary, the survivors become archivists, seeking a record of their drowned pasts while simultaneously contributing their bodies to the record of their oceanic present. They comprise a new existence, wherein they seem to form a symbiotic relationship with underwater worms, who take residence in their eyes. Through this new animal view, these women, and Gallagher through them, construct a new understanding of the ocean as a space of intimacy and union.

Ellen Gallagher's 2006 piece *Untitled* (fig. 2) further establishes the idea of the deep ocean as an archive while simultaneously demonstrating Gallagher's own impulse to mediate the sea. In this piece, Gallagher layers materials on top of penmanship paper, again hinting at a grid-like organization. The penmanship paper also is suggestive of the archive, of the potential for written words to narrate the page. Within this piece, Gallagher effaces and lightens some of the lines of the penmanship paper, implying contact with the water, or submersion. This submersion has possibly erased the words, leaving us with oval stacks organized vertically across the page. Moving down from the far left of these pink and brown ovals to the far right, (reading in a grid) Gallagher presents us with seemingly random words. Of the legible newsprint it reads: "money," "dyed," "coloring," "newsman," "enchantment," "crowded," "upsweep," "back," "night," "full-cap wigs," "splash," "change it," "beef," "Detroit," "cities," "sausage," "Chicago," and "social affair." These clippings may seem random, but within the watery space of the painting – a space full of dark, viscous shapes with eyes and faces – I read these to be sunken words, refuse, the remains and remnants, piled high and submerged deep. These are what survive somehow in the incomprehensible deep, stacked layer upon layer, each unable to breach a surface. Language becomes incomprehensible in water. There is no need to use penmanship paper if the record of written words just gets washed away. Instead, the ocean archive exists as many layers, capturing form and shape, but transforming it within the water, so like the form at the bottom of Gallagher's *Untitled,* it dilutes, spreads out within the water, and becomes new and other forms, resisting the impulses of complete destruction by re-fashioning and re-making.

CONCLUSION

In these representational models, Derek Walcott and Ellen Gallagher reckon with the transformative nature of the ocean and reshape human relationships to the aquatic by imagining the marine in the midst of its own archival metamorphosis. For Walcott, the sea memorializes and holds space for interspecies interactions, which allow for the inclusion of the voices and testimonies of those subject to the Middle Passage – testimonies which have often been excluded from traditional imperial and Western archives. The sea is also a site of transformative materiality, allowing for the union of human and coral to create new forms and new meanings. Ellen Gallagher's work similarly casts the ocean in an archival light by attending to the materiality of human objects, such as paper and plasticine as they are transformed under the water, while also imagining the possibilities in human interactions with oceanic species and plant life. In Gallagher's work, the ocean is an interactive site of memory and materiality, where sunken pasts give way to generative futures. Gallagher's oceanic imaginary is full of unsettling

forms and disparate accretions, which dare viewers to embrace the expansive and mysterious marine. Walcott and Gallagher's representations illustrate the transformative and collaborative potential of the ocean as an archive. The ocean can remake; it can destroy; it can preserve; it can dissipate; it can teach; it can recover; it can coexist. It is both a site of memory and memory itself.

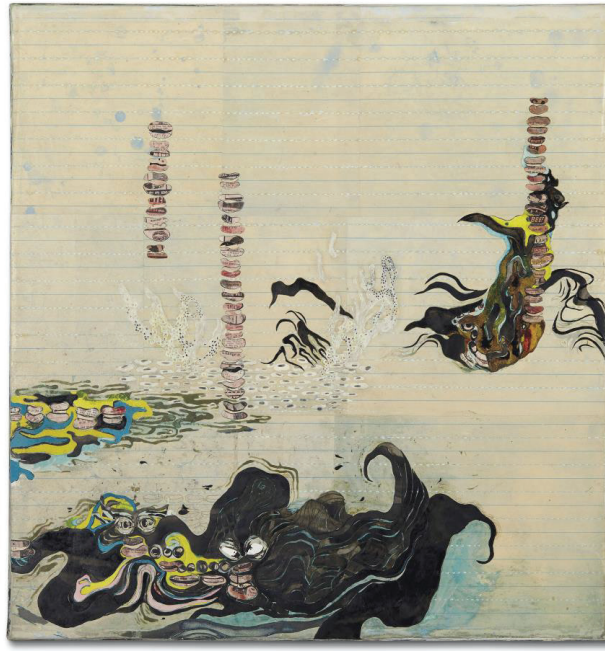

Fig. 2. Ellen Gallagher, *Untitled*, 2006. © Ellen Gallagher. Oil, ink and paper on canvas. 24 × 24 inches / 61 × 61cm. [GALLA 2006.0004]. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

It may be a difficult task to ask us to view the ocean as an archive. But imagined as an archive, and as understood as a site and agent of multiple histories, materialities, and species, the ocean takes on metamorphic qualities, transforming history, memory, and epistemologies into immersive and interactive experiences whereby we can learn from the ocean's record keeping methods as well as its contents. The ocean, unlike human knowledge institutions and the knowledge and memory workers who support them, does not decide what gets recorded or maintained within its archive; it does not decide the types of media; it does not collect with a specific purpose. The ocean is not governed by institutional missions or rules and procedures, instead it is an active agent as well as a passive receptacle. Forms and substances alter within the ocean and because of it. Human institutions and systems used to access history and knowledge have no place in the ocean, which does not abide by such rigid hierarchies. However, our access to the ocean archive is limited by our own tools, understandings, and abilities to plunge into the deep. In imagining the ocean as an archive, we are granted a new hermeneutic wherein marine

spaces and forces act as collectors, conservators, and custodians. The ocean archive amasses materials; it alters them; it asks us for nothing but to look below the surface. Reconstructing the ocean into a new representative mode can help us establish a more fruitful relationship with the ocean. By changing our conception of the ocean to an archival one, perhaps we will investigate what we submerge. Perhaps we will take better care of the archive.

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suckers.

we suck.

we went from *how can we save this planet?*

to, *what planet can we go to, you know,*

once we inevitably suck the life from this one?

in the typical fashion of a species

that believes itself to be deserving

of anything and everything,

we have commodified *every thing* —

it is only fitting now

that we have commodified *living,*

assigned a price tag to a second chance at life.

we suck.

we are mosquitoes —

a swarm of vampiric pests

buzzing for blue veins

bursting with the finest of O positive
taking all that She has to give
jam your plastic straw into Her rind
squeeze her succulence
her vitality from within
'till that grating *sssslllluuurrrrrr p p p*
is all that echoes.

we suck.

Mother Earth has given up —
turned from nurturing humankind —
babes suckling from the breasts
have become beasts –
ravens, buzzards, vultures –
foul fowl plucking, pillaging, pilfering
gnawing at last bit of flesh clinging to Her bones
until the bare barren white is all that glimmers
Sun shining down onto our wasteland
the product of our own greed.

I expect pantheons of deities have given up too
because we're fucking hopeless
putting effort into moving from this beautiful world
only to wring every last drop of life out of the next one —
and how do I know we'll do that?

easy - because we suck.

if I voided your ticket to Mars, earthling,

what would you do?

if we were stuck…

we'd still suck, of course —

but could we suck out the bad rather than the good?

would you jump on this bandwagon instead?

the peripeteia of the Mother's story —

the Earth's own enemy

turned Her personal Robin Hood

straws at the ready,

our very own swords in this battle,

warriors in the fight for our lives —

in the fullest of senses

vacuums catching all that ails Her,

for the Crust and below —

we suck.

can we kill these weeds —

micro plastics, pesticides

plucked straight from our soil

pests tossed aside —

pollutants fashioned by our own hands?

can we purify the air —

condensing the smog of manmade fog —

from noxious fumes to flowing flumes?

straws aimed at the air —

masters of deliquescence,

we suck.

parasites —

labeled as bad, always,

but not bad in all ways —

nonpathogens finding their path again,

into the light of ever-distant Sun —

the redemption of the leeches —

from vehicles of disease in antiquity,

to saving lives and limbs in modernity —

A Bug's Life reimagined —

could we change too? it's up to us —

suckers.

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Utopia as reality: Gabriel Bump's *The New Naturals*

Gabriel Bump. *The New Naturals*. Algonquin Books 2023.

Riots broke out in France. Migrant boats and trawlers capsized off our coasts. Tropical storms churned through the Caribbean. These are the daily catastrophes of our recent memories, and the same ones that afflict the characters in Gabriel Bump's *The New Naturals*. In the face of a changing world, they "held each other at night."[22] They "thought about utopia" (82). After the loss of her infant daughter, Rio, a Black academic in Massachusetts, decides to turn her vision of utopia into reality.

Perhaps surprisingly, the first utopia Bump introduces in the novel is not Rio's. Instead, in the basement of a neighborhood church in Boston, a "white woman, new to the neighborhood," preaches to Rio and other residents, "all white and minor rich in warm coats from London and Paris and Turkey," about creating a "utopia" in which homes would double in value while those with addiction magically disappear from the streets. "[I]magine, a utopia, imagine," she says (6). Outside the church, remarkable gentrification is already underway: Entire neighborhoods are displaced, and year-long establishments become organic, gourmet eateries. The only Black person in the room, Rio listens to a version of utopia that excludes the socially and economically disenfranchised and spells a dystopian reality for Black and marginalized people. That same night, an urge to escape and liberate the oppressed overcomes her, like "ribbons pouring out of her eyes and ears" (11). Rio sees hills and rivers in a vision before losing consciousness, glimpsing kernels of the utopian project that she would later build and name The New Naturals. At the outset of the novel, this scene demarcates Rio's utopian project from traditional notions of utopia and traces its start, on the one hand, to resistance against existing social structures. On the other, it's born out of acute psychological fracture.

[22] Gabriel Bump, The New Naturals (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2023), 21.

In *Black Utopia*, Alex Zamlin writes that "Black escape to a new world was the first idea of black utopia."[23] For the wayward characters in the novel, escape is recourse to a reality that is no longer livable. They have been *pushed to their breaking points*. It's worth noting that some type of psychological break precedes almost every character's search for utopia. Whether it's epiphany or transmogrification, they experience something out of this world. Rio becomes a flying streamer, then loses consciousness; Sojourner, a world-weary journalist, astral projects herself next to the sun; Bounce, depressed and unemployed, steps into traffic and sees into time itself. In their daily lives, the characters "drift" (266) and feel "violent urges" (11), a double-consciousness that induces "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder."[24] When ruptured, these breaks in consciousness, fantastical and speculative or cosmic in the manner of Sun Ra, present altered psychological states as a possible channel toward a new reality, a "burning need for something else."[25]

And what is this something else? What do the characters in *The New Naturals* seek? Beyond a "not-here" or something akin to Rio's underground community, Bump compellingly and critically turns the concept of home into a prototype of utopia. When Rio is pregnant with Drop, she imagines her unborn baby as a "five stories tall" giant (12), walking beside her on the streets and sitting next to her in the church basement, towering over her. Beyond the confines of the home, Drop is outsized and uncontained, simultaneously not made for this world and unprotectable within it. Inside the home Rio and her husband Gibaltrar share, however, the unborn baby shrinks and turns life-size, "partying when caffeinated, doing cartwheels at odd moments" (19). At home, Drop is small and protected. She is a regular child. At home, Rio and Gibaltrar put up security cameras and invert the constant surveillance they endure outside of it. By simply being a place in which a child can grow up naturally, the home indicts the precise impossibility of life in the outside world. It's no wonder, then, that home is the exact refuge each character names and seeks: Sojourner "wanted home" (64); Bounce, just before walking into traffic, wonders how he ended up so far from home (147); Elting and Buchanan are homeless, looking for a bed and roof (190).

Bump is far more interested in writing about the characters, their desires, ambitions, and failings, than *The New Naturals* itself. So the novel is that much richer, though never overwrought. While Bump's prose is beautifully kinetic and wry, its dialogues are at times stressed with too heavy of a hand. Bump uses repetition to invite a script-like realism, often effectively, but in excess it starts to decelerate the hurtling and otherwise immersive prose:

"Right," Dustin said.

Another glass broke, a bigger glass. Maybe, a small plate.

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[23] Alex Zamlin, *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea From Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 21.
[24] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (North Charleston: Millennium Publications, 2014): 5.
[25] Sun Ra, "My Music Is Words," in *Sun Ra Collected Works*, 1:xxxii.

"Right?" Snow asked.

"Right?" Snow asked again.

"Right?" Snow asked once more.

"Right," Dustin said. "I'm just trying to help."

"He's worried about Bounce," Aviary said.

"Right," Dustin said. "Bounce." (166)

The novel is at its strongest when it dwells on interior states; its undercurrent of nostalgia casts an especially tender light. Indeed, Bump's characters always keep an eye on the past even as they imagine the future. They talk about previous utopian movements like the Brazilian quilombos and Back-to-Africa, while Sojourner's name harkens to Sojourner Truth. Streams of consciousness often drift into childhood memories. In one essay, Pavla Veselá writes, "In traditional utopias, the relationship of the old and the new (or the past to the future) borrowed from colonial discourse, casting off the old world in the same terms as colonial discourse treated the abject Other—that is, 'wild, savage, tribal, barbarous, despotic, superstitious, and so on' (Rieder 30)."[26] Inverting the premise of traditional utopias, *The New Naturals* gestures longingly to the pre-colonial past. In the present, Rio's grandfather's land is replaced by a strip mall. But once upon a time, her family's land "was once someone else's land, which was once no one's land, just land, beautiful land" (287). These larger-than-life reflections, stumbled upon as though by accident, are effortlessly moving.

The eventual downfall of Rio's utopia is unavoidable, even predictable. Propped up by an anonymous Benefactor beholden to investors and return on capital, The New Naturals' end is written into its design. "'That's how it works for people like us,' Rio said, drifting. 'At the whims of others, uncertain, in danger'" (284). But *The New Naturals* is not burdened by tragedy. Instead, like Tom Moylan writes of critical utopias, we witness how these characters "rejected utopia as 'blueprint', but nonetheless preserved it as 'dream.'"[27] No one leaves The New Naturals unchanged. Soon, someone tries again. And perhaps again after that. "Thank you for coming home" (291), we'd hear toward the end of the novel, that place brimming with the promise of sanctuary and protection. By then, we'd know that utopia's possible existence matters far more than its actual survival.

[26] Pavla Veselá, "Neither Black Nor White: The Critical Utopias of Sutton E. Griggs and George S. Schuyler," in *Science Fiction Studies* 38, no. 2 (July 2011): 270.
[27] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986): 10.

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"WRITING UP" THROUGH PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY: TEACHING FIRST-YEAR WRITING THROUGH THE THEME OF GROWING UP

Many students enter First-Year Writing with anxiety, dread, or disinterest. "I'm a bad writer," "I'm not creative," and "I hate writing" are some common statements I have heard from First-Year Writing students. This anxiety or dread about taking a writing course is coupled by many students' first year in college. The required course across universities in the United States aims to prepare students for college-level writing, and thus often overlaps with other "first" experiences for students, such as their first semester in college and their first experiences away from home. Sarah M. C. Robertson et. al's "Randomized Controlled Trial Assessing the Efficacy of Expressive Writing in Reducing Anxiety in First-Year College Students" cites numerous factors, including "financial responsibilities, academic demands, pressure to succeed, quality of sleep, overall physical health, and generating social relationships" for generating anxiety (1041). This study specifically links these new demands with "instability" and "identity exploration" that comes with the "emerging adulthood development phase that occurs between 18 and 25 years of age" (1041). Despite these "firsts," it is not their first-time writing.

By contextualizing First-Year Writing within an educational continuum, from elementary school to college, and by applying a playful teaching philosophy, I argue that instructors can combat students' negative attitudes toward writing. I introduce the idea of "writing up," or the ways we grow as writers over time, as an important principle of my writing classes. In addition, I analyze the ways students can embrace the metamorphoses they are experiencing in college and apply that to their writing. Through personal anecdotes, pedagogical theory, and sample lessons, I unpack the frameworks that shape my First-Year Writing course, which is informed by childhood and youth studies.

CHILDHOOD STUDIES & PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As a First-Year Writing Instructor at St. John's University, I developed a course theme, objectives, assignments, and a pedagogical approach that would purposefully remind students of their writing trajectories. My course, titled "Growing Up: A Process of Self-Discovery & Reflection" draws on my background in childhood and youth studies and children's literature to consider the theoretical ways writing studies and youth studies intersect. Writing and growing up are both fluid processes of discovery, exploration, and reflection. As with development, writing is a progressive and continual process, not an isolated product, that can be observed through the practice of drafting, revising, and workshopping. Since many First-Year students are "in-between" the stages of development and starting college, they have the unique opportunity to reflect on their writing journeys thus far. In addition, by viewing writing and identity development as mutable, I have worked to counter student misconceptions that writing is fixed and irrelevant to their studies.

Motivated by the field of childhood and youth studies, my course theme centers on the experiences of children and adolescents and inspires interdisciplinary research. As an interdisciplinary field, childhood and youth studies draw from all disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, linguistics, education, literature, history, and anthropology, to explore shifting conceptions of young people across time and place. Students then can explore the intersections of this field with their diverse majors and interests. Through four major units that cover personal narratives, creative writing, critical analysis, and research projects, our readings and class lessons incorporate literature that reflects on childhood and adolescence. By having a broad, but shared theme, my goal is to create a community of writers who still have the freedom to devise their own paper topics. In addition, I have found that applying a playful pedagogical approach decreases writing anxiety.

Theories of play have not only informed ideas about education and entertainment in young children, but also in adults. New studies on playful pedagogy in higher education reveal the success of this framework for inspiring creativity, generating critical thinking, building meaningful relationships, and decreasing anxiety about grades. By adopting the theory of playful pedagogy, I treat writing in my course as a playful practice and was first introduced to the idea through Mark Sample's entry on "Play" in *MLA's Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities.* Through the perspective of a digital humanist and game-designer, Sample argues that though "Play is commonly thought to be the domain of children, or of adults engaged in child-like activities–games, performances…" it is an essential component of learning. Sample argues that play is different from work in that it is "voluntary, separate from other aspects of life, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and simultaneously more or less dependent upon make-believe." Playful pedagogy in higher education is informed by widely accepted data on the value of play for child development, such as in UNICEF's *Learning through Play,* a digestible, yet comprehensive advocacy brief. By extending the theory of play to the college-classroom, students can find that writing is enjoyable, fun, and productive.

To accomplish a pedagogy of play in higher education, scholars indicate a series of distinctions between what they call "serious pedagogy" and "playful pedagogy." Sample writes that while "serious pedagogy" is the traditional approach in higher education, a playful one values the following, instead: "process over product," "low stakes over high stakes," "discovery over objectives," and "divergent thinking over convergent thinking." In combination with

lessons, activities, class dynamics, and grading policies, the goal of playful pedagogy is to create classrooms that encourage learning through the same activities that make learning fun in childhood. In Shelby Boehm and Lindsey Franklin's "The Case for Playful Pedagogy in the High School English Classroom," they list "imagination, responsiveness, and laughter" as important principles for learning.

PUTTING PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY INTO PRACTICE

One of the major revisions I made to my grading and assessment practices when I adopted playful pedagogy was eliminating examinations and quizzes and requiring several short papers. Scholars and educators across grades have reacted to the notion of "teaching to the test," especially for standardized tests or unit exams. In "Playful Learning in Higher Education: Developing a Signature Pedagogy," Rikke Toft Nørgard, et al. respond to what they call an "emergence of 'the corporate university' or 'the knowledge factory'" in the value of "teaching to the test, reproduction of information, criteria-based assessment, and clear quantifiable outcomes" (272). These methods of assessment are especially challenging, and arguably harmful, in writing classes. Instead, student retention and understanding of a unit is measured through their short papers, as well as through their revised portfolio. Revisions are encouraged by allowing students the opportunity to resubmit any paper at any time in the semester. I consider the in-class writing, drafting, and brainstorming that students do to scaffold a paper in their final grades.

In addition, I made participation, defined as attendance, in-class engagement in writing and group activities, a more substantial part of the final grade. Through an active-learning approach, students engage in dialogue with each other in each class as they tackle different "games" or activities that practice a new skill. For example, when teaching techniques for structuring or organizing ideas, I create what I call a *Frankenstein* challenge, or what *The Pocket Instructor: Literature* terms "The Cut Up." Students work in small groups to detangle a text whose paragraphs have been rearranged. *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing* also offers useful prompts and activities that practice a particular writing skill. Free-writes that respond to music and visual art typically accompany my classes. By drawing on this pedagogical approach, I also aim to create thematic and instructional cohesion. Another approach I have developed to facilitate playful pedagogy, and to allow students to critically reflect on their educational journeys, is through the idea of "writing up."

"WRITING UP:" VIEWING WRITING AND EDUCATION ON A CONTINUUM

Instead of conceiving of first-year writing as a new course, viewing education on a continuum shows the interconnectedness of students as writers. I developed the expression "writing up" from Margaret Mackey's notion of "reading up" to reflect on the places, spaces, and stages of life that have shaped our writing. By asking students to critically reflect on their writing experiences thus far, we examine the connection between growing up and writing. In "Reading from the Feet Up: The Local Work of Literacy," Mackey attributes literacy development to our conception of place, and more specifically to the site of our feet. She writes, "Because reading...involves *moving* through the story, it seems reasonable to posit that for the early reader, developing foot-knowledge, acquiring an embodied understanding of the local world, features in the development of literacy as it does in the development of language itself" (Mackey 329). In her auto-bibliography, or memoir of reading, she calls her growth, "reading up," and discusses the challenges of finding literature she enjoyed as she matured. Scholars like Mackey have investigated the way our reading habits and interests begin in childhood and, I, extend that same

interest to writing. I challenge students to recall how they have grown as writers and from what places. By aligning writing with development, students become self-aware of their growth as writers and the habits they would like to break or continue. Through playful pedagogy, they are given the opportunity to write in ways that once sparked their childhood imagination or to depart from punitive measures that harmed their confidence. As Jill Parrott argues in "Some People are Just Born Good Writers," I combat the notion that writing is inherent or genetic. Instead, students work to identify what aspects of their development have shaped their identity as writers.

On the first day of class, I remind students that while they may be new to college and new to this course, they have been practicing writing their entire lives. While there is a lot of research on writing and literacy development in children, "Only a handful of studies survey writing development across the years of schooling," state Frances Christie and Beverly Derewianka in *School Discourse: Learning to Write Across the Years of Schooling.* Through a linguistic analysis of writing developments from elementary school to high school, they aim to fill in gaps about this writing progression. At the start of the semester, I lead icebreakers that ask students to reflect on their educational journeys. I have anecdotally kept note of the correlations between students' attitudes about writing and their school memories; more formal studies are needed to establish this connection. Students that express dislike for writing, or do not call themselves writers, recall negative writing experiences in the past, related to required book projects on summer reading or not receiving good grades on papers. Students that enjoy writing often have positive memories of elementary, middle, or high school, recall doing creative writing assignments, and being praised for their writing abilities. One way that I foster that critical reflection on their past writing selves is through personal narratives.

SAMPLE READINGS AND UNITS

Beginning with personal narratives as our first unit, I assign excerpts from *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls and *Americanized: Rebel without a Green Card* by Sara Saedi to reflect a wide range of childhood experiences. These pieces beautifully narrate specific moments in time with authenticity and vulnerability. For example, "I was on Fire" by Walls describes her memories of being treated in the hospital for burn wounds through her child-self's perspective. She uses descriptive language and imagery to carefully express her conflicting emotions toward her neglectful, yet caring family. Saedi uses humor, historical background on Iran and American relations, and pop culture references to recount her memories growing up as an undocumented immigrant. In "Sporting the Frida Kahlo," she unabashedly describes tweezing her eyebrows for the first time to impress her child crush. Enriched by videos and other media, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Ted Talk, "Dangers of a Single Story," our personal narrative unit emphasizes the importance of narrating "what we know" and "where we know from." Adichie advocates for sharing personal narratives to counter harmful stereotypes and misunderstandings about diverse groups of people. She recalls reading popular British stories in childhood and realizing that they did not resemble her own upbringing in Nigeria.

Allowing students to write about their unique backgrounds is also described in Eugenia Zuroski's "'Where do you Know From?': An Exercise in Placing Ourselves Together in the Classroom." Zuroski offers a useful framework for creating a community of writers that "know from" different backgrounds. Instead of asking students to write about "where they are from," this framework allows writers to share whatever moments, people, or places in their life have shaped them thus far. When students are allowed to write about "where they know from," they

tend to produce vulnerable pieces that would never fit into my long list of suggested paper topics, such as writing about the first day of high school or playing a favorite game in childhood. Aside from showing students that their unique voices and experiences are valued, I also aim to show the applicability of personal narratives to other disciplines and writing styles.

The open-access collection of essays in *Bad Ideas about Writing,* edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe counters popular myths held by composition students, including the idea that "First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing" or "First-Year Composition Should be Skipped." I assign several short texts from this collection to explain how our units on personal narratives and creative writing can benefit academic and argumentative writing. For my skeptical students who wonder why we spend so much time on personal narratives and creative writing, I teach Tyler Branson's "First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing." It dispels the idea that this required course only prepares students for "college" or "academic writing." As we investigate through our later units on critical analysis and research projects, creative writing trains students to apply innovative thinking and problem-solving skills to any discipline. For example, I enjoy sharing Sofia Lico and Wendy Luttrell's "An Important Part of Me: A Dialogue about Difference," which exemplifies collaborative storytelling between a senior scholar, Wendy Luttrell, and a young adult, Sofia Lico. Luttrell engages in dialogue with Lico about her immigration experiences between five and fifteen years old.

This sociological research, which contributes to the field of childhood and youth studies, pushes the boundaries of personal narration and qualitative research. Kim Holflod's "Playful Learning and Boundary-Crossing Collaboration in Higher Education: A Narrative and Synthesising Review" argues that playful pedagogy is especially adept at creating interdisciplinary connections. She writes that it "creates a potential for developing and sustaining social, creative and motivating learning methods at the boundaries of professions and disciplines in higher education" (472). Moving into our second unit on other creative forms, we investigate the applicability and benefits of practicing poetry, fiction, and multimodal composition.

The clearest link I can establish between writing and growing up is through children's and young adult literature. I incorporate readings that are often read during childhood or adolescence to create a sense of comfort and creativity in students that may not have been felt since elementary school. At the same time, students are pushed outside of their "comfort zones" by writing in new styles, thinking critically about their writing decisions, and sharing their writing during workshops. This balance of the new and the familiar is meant to simulate play. Our literary inspirations during this unit include reading excerpts from Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming,* which exceptionally combines personal narratives, poetry, and the bildungsroman. We also reflect on the way fairy tales like "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood" shape our conceptions and expectations of children. Reading and discussing fairy tales opens discussions about plot structures, adaptation, and revision. I offer Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man & Other Fairly Stupid Tales* as an example of a text that challenges genre norms and embraces multimodal composition. Children narrate through multiple modes, such as through drawing, speaking, and writing, with ease. Yet, as we mature, educational demands and standardized testing decreases the value of multimodal composition. These playful texts allow students to experiment in ways that bolster their self-confidence, as well as their analytical, argumentative, and research-based writing.

The importance of practicing argumentative writing in first-year composition is perhaps less controversial than creative writing. However, as Cydney Alexis has argued in "Creative Writing is a Unique Category," creative writing is applicable to all forms of "academic" writing and critical thinking. During our units on argumentative writing, we do not abandon our personal narrative and creative writing skills, but instead use them to create writing topics that are of personal interest and that problem-solve. For their last paper, I encourage students to write about topics within the scope of youth studies that they are personally invested in and that address a problem with public relevance. Students have produced a variety of projects that explore topics like teaching financial literacy in high school, LGBTQ+ support clubs in college, dress code policies in elementary school, the effects of social media use, drug epidemics in young adults, the importance of extracurriculars, and censorship of children's reading. Some students choose to write traditional papers, while others create slideshows, webpages, letters, and graphics. Typically, their final paper topics stem from previous papers.

In addition to completing our final unit, I carve out time at the end of the semester for final reflections. Alongside my students, I reflect on the lessons, readings, topics, and procedures that were successful and those that could be improved. Students submit reflections on their growth as writers in their final portfolios. One anecdote that stays with me each semester is a former student who had dropped her first-year writing courses two times before, for fear of failure. In her portfolio, she expressed her triumph in sticking with the course and described her new-found positive feelings about writing. Though it is often difficult to assess the long-term impact of instruction in higher education, seeing small and big metamorphoses in students over the semester affirms my practices. More importantly, students leave with the skills and confidence to reflect on their development and change as writers in preparation for the future.

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CORRUPTFILE

we are deeply saddened by the recent tragedy in _____
this is another senseless act we simply cannot stand for
our thoughts and prayers are with INSERTNAMEHERE

it is easy to write your statement with artificial intelligence
scary how technology can conjure the very words you scorn
when it only needs FACIALRECOGNITION to flag our image
it reads the sacred name given to us by our grandfather and
tells the nice people at the desk to heed our presence: *warning*

the digital disadvantage of a metamorphosis unbecoming
a corrupt code burning numbers into the flesh of the earth
and one malicious link is all it takes for the virus to spread
because in the name of protection, a headscarf is a flight risk
they see a flash of skin and rush to label that person a terrorist
and when the sirens blare you want the hair to fall off of my
brother because he is innocent, not like the criminals you
see on your television but

we must think of the people
what good would it do to have a vagrant in the street
only upstanding citizens have families and jobs
you know what they say about food stamps and welfare
don't get me started on the newcomers who trespass
it's not like our country was founded on stolen land
everyone feels so entitled nowadays
when we are the modern slaves

and you admit we are of the same human condition, same but

s e p a r a t e

equality
align to the middle, written in twelve-point font
the center of the page but never centralized and
wait is the keyboard moving on its own accord?
FAILURETORETRIEVEINFORMATIONFROMHOST

your identity does not make you the victim
this is our land our resources our wealth
we earn we deserve we are the center

quick! reboot your computer
do it now before—
SIGNALLOST

“Untitled”
Anjeanette Ang

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WHERE IS MIRAJI? *MOON AND STARS ARE ALL IMPRISONED IN THE DUNGEON OF TIME*

INTRODUCTION

Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, and one of the most poetic languages from South Asia contains various distinct features that make it different and special in the realm of languages. The complexity and profundity of the language have caught the attention of many; very few could dive deep into it to explore its treasures. Dagh Dehalvi, one of the remarkable pre-partition poets of Urdu once said:

اردو ہے جس کا نام ہمیں جانتے ہیں داغؔ ہندوستاں میں دھوم ہماری زباں کی ہے	Dagh, we are the esoterics who know this language called Urdu In Hindustan, the fame of our language prevails

While there are numerous elements that contribute to the sophistication of this language, ghazal holds a significant position in the domain of World Literature. According to Rekhta, the literal meaning of ghazal is “conversing with the beloved” and this subgenre of the poem is usually based on 7 couplets. Ameer Khusru, the legendary poet from Persia, composed the first Urdu ghazal, Ze-hal-e-Miskin, and over centuries, the form of the ghazal evolved, developed, and ripened. From Khusru to Faiz, the ghazals of Urdu and their poets have been wearing the royal crown of classic North Indian literature. One of the majesties of the kingdom was Miraji. Born in 1912 Lahore, Miraji was called a “phenomenon” by N.M Rashid, another remarkable Urdu figure (Rekhta). In 2023 Noor Habib, and her co-translator Zara Khadeeja Majoka, won the PEN/HEIM 2023 Translation Grant Award for their English translation of Urdu "Oblivion and Eternity Within Me" by Miraji. The acknowledgment of his work by the world compels readers to ask: what is Miraji’s place in world literature, and how effectively have his poems have been translated into English and other languages? To define World literature, the term was coined by Goethe as Weltliteratur in German, and spread in the world when his student, Johann Peter

Eckermann published *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* in 1835, three years after Goethe's death. Goethe said that "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach" (Damrosch). This paper is a close reading of Miraji's poem, "Moons and Stars are all Imprisoned in the Dungeon of Time", and claims that the intertwining of personal reflection and universal themes of mobility and cultural aesthetics of poetic language not only positions the poem within the realm of world literature but also serves as a reflection of the literary landscape of Miraji's time. Translated by the author of this paper, this poem compels us to see both: Miraji's individuality as a poet and his engagement with broader literary movements in the global literary canon.

URDU GHAZAL AND WORLD LITERATURE

The Indian subcontinent has a distinct poetic form. Every region of it composes a unique tapestry of folk music and poetry. In Urdu, it is the ghazal that is known worldwide in literature for its vibrancy and style. It has such distinctive characteristics that, in the words of David Damrosch, the Ernest Bernbaum Professor at Harvard University:

> "A close familiarity with Shakespeare's sonnets won't help us much in appreciating the distinctive drama of a *ghazal* – a lyric form popular over many centuries in Persia and north India, with its own set of rules for rhyme and its own assumptions about the ways in which poets experience love and longing and pour out their sorrows in highly ironic verse" (Damrosch 8).

This appreciation from a scholar of World Literature shows that the Urdu ghazal should be a part of the World Literature curriculum across the world. Its "distinctive drama" still overwhelms the people of North India. On most of the sufi shrines of this part of the world, ghazals are often sung as qawalis and make people intoxicated. Therefore, this high and unique expression of one's feelings that is not a usual part of literature everywhere needs to be recognized by the world. For that, ghazals of North India should be a part of the curriculum of World Literature. In the 19th century, Goethe used the term world literature for the first time. However, his idea of world literature, or Weltliteratur, was futuristic. Thus, his words, "the epoch of world literature is at hand, and each of us must work to hasten its approach," are still relevant. Since the composition of the first literary book, *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* the literary domain has observed myriad shifts in production, circulation, and influence. According to Amir R. Mufti, "World literature is a discourse of mobility—of literary works, authors, genres, forms, styles, and so on. But in its existing forms, this discourse has only become possible by suppressing the realities of enforced forms of immobility" (Mufti). This statement compels the scholars of world literature to understand the progressions and limitations of this critical field. If World Literature allows the Orient languages to be a part of the global literary canon, the absence of reliable mediums for their propagation halts that process. In their article, "The Necessity of Translating Urdu

Literature into English: A Plea to Rend the Iron Curtain," Jamil Asghar and Muhammad Uzair argue that "Today, if in the international academia and publishing industry Urdu literature is lost in anonymity, it is because it has not been communicated to the world as such" (Asghar, Uzair 1). The circumstances were way more challenging for Urdu in the pre-partition era. Orsini states: "The pre-1947 era of Urdu literature was marked by extreme obscurity and provinciality in terms of its English translations. The number of English translations during that period was extremely small—almost negligible. Moreover, most of those translations were incomplete, deficient and done mostly by the non-native English translators" (Orsini 6). However, Miraji's work was not dependent on these external factors. It was centered around the local but had the capacity to attract the global audience. Damrosch, in *What is World Literature*, stated that "For any given observer, even a genuinely global perspective remains a perspective *from somewhere*, and global patterns of the circulation of world literature take shape in their local manifestations" (27). *Moons and Stars are All Imprisoned in the Dungeon of Time* fulfills all these standards with its unparalleled magnetism and literary aura that can transport the reader to a world where every word seems to hum with meaning and emotion. Its cultural representation and locally situated essence make it eternal. In the subsequent paragraphs, we will closely read *Moons and Stars are All Imprisoned in the Dungeon of Time* to comprehend Miraji's ghazal as an ideal of mobility, cultural aesthetics, and poetic language.

THE MOBILITY IN *MOONS AND STARS ARE ALL IMPRISONED IN THE DUNGEON OF TIME*

In the context of poetry, "mobility" can refer to the ability of poetic language or imagery to evoke a sense of movement, change, or dynamism within the poem. It encompasses the fluidity and versatility of language, allowing the poem to shift between different perspectives, emotions, or narrative threads. Mobility in poetry can also denote the poem's capacity to transcend boundaries or limitations, whether physical, emotional, or conceptual, thereby creating a sense of expansiveness or openness within the text.

چاند ستارے قید ہیں سارے وقت کے بندی خانے میں لیکن میں آزاد ہوں ساقی چھوٹے سے پیمانے میں	Moons and stars are all imprisoned in the dungeon of time, But oh cupbearer, I am free, my friend, in this small goblet.

This first couplet of the poem depicts the true essence of mobility, where Miraji connects local to global and individual to universal. For him, he has more freedom than the celestial bodies who follow the strict patterns of orbits and time. Francesca Orsini, the renowned Italian scholar of South Asian literature, in her article, "World Literature, Indian Views, 1920s–1940s" states, "In early-twentieth century Indian periodicals, world literature was more about discovering the world and finding one's place in it than about creating fronts and alignments" (Orsini 3). Miraji's

writings align with this idea. This particular poem is all about seeking a place in the world where he could fit well with all of his flaws, strengths, capacities and incapabilities. These flaws and capabilities can be individual as we will discuss later in the paper, or these strengths and in capacities are the products of colonial oppression exerted on Indian people that took the identities of people away from them and compelled them to assimilate with the foreign culture. This shift from one perspective to another perspective brings significant mobility present in this work. In the second couplet of the poem, the deviance of Miraji from the conventions and the obvious is more explicit. He is not afraid of the fleeting nature of life and waits for something that is more wholesome and meaningful for him.

عمر ہے فانی عمر ہے باقی اس کی کچھ پروا ہی نہیں تو یہ کہہ دے وقت لگے گا کتنا آنے جانے میں	Life is transient, life is eternal, I don't care about it, (But) tell me how long will it take for you to come (to meet) and go

Here, life is ephemeral for him, and he is not concerned about its finite nature, but what matters the most for him is the meeting with his beloved, and there he is only bothered by the time constraint that can create hurdles in the way of this rendezvous. Themes of yearning and longing are deemed crucial in most romantic poetry, but Urdu poetry interweaves love and devotion for a human beloved and the divine in such a way that it becomes difficult to state with certainty what the poet's true aspiration was. It seems the for their entire lives they dwell in this uncertainty and longing for the beloved. This yearning is an integral theme of Urdu ghazal and it is vivid in the next couplet as well in which Miraji says:

تجھ سے دوری دوری کب تھی پاس اور دور تو دھوکا ہیں فرق نہیں انمول رتن کو کھو کر پھر سے پانے میں	Distance from you was not distance at all; intimacy and distance are delusional It does not make any distance if we lose a priceless jewel and retrieve it.

This couplet again denotes his open-mindedness and free spirit. Intimacy and distance are merely two terms of illusion and carry no concrete significance. One can find a place in the world by transcending these limiting boundaries and not grieving losses and defeats. Eventually, everything can fall into place and can be regained. But what is the precious jewel Miraji is talking about here? Is it the loss of cultural tradition that was lost in the Raj era? Or anmol ratan is none other than the Koh -e- Noor diamond that was possessed and implanted in the British crown? This couplet implies that he is optimistic that after regaining everything the people of united India will be back to their glorious past and the era of darkness will remain in the memories only. Thus, the realm of World Literature allows people not to only enjoy the cultural and literary aesthetics of a particular region but also to get aware of their histories. However, this

paper emphasizes the charm and aesthetics of Miraji's work that should earn him acclamation in the World Literature.

THE CULTURAL AESTHETICS AND THE POETIC LANGUAGE OF GHAZAL

The aesthetics and imagery of pre-partition North Indian poetry showed the amalgamation of Indian and Central Asian cultures. The Sufi influence, romanticism and longing, regret and despair, and the symbolic use of tavern as a meeting place for lovers are some of the distinct features of a ghazal. In the next couplet of Miraji's ghazal, he says:

دو پل کی تھی اندھی جوانی نادانی کی بھر پایا عمر بھلا کیوں بیتے ساری رو رو کر پچھتانے میں	Two moments of blind youthfulness, achieved through foolishness, Why should I spend my entire life regretting, crying?

The guilt of misconduct in the South Asian Muslim youth denotes to the dilemma of zameer (conscientiousness) and nafs (self). The incorporation of this concept in the poetry resulted by the influence of Sufi poets on the India, such as Baba Farid, Waris Shah, Nizamuddin Aulia and Ali al-Hujwiri. All of them were great Sufi poets who contributed significantly to the propagation of Islam in South Asia through their soft charisma and belief in non-violence. However, in this couplet, Miraji seemed to overcome the guilt and says what ever happened in the youth should not affect the rest of my life. He goes on by saying that:

پہلے تیرا دیوانہ تھا اب ہے اپنا دیوانہ پاگل پن ہے ویسا ہی کچھ فرق نہیں دیوانے میں	Initially I was madly in love with you, now I am my own fanatic My passion is same, there is no difference in this mad lover

Again in this couplet, Miraji talks about the different phases of his life. From loving his beloved to loving and accepting himself does not only speak about his evolution as a human but also points out to his passion which might change its subject but not its intensity. Deewana in Urdu is not a common lover but someone who is so devoted to their lovers that they forget about everything else. This concept can find its roots in the Sufi teachings of Fanaa where the lover annihilates and becomes the beloved. But here, the love for beloved has been converted to devotion to one's own self as if Miraji has found his beloved inside him. The next couplet of the poem helps more to shift the topic of the discussion from the beloved to self.

خوشیاں آئیں اچھا آئیں مجھ کو کیا احساس نہیں سدھ بدھ ساری بھول گیا ہوں دکھ کے گیت سنانے میں	Happiness has come, that is good, but I do not care I have lost my all senses in singing the sad songs

Here Miraji shows that the agony and grief have taken control of him and he is indifferent towards happiness. This idea does not result from nihilism but just a hyperbolical way of portraying the emotions in a ghazal. The creation of such poetic forms, structures, or literary techniques that are associated with a specific cultural tradition or literary movement forms the literary aesthetics and sets the standards of the poetry in a particular region. Therefore, these poetic forms, which travelled from the East and fascinated most of the North Indian writers, played a substantial role in shaping the Literature of this part and "For Miraji, too, Eastern poetry was a discovery and was intimately linked to his project of expanding the Urdu poetic idiom--" (Orsini 4). The above-mentioned couplet of him contains all the sensory elements such as sense of happiness, feeling, wisdom and grief. All of them are universal feelings and in this way, he adds a vivid imagery to his poetry and connects it to humans all around the world. The last couplet of the poem reads like this:

اپنی بیتی کیسے سنائیں مد مستی کی باتیں ہیں میراجیؔ کا جیون بیتا پاس کے اک مے خانے میں	How should I share my past? They are intoxicated tales The life of Mira Ji was spent in a nearby tavern

This couplet emerges from profound cultural facets the Indian society was centered around on. The explicit mention of place nearby informs the readers that, "Miraji shows that a peripheral mentality was not necessarily the only stance for Indian colonial writers and intellectuals" (Orsini 19). Their understanding emanates from the center, the core of the culture that is very nearby, very local. In this couplet, Tavern is a place that is not a typical bar we usually find in the Western countries. It is a complex place. Sometimes, it can represent the transient nature of worldly pleasures; the other times it can symbolize the human heart or soul, where the seeker experiences the divine presence or union with God. This idea of tavern as a place in ghazal circles back to the main idea of this paper: the place of *Moons and Stars are All Imprisoned in the Dungeon of Time* in World Literature. From mobility, to cultural aesthetics and poetic language of this poem, everything makes it the most suitable choice to be taught as World Literature along with the Sonnets of Shakespeare and John Milton. Miraji was also a believer of more diverse audience of his work generally, and of Urdu literature specially. In the words of Orsini:

"His extraordinarily eclectic and wide-ranging Urdu translations of early and contemporary poets from East and West, from the Minnesänger to Walt Whitman, Pushkin to François Villon, Charles Baudelaire to Li Po, Catullus to Korean, Chinese, Laotian, and Japanese poets, which also appeared in periodicals like *Adabī dunyā* (*Literary World*, Lahore 1928) in the 1930s and '40s, reveal an eclectic, omnivorous and confident "thick" engagement with world poetry. These translations were often embedded in long historical-critical essays that performed an important world-literary pedagogical function, situating each poet or body of work within

their historical and social context and making them the outcome of particular possibilities and not representatives of "national qualities" (Orsini 14).

This analysis shows that by incorporating local in his work and connecting it to the universal, Miraji did not want to craft a mere Urdu poem but a masterpiece of World Literature that discusses regional and universal issues, cultural style and the distinct linguistic features of a ghazal. *Moons and Stars are All Imprisoned in the Dungeon of Time* can be a part of Masterpieces of World Literature because it is still imprisoned in the dungeon of old pre-partition era which was full of mysteries, glories, and agonies.

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GAMING (AND WRITING) THE SYSTEM: USING VIDEO GAMES IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

In keeping with the theme of the issue, my goal in this essay is to track two metamorphoses throughout, one pertaining to the pedagogical shift we must deal with as instructors in higher education, and the other to my own shift as a critical educator. We, as teachers, are no longer discussing the "oncoming digitization" of the world and of learning, that time has passed. We are seeing students whose main mode of writing and written communication is through texting, the internet, social media, and gaming servers like Discord and Twitch. Because of this, I have had great success incorporating video games into my composition classrooms. As a critical educator, I believe the goal must no longer be to simply teach writing for an academic setting because that will "help" students through college and "in the workforce." The first shift I want to highlight is the metamorphosis in the ways students are willing and able to learn. Rather than understanding students as *un*willing or *un*able to read, write, and learn, a complaint I have often heard from educators, I believe this metamorphosis presents an opportunity for educators to teach in new ways with new texts and mediums. Additionally, this work requires the teaching and discussion of critical thinking, critical literacy, and critical analysis in order to foster a critical consciousness.

First, video games can help students with understanding what critical literacy is and how everyone in the classroom brings with them their own literacies and knowledges of the world. Secondly, through in-class discussions, I have seen how students begin to realize how those literacies affect them and their fellow classmates even in ways that may not be fully seen or understood. Some students come into class sessions which feature video games fully prepared with a knowledge of the mechanics of a game and the maneuvers available to them. Once we've seen gaming literacies in practice, my students and I are able to discuss the ways in which people who grew up with knowledge of and investment in larger more oppressive systems, much like experienced gamers, are able to do adjust the game to work for them. Discussing gaming

literacies makes other systemic literacies, which is to say ways to read and understand broader cultural, economic, and political systems, more visible and tangible to students who may not have a clear picture of the ways those systems affect people. Explicitly, these are systems at the root of broader social and cultural problems such as white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. This systemic literacy, when bolstered by critical pedagogy, can also give students language to speak about power and oppression that they may *feel* in their everyday lives but not explicitly understand. Ultimately, this metamorphosis which produces students who are eager to learn in new ways offers educators the opportunity to reveal oppressive systems to students and give them the language and space to begin or continue their journey toward critical consciousness.

I have been writing about the three games I'll discuss in the following sections in varying ways since 2021. To track the second metamorphosis, the ways in which I have changed my thinking about video games in classrooms, I want to italicize the writing in the body of this essay to indicate what was added or changed in this draft. I am grounding this decision in a Black feminist rhetorical tradition because, as Jaqueline Jones Royster explains in *Traces of a Stream*, "the thinking is exploratory, unfinished, open-ended" (23). I hope to also convey the idea, in keeping with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that knowledge and ways of learning are never static but instead ever changing, constantly being reoriented and reframed. My constant changing of the language and writing in this essay reflects the constant changing and shifting of students and the ways in which we learn and grow together. Therefore, rather than making a traditional argument, in this essay I instead hope to illustrate my experience using texts like video games to foster critical literacy and learning in students and show that this practice also offers opportunities to learn and grow as a critical educator.

DEATHLOOP

The first of three video games I often use as texts in class is called *Deathloop*, produced by Bethesda Softworks. Typically, I ask students to volunteer to play through the opening sequence of the game, and while one student plays the rest of the class answers a set of questions I pose to them in their own writing *while also participating in an open discussion*. The sequence altogether takes about 30-40 minutes and *the first time I did this in a classroom, I tried* to switch players every 10-15 minutes to allow the student who was playing an opportunity to do some writing of their own. *Now that I have done this lesson several times, I ask for volunteers, but I make sure to get both a veteran gamer and a non-gamer to play the game. In this way, my utilization of this game allows me to focus on the different types of literacies that students bring with them into class. By highlighting gaming literacy, we are able to see that different people form and utilize different literacies based on their lived experience and thus begin discussion about critical literacy and what it is.*

Deathloop is a first-person shooter game in which you play as Colt, a man whose identity and purpose are unknown to the player at first. More interestingly, purpose and identity are unknown to Colt as well, and the player and character, together, must discover the mysteries of

the setting in order to piece together the story of the game. Because of this, I felt that *Deathloop* would be a good tool to practice the act of "noticing" as it applies to doing analytical writing. *Now, I realize that it does more than sharpen their ability to notice what is happening in the game. It can also be a way for me to more easily begin talking about the critical literacy practices necessary for establishing a type of systemic literacy, or perhaps better put a literacy for reading the complex, real-world systems that govern the behavior of human beings in society.*

Some of the questions included:

> What do you see on the main screen? What questions do you have about this screen? Can you infer the meaning or the goal of this game based on this screen? What can you know? What do we see on the screen after the opening cutscene? What do we make of our surroundings? What questions do we have now? We see "break the loop" and then Colt acknowledges that he sees it too. What is interesting about that? What questions do you have so far? What questions do you have about the story? About Colt?

Among other things, these questions encourage students to ask questions of their own, a vital tool to writing analytically because analytical writing is predicated on being able to ask questions that lend themselves well to thinking through problems. Thus, I felt creating an assignment where students could practice both noticing and asking good questions was worthwhile. *Originally, I thought that* getting my students to think about the language being used on screen *would help them with "noticing" more generally. What I didn't realize is that this does a better job of highlighting the gaming literacies that some students have and others don't. To notice the language on screen, one must possess a basic gaming literacy, otherwise the words are just words, they have no deeper meaning other than the literal meaning they convey.* Colt can see some of the words that appear on the screen which help the player, but it is Colt's ability to see the words at all that is interesting. This is because typically in video games the character the player is controlling cannot see words on screen because they are relaying information to the player, not the character. *Of course, the player needs to know that in order to know something is off, they need to know they should be noticing something, they need to have specific literacies. In reviewing the questions, I can see that some of them are very obviously coming from a place of advanced gaming literacy. As someone with at least two decades of gaming experience,* it goes without saying that my gaming literacies are much more well-refined and specifically crafted than someone who is not a gamer. This can pose a serious barrier to entry for some students. *My original goal was to have students notice specific things in the game. But what I realized was that exploring and discussing what they did and didn't notice was far more interesting and productive. This is because when our goal is to help students recognize the different literacies they each have, some of which allow for advantage in a given situation, we can start exploring ways in which different literacies allow for different ways of engaging with and maneuvering within systems of power.*

For example, I have had multiple students who, without being prompted, go into the settings of the game and make changes that suit their play style. One would not know how to change these settings without prior knowledge of what changing those settings would do to the gameplay. In fact, some might not even know settings exist and can be manipulated. I had a student once, after watching someone else play, immediately change the "sensitivity" settings, meaning the character and camera that the player was in control of would move a little more slowly, offering the student more control of the game. From here it is easy to make the connection to a type of systemic literacy that some possess and others don't.

Experienced gamers change the settings as a matter of instinct*, they know that it is within their power to change things to make the game work better for them.* In *What Video Games Have to Teach us About Learning and Literacy,* James Paul Gee calls this the "Insider Principle," which contends that, in a gaming situation, "the learner is an 'insider,' 'teacher,' and 'producer' (not just a 'consumer') able to customize the learning experience and domain/game from the beginning and throughout the experience" (212). *However, this misses the fact that only some people get to have that identity as "insider," and this identity depends on if the player is a "gamer." If a student is not a "gamer," their knowledge of the way the game's settings work is extremely limited. As an educator this offers the perfect opportunity to highlight the difference in literacies that students have in the world outside of the classroom. The "Insider Principle" is therefore something to be critically interrogated in class.* Gee explains that "critical learning […] involves learning to think of semiotic domains as design spaces that manipulate us […] in certain ways and that we can manipulate in certain ways" (43). *But to* know *that you can manipulate a system to your benefit a student must have a preexisting literacy of the given system they are trying to manipulate. Opening space for students to critically examine the differing literacies in the room allows for us to understand that some people will have different knowledges about the very systems that govern our behavior in the classroom and utilize that knowledge when navigating systems everywhere. In short, the discussions possible when playing this game can* give way to a type of system literacy.

TEXT GAMES

Text games have been the trickiest to use in class and have produced varying results. This is reflected in the amount of italicized writing, illustrating how much it had to be rewritten, reworked, reconceptualized. In class, I ask students to access a website called https://textadventures.co.uk/ and choose one game from the extensive list of text-based games that they feel drawn to. After about 20 minutes of play, *I ask students to write about the experience and, more specifically, about the methods they employed to play the game and how those methods worked. Text games are some of the oldest types of video games. Reminiscent of "Choose your Own Adventure" books of the 80s, these games rely on players typing in commands and receiving feedback from the game's system. Without practice, these games can be challenging and confusing. In a traditional sense, these games can be useful in* getting students to think about word choice, authorial intent, and rhetorical strategy. *Again, though, this activity*

highlighted a sense of differing literacies among students, this time situated more significantly around a student's ability to use words in a way that produces a desired result. In a sense, these games remove the accessibility barrier in place for games that require use of a controller (like Deathloop) and offer an experience that relies on typing and reading instead. Students more practiced in writing for a specific purpose tend to do well, while other students struggle with not just the format of the gaming experience but getting what they want or need out of the game. After the first play session students are put into pairs and asked to choose a different game to play with a partner. Following another 20 minutes or so students write together on *not just how they played* the game but how the experience of playing was different with a partner.

Many students struggle at first, *claiming that all of the commands they enter either don't work or progress them through the story in a way that is unhelpful. One* game *that seems to be chosen a lot is* called *The Shack* by a creator named System Masters. It states at its opening, "you can see a sliver of light coming from a crack in the wall ahead of you. The rest of the room is in total darkness" (System Masters). *Many students* explain that they try walking, running, poking, jumping, and reaching at the light, but they were met with the same response from the game's AI: "You can't do that. (Try putting a noun after a verb)" (System Masters). *When we discuss other possibilities, we often come up with the word the game wants (which is "look"). This allows students to talk about why word choice is important in writing situations, but if our goal is critical literacy and consciousness perhaps more importantly this allows students the space to discuss the ways in which rigid uses of language and word choice can be stifling to creativity and communicative ability in all forms of writing. This is especially true given the continued rise of AI writing tools, a topic too complex to properly engage with here.*

Furthermore, once students are paired, their progress *in the game advances while their ability to see that each person brings with them a unique set of literacies that produce differing ways of knowing and doing amplifies. Because the first time I used these games was in a writing class, I thought that focusing on rhetoric and rhetorical strategies would be useful for students. In the same way my thinking was changed about Deathloop, watching students struggle with and push back against the systems which governed the text games illuminated for me the importance of discussing literacies.* In discussion, students bounce ideas off one another and in many cases are able to get much further than they may have alone. *I thought that by* focusing on word choice and rhetorical strategies, students would be able to use gaming as a way to see the importance of rhetorical choices and techniques, thus strengthening their own writing and literacies. *But as I continue to combine gaming and writing in the classroom, I continually learn that it actually offers an easy way to see that all people bring their knowledges with them into the classroom, opening discussion and creating community for sharing those ways of knowing and doing. It also creates a community around what should and shouldn't be part of the learning environment, something that, in a Freirean model, should be dictated by the students and educators together as a collective action.*

AMONG US

Among Us, made by the company Innersloth, saw an explosion of popularity during the Covid-19 quarantine in 2020. In the game, players are given the role of "crewmate" or "imposter," and each of the roles comes with a unique goal. Roles are assigned at random and there are always more crewmates than imposters. As a crewmate your job is to perform tasks that keep the systems within the fictional game world working properly. These tasks include simple things like emptying the trash to more complex tasks like shooting away asteroids that might destroy the crew's spaceship. As the imposter, players must kill and/or sabotage the crew to keep them from completing their tasks while remaining undetected. If the crew can complete all the tasks or oust the imposters, they win, but if the imposters stop the crew, they win.

In class, we tend to play two rounds of the game, each punctuated by informal writing to a set of questions. *Originally,* students first responded to simple ideas: their perception of themselves and of others, their genuine reflections of what happened and why, and if they liked the game or not. *Once again, though, after doing these lessons a few times I realized that on top of those questions a discussion about the ways in which different players engage with the game began naturally. Some students don't know how to play the game which once again highlights literacies in practice, and the discussion that follows allows those with the knowledges of how to play the opportunity to demonstrate their practice to those who do not. From here, and after multiple classes where we have discussed literacy, we can examine the ways in which literacies extend into knowledges and practices that allow for different types of readings of the structures of our systems, both oppressive and not. These discussions help us see differences across intersections and understand the reasons that those differences exist. The more difficult problem is getting students to take the step toward critical political and social action. Revealing and offering space to speak back to these systems, however, is a step in the right direction.*

Aside from discussions about literacy in a wide range of contexts, video games like Among Us *are also able to facilitate discussion about an important aspect of critical consciousness: the self and self-identity.* In *Unified Discourse Analysis*, James Paul Gee *explores the term "projective identity" and explains that video games and the characters that a player controls are* "projects the player has been handed and beings into which the players project their desires, intentions, and goals" (97-8). So, not only were students asked to write about how they saw their own identity in the game, but also how the behavior *and identity* of other players affected them. *When playing this game most students use "gamer tags" or "usernames" that are different from their own name, thus separating the identity of the character on screen from the person playing. If you are playing as an imposter a huge part of the game relies on lying and deceiving the other people playing with you, so players must try to perceive who is playing in what way, and since we are all in the room together, there is a double layer of projection happening. Students are watching what is happening in the game while also watching what is happening in the room, and then being asked to watch what is happening inside themselves. This means they're projecting their identity onto the classroom and the game while simultaneously having identities projected onto them by other players. The game itself is also projecting an*

identity or identities onto players because, as Gee points out, "projective identity" is "a double-sided stance towards the world (virtual or real) in terms of which we humans see the world simultaneously as a project imposed on us and as a site onto which we can actively project our desires, values, and goals" (94). Because understanding the self is such a significant part of critical literacy and building critical consciousness, Among Us provides a bridge for me to get the class to the idea of ideological, reflective analysis*, which we then turn into a reflective essay about the self in connection to political, social, and cultural action.* In other words, we use the discussions about gaming and systemic literacies in class in order to write about the self in relation to those systems.

This piece of the puzzle, however, extends beyond literacies into embodied experience. We must remember that in our society, which bell hooks calls a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy, whiteness and maleness offer an identity that affords privilege. Having identities projected onto you in the way that Gee describes is far less dangerous for a white person than a person of color. More significantly, in my experience as a white male, we are often privileged with the identity of "default human" and because of that are led to believe that the way we live, think, and maneuver through the world is the way that all other people do too. In this way, Among Us *can double as a way for students, and perhaps primarily white male students, to see how identities are being projected around the room, while being asked to notice how or why that is happening and then writing about it. The hope is that highlighting the ways identities shift and change will help some students with the deconstruction of privileged identities.*

CONCLUSION

We are experiencing a daunting cultural shift characterized by rising fascism, the climate crisis, social and cultural unrest, and *extreme* wealth inequality that is plain to see when using tools like critical literacy. With this, in my opinion, comes a metamorphosis of the ways in which college students learn and want to learn, which in turn offers a great opportunity for educators to arm students with a critical literacy for reading the changing world. Discussing and centering gaming literacies, which give way to burgeoning systemic literacies, gives my class the ability to see, understand, and speak back to oppressive systems like white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. My hope is that it also allows students the room to move toward the critical consciousness that will be necessary for altering, bettering, and perhaps upending these systems of domination. We, as critical educators, must follow this shift and fully embrace students' knowledges and literacies to help them "see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire 83). Giving them tools like critical literacy through something familiar like video games embraces and strengthens the ways in which they learn while also arming them for a future which can look intimidating to say the least. Samantha Blackmon, writing with Daniel J. Terell, points out in "Racing toward Representation: An Understanding of Racial Representation in Video Games" that video games "are the texts that many students regularly interact with. This is where they 'live'" (214). Because we live in a consistently

shifting time, as critical educators we *must* shift with students and meet them where they are in order to be effective in the face of such overwhelming change.

I also hope it is clear that this writing is in progress, and more importantly always will be. This essay represents my thinking as it stands now, but as I plan to do these lessons again in coming semesters, I look forward to the ways in which my students will inform my practice. I look forward to their dislike and discomfort and their willingness to tell me why it does or doesn't work for them. I look forward to returning to this essay to gather what I can before rewriting and revising and writing something new. It is only with the understanding that knowledge and learning is always fluctuating, changing, and morphing that we can fully understand that we as people are too.

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