Issue Highlights:

- 'Bites here and there' conference , a critical reflection
- Perceptions, misconceptions & depictions of cannibalism
- Werewolves, corpse medicine, magic and madness
- Cinematic and literary representations of cannibalism
- Cultural insights into global anthropophagy perceptions

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'But He Looked Suspiciously Well Fed': Editorial, Volume 7, Part 2

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Good evening, Madam and Gentlemen. I am the main Dish of the Day. May I interest you in parts of my body?...Something off my shoulder, perhaps, brazed in a little White Wine sauce?

Your shoulder?

Well, naturally mine, sir. Nobody else's is mine to offer. The, uh, rump is very good, sir. I have been exercising and eating plenty of grain so there's a lot of good meat there. Or a casserole of me, perhaps? (**Episode 1.5, 1981**)

Introduction

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, which excitingly represents the very first special issue we have ever produced. The whole editorial team and I are delighted to bring you this new volume, containing insights centred on a singular topic from emerging and established scholars around the globe.

For once, I feel the customary hyperbole one typically finds inside journal editorials is justified, as I am genuinely pleased to have helped facilitate this issue's publication. Regular readers will be aware that *Exchanges* frequently makes themed calls for papers, the results of which appear in our regular issues, alongside non-themed work (**Exchanges, 2019**). By contrast, this issue represents the first time we have produced an issue entirely dedicated to a sole focus.

I must acknowledge earlier efforts, prior to my appointment, to produce a themed issue. Regrettably these endeavours failed to secure sufficient texts to coalesce into an entire issue, any successful papers were included within our regular publications. By marked contrast, this issue began with over thirty manuscripts submitted for publication consideration. For a journal such as *Exchanges*, still forging its reputational capital and developing greater esteem markers within the scholarly publication field, this represented two key successes. Firstly, it was a mark of confidence from the issues' instigators in our journal, our quality assurance and editorial processes and our visibility to a broad interdisciplinary readership. Secondly, it was more papers than we've had to routinely work

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

i

with for a single issue. Would that such a tsunami of submissions were a more regular occurrence, as I believe I would be delighted to work through such a degree of abundance! However, this latter point introduced some elements requiring a revision to our established editorial configuration, as I'll briefly discuss shortly.

In preparing this editorial I've been going back through my correspondence concerning the special issue. I've been delighted to note with publication today, it is exactly a year since myself and Giulia Champion first started discussing the potentialities and practicalities of producing this volume. Regular readers of my editorial blog (**Exchanges, 2020a**) will have had the pleasure of closely following our journey as the issue as developed, but for those who haven't let me briefly unpick the experience.

As alluded to above, part of the journey to the special issue has been the necessity to broaden the editorial team contributing to *Exchanges*. Previously, our Editorial Board, comprising various early career scholars around the globe, have always served as advisors and immaterial labourers, diligently performing the editorial graft needed to ensure articles are quality assured and sufficiently polished to enter the public sphere under our banner. With the influx of so many articles, for an additional issue alongside our regularly scheduled volumes, it was clear our traditional editorial labour model needed revising in order cope. The solution was an elegant one, which spoke specifically to a key part of *Exchanges*' mission to provide '*a readily accessible and supportive environment' through which both authors and editors can develop superior academic writing and publishing skills*' (**Exchanges, 2020b**).

Normally, our recruitment target for the editorial team members are early career researchers, those close to completion of the doctoral studies or in the first phases of their academic careers. By contrast for this issue we recruited broadly among the post-graduate researcher community at Warwick to serve as *associate editors*; a newly created category of editorial contributor without journal development and policy responsibilities. All seven of these associate editors have made a significant contribution to the issue you are currently reading, not solely through their labour but also their insight, questioning and enthusiasm for the project. It has been an edifying experience to work with these enthusiastic thinkers, and I hope they've genuinely benefitted from the experience too.

Understandably, producing this issue has also been a learning experience for myself, as editor-in-chief, expanding on the distributed virtual team I've been managing in this endeavour. Moreover, it's also given a distinct shape to the specific requirements and essential criteria which must be

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

ii

clarified before instigating further special issues. When Giulia initially approached me, I was unclear how much additional labour might be involved for example, although I imagined it wouldn't be a zero-sum calculation. Nor was I entirely sure if the timespan we had allotted to develop the issue would be sufficient. Nevertheless, through producing our first special issue, I've developed a useful set of critical questions which must be answered before instigating a special issue. Hence, if this issue has sparked your imagination, and you have started to think in terms of your own special *Exchanges* issue, there will be key questions to be answered first.

There is a further crucial question, and it is one which no editor can truly answer ahead of publication, now matter how they might represent their expectations in the public sphere. That question is the degree to which this special issue makes a valuable addition to the literature and discourse. That is something editors must leave up to our respective readerships, although I can confidently say that the articles in this volume are as eye-opening and intriguing as any work we have previously published. Or possibly even more, but in this matter I rely entirely on our readers' discerning judgement and fine intellectual taste. Nevertheless, on behalf of the entire editorial team, I sincerely hope you get as much enjoyment, enlightenment and edification in reading this volume as we have in producing it.

You will doubtless be pleased to discover this special issue is only our first such planned volume. A further issue focussed on climate fiction is already underway for expected publication in the latter half of 2020. We also have two other special volumes commissioned for 2021, which I've outlined elsewhere in a little detail (**Exchanges, 2020b**) and will discuss more as we move into a more active phase of production. Needless to say, as Editor-in-Chief, I'm always happy to discuss the potential for further special issues originating from within the post-graduate, early career researcher and interdisciplinary communities.

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

iii

So we danced all night to the Rolling Stones,
when I awoke they were chewing on bones.
Yelyena was supping blood from a cup,
that's when I knew something was up.
(**Flight of the Conchords, 2009**)

Theme: Bites Here & There

This special issue brings together a specifically focussed selection of articles which stem from the '*Bites Here and There*' conference hosted in late 2018 (**Warwick, 2018**). The conference, which drew many post-graduate and early career researchers from diverse disciplines, was an exploration of '*literal and metaphorical cannibalism*', a topic which when it was brought to my attention raised my eyebrows slightly. However, I believe readers will find this volume a satisfying and tasty experience, once you delve into its guts! For more about the heart of this theme, readers are directed towards the opening article (**Shorland, 2020**) which provides a condensation of the event.

Notably, an edited collection of work from a few scholars who contributed to this event will also appear elsewhere in due course. However, it was those conference contributors unable to participate in this book, who were invited to contribute to this volume. Most, although not all, of those people took the opportunity to submit a manuscript for consideration. Observant readers will have noted there are not '*over thirty*' papers in this issue, more's the pity. Some manuscripts, sadly did not clear the reviewing and authorial revision process in time, but are expected to see publication in a subsequent *Exchanges* issue. Our credo remains, if it clears our quality review processes, then it will see print. We also lost a few articles along the way, as would be expected, which did not meet our quality assurance criteria. Nevertheless, what remains here is still an extensive taste of the discourse, insight and revelation presented at the conference.

However, that's enough background, let us clear our plates and prepare to dig into the rich intellectual meat of the articles within this special issue.

Critical Reflection & Conversations

We start, appropriately enough with Sophie Shorland's contribution, which serves to set the scene. Shorland provides an introduction to the *Bites Here and There* conference's themes. In her piece, she provides a few tasty morsels to whet our intellectual appetites as she explores a few of the many papers presented which caught her eye during the event. Notably, some of these contributions have been developed as articles in this issue, while others you may find appearing in when the edited collection is subsequently published (**1**).

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

iv

Our other critical reflection this issue is from Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez and is provocatively titled as an *Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age.* A development from earlier work, this article explores the role of the author in performative acts of research, while considering her unique cultural position between divergent global cultural practices. In particular, it sheds light on the tensions between Brazilian artistic and cultural practices within an increasingly technocratic era (**6**).

Articles

Next we turn to the work of Duncan Frost, whose conference contribution was highlighted by Shorland, appropriately opens our peer-reviewed papers section. An editor shouldn't play favourites, but I was wryly delighted by the topic of Frost's paper *The Justification of Shipwreck Cannibalism in Popular Balladry*. This article explores ideas of the pragmatic rationalisation of castaways satisfying their hunger through the consumption of forbidden flesh. It considers the role songs and ballads of the period played in reframing these abhorrent acts within almost '*chivalrous*' terms. Intriguingly, Frost contrasts how within colonial discourse such anthropophagic representations dramatically diverge when other non-European cultures' practices were presented (**17**).

Turning from oral to written traditions, our next paper from Carla Scarano D'Antonio considers *Cannibalism in the Consumerist Society of Margaret Atwood's 'The Edible Woman'*. D'Antonio explores Atwood's maiden work's embrace of fairy tale imagery and what this speaks to the artificiality of a consumerist world. Uncovering an inherent cannibalistic quality within such a society enmeshed within struggle, the paper provides both a thrilling exploration of the novel's themes, but also offers some salient reflections on its resonances with our own societal lifeworld (**35**).

Leah Henderson roars into life with her contribution, which provides *An Eco-Feminist Analysis of Justine Larbalestier's Liar (2009).* Diverging from Atwood's secular monstrosities and into the realm of the fantastical, the novel centres with lycanthropic delight on werewolves. Henderson's piece considers how, with the lycanthrope squarely in the picture, what Larbalestier's work has to convey on issues including authoritarianism, individuality, gender mob mentality and societal alienation (**58**).

Segueing from novel to movie, Thomas Moran returns squarely to our core theme as he considers *Cinematic Cannibalism in Pedero Costa's Casa De Lava (1994)*. The paper touches on how issues of Portuguese colonialism in Africa are exposed through the anti-commodification role of cinema deployed within a revelatory *cinéma vérité* form. Occupying a liminal space between outright entertainment and documentary, Moran contends and

unpacks how Costa's film illustrates and uncovers the haunting legacy of colonialism within Cape Verde (**76**).

We continue our cinematic considerations of cannibalism, within David Shames' piece exploring *Consumption from the Acant-Garde to the Silver Screen*. Constructing a lens derived from Marx's construct of commodity fetishisation, and Apparadurai's more recent work on consumer fetishism, Shames explores the '*profanation*' of consumption. This thought is illustrated through two filmic case studies: *Como era gostoso o meu francês* (1971) and *Cannibal Holocaust* (1981), providing a measured consideration of both films' messages and underlying resonances (**96**).

Staying 'on brand', Michael Wheatley's paper stays within the cinematic realm, similarly drawing on Marx, as it discusses *The Cannibalism of Creatives in Chuck Palaniuk's Haunted and Nicolas Winding Refn's The Neon Demon*. Providing an intriguing guide to both films, the article considers a satirical trend evidenced by cannibalism's juxtaposition within the industrialised, commercialised and commodified creative industry lifeworld. Within such a reading, it seems the dehumanising exploitation of creatives, repositions them no longer as '*cogs*' in the entertainment machine but 'meat products' devoured alive by a capitalist interests, a seemingly willing act of auto-anthropophagy (**115**).

We remain within the film world, as Kimberly Jackson sinks her teeth into *Postmodern Abjection in Ana Lily Amirpour's The Bad Batch*. The piece provides an exploration of the contrasts between The Bad Batch and Amirpour's other works, before exploring the former in more depth. Jackson explores the difficulty critics have found in situating the film within the cannon of cannibal movies, and its role as an effective postmodern fairy tale. She argues how through its embrace of abjection, the movie challenges the viewer to confront rather than avoid horrific circumstances and events which disrupt the self, identity and the established order of contemporary society (**134**).

We shift from movies to theatre, and specifically James Alsop's delicious encounter with *Cannibalism and Corpse Medicine in Hamlet*. Alsop considers Shakespeare's linkages between corpses and culinary traditions, as robustly employed within *Hamlet*. He contextualises these aspects of the play, through the period's normalised usage and consumption of '*corpse medicine*', or '*mumia*'. Developing these themes the paper explores how *Hamlet's* cannibalistic aspects served to challenge contemporary audiences to reconsider their own '*acceptable and unacceptable*' anthropophagy (**153**).

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

vi

Remaining in the early 17th Century, Matteo Leta takes up the fascinating study of *Magic, Cannibalism and Ethnography in the Works of Pierre de Lancre*. Looking particularly at the importance of cannibalism de Lancre ascribed to the Basques' spiritual practices. Representing the power of the crown, de Lancre's work, Leta argues, is suffced with a demonization of a people. Consequently, the patrons of his publication would be enabled to view the repression and '*normalisation*' of the Basques within the constraints of the ruling polity to be entirely justified ([169](#)).

Shakespeare rears his hungry maw once more, through William Green's piece on *The Theme of Cannibalism and the Implications of Authorship in the 1623 Text of Titus Andronicus*. Concentrating on the notorious cannibalistic climax to the play, Green considers how a later addition to the work, provides evidence of authorship beyond the two previously acknowledged contributors of Shakespeare and Peele. The paper further argues how these supplementary materials, augment the text through contextualising and repositioning the prior-climatic moments as more crucial elements of the play's narrative structure ([182](#)).

Hugh Davis continues our literary exploration with his examination of *'Monkey Meat' and Metaphor in Shohei Ooka's Fires on the Plain*. Resonating with Frost's earlier piece, Davis considers the psychological breakdown of a Second World War soldier forced to survive through cannibalism. Davis deliberates how central character Tamura's decent into the consumption of human flesh is emblematic of the '*self-destructive nature*' observed within contemporary Japanese imperialism. Moreover, it explores how cannibalism represents for Tamura a denial of redemption ([200](#)).

Ursula de Leeuw returns us to the cinematic world, considering *Julia Ducournau's Raw and Bataillean Horror*. Contrasting the film *Raw* with Bataille's general economic theory of transgression, de Leeum contextualises issues of transgression, sacrifice and eroticism in the works ([215](#)).

Finally, our issue concludes with Rituparna Das's piece concerning *A Postcolonial Reading of the Cannibals in Some Fairy Tales from Colonial Bengal*. This engaging piece explores the juxtaposition between the traditional folk tales and the Indian colonial experience. The '*cannibal demons*' in these works comprise a strong representation of 'anti-colonial resistance' within the cultural memory ([229](#)).

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

vii

Current Calls for Papers

While this has been an extra issue of the journal, we'd be remiss if we didn't highlight to readers old and new alike our currently open calls for contributions to future issues of the journal, highlighted previously

Falsehoods, Misinterpretations & Factual Divergence

For the issue of *Exchanges* **to be published Autumn 2020**, we invite authors to submit original, exciting, insightful peer-reviewed research-based articles or critical reflections addressing some aspect of *falsehoods, misinterpretations and factual divergences*: however, your research, perceptions or epistemology might wish to conceptualise them. *Exchanges* especially welcomes articles tackling this topic by multiple authors with contrasting positions or from disparate fields. The Editorial Board, and myself, are delighted to discuss article concepts or outline ideas further.

The submission deadline is Friday 1ˢᵗ May 2020

General Submissions

Additionally, *Exchanges* welcomes **submissions 365 days a year** on any subject, outside of our themed calls. We therefore invite manuscript contributions from researchers or practitioners from any discipline, anywhere in the world, fulfilling our **standard requirements**. We are happy to receive traditional research or review articles, but we also especially welcome submissions of **interviews with key scholars** or **critical reflections** on important scholarly events, conferences or crucial new texts. More information on desirable manuscript formats are available on our website, or via our Editorial Board members, who are also available to explore article ideas with potential authors.

There are no deadlines for non-themed submissions

As *Exchanges* has a mission to support the development and dissemination of research by early career and post-graduate researchers, we are particularly pleased to receive manuscripts from emerging scholars and first-time authors. Prospective authors are strongly encouraged to consider how their manuscripts address a broader, interdisciplinary audience; given our readerships strong interests in work which encompasses or straddles disciplinary boundaries.

You can read the full details of these calls online (**Exchanges, 2019**).

Fees, Access & Author Rights

Exchanges is a diamond open access (**Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013**), scholar-led journal, which means there are no author fees or reader subscription charges. Authors also retain copyright over their work, but grant the

journal first rights of publication as a submission requirement. Contact any member of the Editorial Board or see our online guidelines for more information about submitting to *Exchanges* (**Exchanges, 2020c**).

Forthcoming Issues

The next planned issue of *Exchanges* is our regularly scheduled Spring volume, which will be followed in September 2020 by our next special issue, presenting a celebration of work from and inspired by the Utopian Studies Society conference this summer on ***Utopia, Dystopia and Climate Change*** (**USS, 2019**). We've had many exciting potential contributions to this volume, which we are currently in the process of reviewing. An issue, I'm sure you will agree, which will be something to look forward to reading.

Beyond this, we have also commissioned two further special issues for publication during 2021. The first of these will be produced in collaboration with scholars from SOAS University of London and Oxford University, with the second a cooperative effort with Warwick's Faculty of Art. Both of these issues are intrinsically associated with events being held later this summer, with calls for contributions appearing subsequently. I'll hopefully be able to share more details about these in the next regular issue, along with the continued editorial blog dialogue.

Acknowledgements

As always, my thanks to our authors and reviewers for their vital intellectual labour contributions towards creating this issue. Without you, the ability to produce a quality-assured, peer-reviewed, scholar-led publication would quite simply not be possible. Thanks also to our reader community, who play a key role in developing the debates and insights raised in each issue. I hope you find this issue as valuable, informative and enjoyable as previous volumes.

For this special volume, I'd like to pay particular tribute to my seven associate editors, many of whom have come aboard solely to support this issue. Drawn from the post-graduate rather than early career researcher communities, they've each made invaluable contributions and I deeply appreciate their efforts. Hence, a very gracious tip of the editorial hat to: Giulia Champion, Fiona Farnsworth, Sophie Shorland, Freya Verlander, Nora Castle, Amulya Gyawali and Lorenzo Serini. Particular thanks to Giulia Champion, for vital efforts initiating and sustaining discussions around this issue.

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

ix

Naturally, my thanks also to my Board, some of whom have also worked on this issue, along with Rob Talbot and Julie Robinson at the Warwick University Library, for their continued technical support. I'd like to also acknowledge departing Board member Giannis Moutsinas.

Finally, my grateful thanks to our publisher, the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Warwick for their continued financial and strategic backing for *Exchanges*.

Continuing the Conversation

If you want to keep up-to-date with *Exchanges'* latest news, developments and calls for papers there are a number of ways you can do this. Visit the editorial blog, follow our Twitter account or join our Linked.In group. Please do join in the conversation, as we value hearing the thoughts of our author and readership communities. Alternatively, as editor-in-chief, I'm always delighted to discuss possible manuscript submissions, potential special issues, further collaborative opportunities or invites to talk publicly about *Exchanges*, editing or scholarly publishing in general. Contact me via the email at the start of this article.

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Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

xi

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Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

xii

Johnson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. i-xiii

xiii

'Bites here and there': Literal and Metaphorical Cannibalism Across Disciplines Conference Review

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Abstract

A conference review of the 2018 conference, 'Bites here and there': Literal and Metaphorical Cannibalisms across Disciplines, held at the University of Warwick and organised by Giulia Champion. This one-day interdisciplinary and international conference sought to explore the evolution of the tropes of cannibalism and the use of this taboo across time.

Keywords: cannibalism; slavery; metaphorical cannibalism; introduction; conference

Introduction

One-day conference *'Bites here and there': Literal and Metaphorical Cannibalism Across Disciplines* (**Warwick, 2018**) brought together 80 scholars from around the world to discuss cannibalism, whether literal or metaphorical. Truly interdisciplinary, researchers presented on topics from psychological cannibalism to Bluebeard's castle to Brazilian anthropophagi, and provoked fascinating discussion that crossed the boundaries of academic disciplines. Housed in Warwick University's Teaching Centre, where children's colourful artwork lines the walls, I doubt even primary school children coming in for their lessons made quite as much noise as we did during the coffee breaks, concurrent panels making halls resound with the cry, 'Why can't I be in two places at the same time?' The conference atmosphere supported meaningful connection and interdisciplinarity, in part thanks to the quantity of coffee available, but mainly thanks to the brilliant organisation of Giulia Champion, who somehow managed to project calm, despite the hundreds of moving parts that make up a conference on this scale.

Particular questions that this conference provoked, asked, or complicated included: Do narratives of cannibalism always require a savage Other? How have cannibalistic narratives shaped, supported or destabilised political ideology? And, unexpectedly, are cannibals lazy? Some particularly important work this conference participated in was thinking about the relationship between 'savage' and 'civilised', the savage being the cannibal and the civilised being the non-cannibal and potential victim. Exploring anthropological and historical narratives, we were frequently confronted with how cannibalism changes the identities of both the devourer and the devoured.

The word 'cannibal' is itself a product of colonial encounters, probably derived from an Arawakan language used by the Carib people and appropriated by the Spanish. The Carib people were said to eat human flesh, so *caníbal* came to mean 'man-eater' (**OED, 2018**). Other origin tales include the anthropophogi, first recorded by Heredotus, who allegedly ate human flesh and were without law or justice. His fusion of mythology and history sets the scene for encounters with cannibalism, which despite being reported as fact, were often entirely fantastical and utilised to resonate in specific ways with audiences reading or listening to these tall tales (**Arens, 1979**). One of the aims of the conference was to shed new light on this type of encounter, unearthing global histories that have been marginalised or suppressed.

Selected Papers

Henna Karhapää's (Independent scholar) paper – *Devouring His Own Empire: George III as a Cannibal in John Almon's The Allies* – looked at an eighteenth-century print in which George III is shown taking part in a cannibalistic ritual with indigenous North Americans. A dog, representing the British people, was so disgusted by their actions, that it is shown vomiting in the foreground of the print. This is expected and unexpected: the 'savage'/'civilised' binary is applied to indigenous and colonial peoples, yet the animal in the print represents the civilised, and the King of England is the most savage person in the print, abandoning that most eighteenth century of virtues: politeness. Karhapää explored the context of this print, created by 'shameless self-publicist' John Almon shortly after James Cook was killed in Hawaii, leading to particularly high popular interest in tales of cannibalistic feasts. This print was particularly shocking because it mentioned George III by name – British eighteenth century libel laws meant that the written word was under much stricter prohibition that the visual. As Karhapää argued, this represented a shift in the way George III was popularly presented in this most active and brutal propaganda form – the satirical print – becoming culpable in the perceived dismantling of the British Empire.

Further thinking about the ways cannibalism has both enforced and undercut narratives of savage Other and civilised self, keynote speaker Manuel Barcia (Leeds) narrated the tale of the Portuguese Schooner *Arrogante* in his address *White Cannibals, Enslaved Africans, and the pitfalls of the British Colonial System at the time of Abolition.* After being captured by the British in 1837, tales from the ex-slaves who had been on board the ship circulated, claiming that the sailors killed an African man, cooked his flesh, and fed it to the slaves, keeping the heart and liver for themselves to eat. There is some suggestion that cannibalised man may have been albino, and one audience member made the fascinating connection between consumption of the heart and liver and Ancient Near Eastern divination practices, implying potentially magical motives underlying this act of white cannibalism, although as Barcia pointed out, any such reading is conjectural. After the *Arrogante* was captured and taken to Jamaica, the scandal and court case worked to query predetermined cultural associations with Europeans and Africans in colonial Jamaica and further afield. Barcia dwelt particularly on the testimony of the ex-slaves during the trial, revealing paths of communication between slaves despite being locked in separate compartments on board the ship.

Similarly exploring white cannibalism, Duncan Frost (Kent)'s paper *Civilised and Heroic Cannibalism in Popular Balladry*, although it presented a very different scenario, of shipwrecked sailors drawing lots for who would die to feed the rest of the group. In eighteenth and nineteenth century ballads, this was presented as a test of virtue and a heroic self-sacrifice on the part of the person whose time was up. Emphasising the popularity of these ballads in popular culture, Frost's paper disrupts an automatically savage-civilised binary when we think about cannibalism, looking at instances where cannibalism could be heroic. This notion of heroism is tied in interesting ways to the history of ballads themselves, a genre often centred around a mythological hero like Robin Hood or Bevis of Southampton.

The ways a cannibalistic narrative can be used to define self and other connects in fascinating ways to clinical psychologists Julian Boon and Lynsey Gozna's (Leicester) panel *Cannibalism: Psychological interpretations of negativity and destruction*, which explored contemporary cannibalism from a clinical psychology perspective. Arguing that cannibalism is on a spectrum of cannibalistic behaviours, images from heavy and death metal bands gained new and even more gruesome meanings during this panel. While cannibalistic impulses, they argued, can present as benign, there are instances of malign cannibalism that can be figurative as well as literal. This is psychological cannibalism – taking over someone's personality and life, potentially replacing them in the manner

Shorland. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 1-5

3

of film and book *The Talented Mr Ripley.* Presenting real life case studies of this phenomenon, Julian Boon argued that psychological cannibalism stems from laziness on the part of the cannibal: the psychological cannibal wants the life of their victim but is not willing to transform their own life, stealing an identity an 'easier' way of achieving the desired result. There may also be a sexual component, and one particularly interesting case study for our purposes – the conference being an academic one – was a case of academic cannibalism. After being romantically rejected by another academic, the academic cannibal changed their name to a version of the victim's, took on his mannerisms, bought a house that closely matched his, and removed his name from all academic papers, leaving only their own, as though to completely replace the victim. Suggesting that psychological cannibalism is intertwined with desire and status, a way of jumping through hierarchy, this panel acted suggestively in thinking about historical instances of cannibalism.

Staying on a clinical theme, this conference was significant in thinking about a medicalised discourse of literal and well as psychological cannibalism. Heather Bailey's (Florida State) paper linked early modern political ideology to a discourse of epidemiology, giving 'going viral' a new meaning. Her paper – *'But of her dainty flesh they did deuise/To make a common feast:' Consuming Female Flesh in Edmund Spenser's* The Faerie Queene – looked at an early modern English discourse that rendered Catholics both diseased, spreading syphilis, and cannibalistic, encouraging literal consumption of human flesh through the Eucharist. In the sixteenth century, syphilis was a particularly terrifying threat, spread sexually and with no cure, it led to body parts (particularly the nose) dying and dropping off. Combining these two fearful motifs, Bailey argued, creates a syphilitic and cannibalistic pathogen that will consume the English body politic, represented in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* by female virgins Amoret and Serena. Looking at the intersection of the political and the medical, Bailey's paper intersected with the theme of narrating identities: by tying Catholic identities to a monstrous pathogen, Catholics are monstrous through association.

Continuing the Conversation on Cannibalism

This special issue of *Exchanges* seeks to continue the dialogues that began with this conference, thinking not only about the way cannibalism is invoked and described, but what purposes cannibalism serves for those who narrativise and participate in this practice. Often used as shorthand for difference because of its shock value, *Bites here and there* explored the wide range of cannibalism's socio-political uses. It provided an important space for nuance to emerge, thinking about the long history of eating

Shorland. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 1-5

4

practices, and the ways in which they regulate difference, describing inappropriate relationships from the nuclear family to the socio-political.

Thinking about the propaganda and political value of the taboo, the shocking, makes this issue of particular relevance as we think about how messages are broadcast. Continuing this conversation on the place of shock tactics to create identities, this special issue considers the perceptions and narratives that constitute a particular identity. The binaries that cannibalism is often associated with, and that contribute to identity, of 'good' and 'bad', 'sane' and 'insane', 'human' and 'inhuman', highlight the importance of nuance, going beyond the shocking to ask why and how cannibalism is invoked.

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Shorland. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 1-5

5

Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age: 10ᵗʰ Anniversary Rendition

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Abstract

In 2009 I started writing the essay Digital Anthropophagy[i] and its companion piece, the manifesto-poem Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age[ii]. Being an artist from Brazil, I could not escape the cultural mystique of 'Anthropophagy'. For those unfamiliar with the term, the etymology has a Greek origin dating back to the mythological Kronos (Saturn) eating his own son – 'Anthrōpophagia': 'Anthropos'= human being + 'phagein'= to eat, i.e., an eating of a human. The words 'Anthropophagy' and 'Anthropophagus' were transplanted by the European conquistadors in the late 1400s/early 1500s to the land masses renamed 'America' and 'The Caribbean' at the onset of colonialism. Starting at this period, some native ethnicities of the 'Amerindian' populations have been described as practitioners of ritual Anthropophagy and/or Cannibalism. 'Cannibalism' itself supposedly finding its root in a misspelling or ironic naming – 'Canib'[iii] – by Columbus when describing the Carib people of Antilles/Caribbean Islands during his navigational enterprises between 1492-1504.

In 1928, Oswald de Andrade devoured Brazilian colonial history itself writing the 'Manifesto Antropófago', an adjective form of the term, meaning a Manifesto that possesses the agency to eat. The proposition of the Brazilian Moderns was to devour what comes from outside ('First World' novelties), absorb their useful 'otherness' in order to output something uniquely Brazilian. Thus 'Antropofagia' is appropriated and forever transformed in the 1920s São Paulo into a Brazilian avantgarde. Antropofagia is considered by some critics to be perhaps the only true Brazilian artistic canon. The concepts of this cultural icon have inevitably impregnated my own artworks, especially in my condition of migrant since the age of 19, living in a constant state of becoming 'other' somewhere.

Keywords: digital anthropophagy; anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the digital age; manifesto antropófago; Oswald de Andrade; antropofagia; Brazilian modernism; digital age; colonisation; Vilém Flusser; Aílton Krenak; Bauhaus
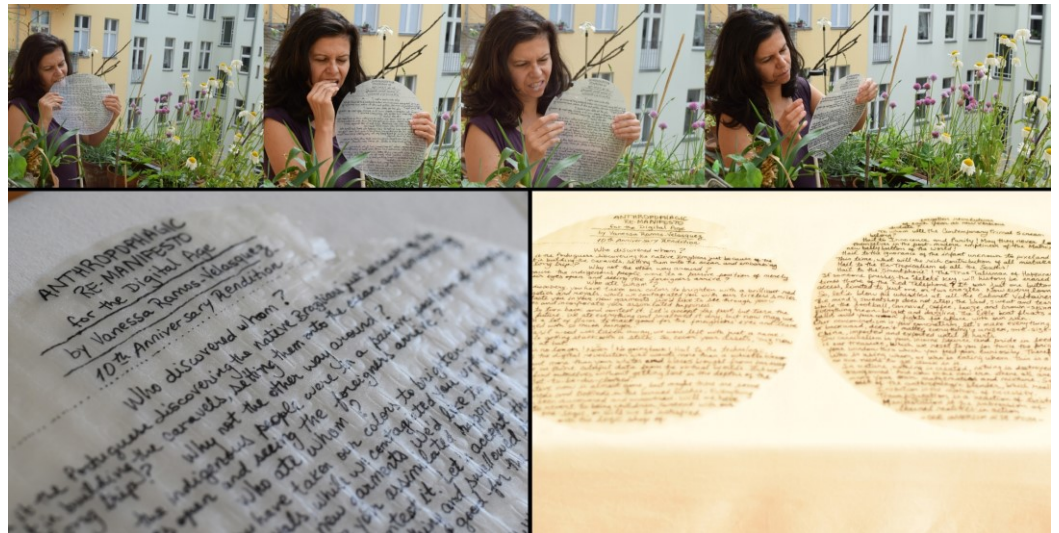
Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

6

Figure 1: The artist, Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez, biting off a piece of her Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age after reading it to no one in particular.
Image source – author's personal collection.

Anthropophagy offers complexities that defy even the fields which have traditionally dealt with such a theme. My fields of interest and research focus on Ritual Anthropophagy, its cultural constructions, their appropriation in the arts and through the arts, and the ensuing generative potential for innovation constituting both a philosophy as well as a method of creativity, especially in moments of crisis. Ritual Anthropophagy has been described anthropologically as a switch of perspective. Especially in warring rituals, the winner supposedly consumes the strong enemy (weak individuals are never desired), in order to see oneself as the enemy sees him. This constitutes a motion toward acceptance of otherness in oneself, instead of negation of a dissimilar entity. A foreign strong body as a formidable body and its consumption an openness to the highest form of alterity.

While I was moving from New York City to Berlin, Germany, in 2009, I started writing the essay Digital Anthropophagy[i] containing a companion piece, the manifesto-poem Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age. Drawing from my experience as a migrant of continuous cultural transformation, a constant motion toward the unknowable 'other', experimenting with a multiplicity of worldviews and perspectives, I felt an embodiment of the concepts that enliven Anthropophagy/Antropofagia. In my artistic practice at that time, being a video and film editor, I was hand-making films from discarded 16mm film pieces, creating new narratives for these materials that I found in dumpsters, donated archives, and bulk purchases of undeveloped rolls from Ebay. After receiving the Distinction Prize of the Vilém Flusser Theory Award in 2011 at transmediale[iv], the annual festival for art and digital culture in Berlin, I presented my essay and manifesto globally as an audiovisual

[Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16](#)

7

performance-lecture and a communal ritual. When I finish reciting the Re-Manifesto, handwritten on rice paper, I eat a piece of it and pass the communion wafer to the public, a translation gesture of one of the most disseminated and recognised (ecumenical) meanings behind 'Anthropophagy': eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus as bread and wine. The gesture also points to a turn against itself, eating one's own words, a de-programming act: cor inversum in se ipsum [The heart turned against itself] (**Flusser, 2008: 28**).

Anthropophagy in Brazil has been constructed initially from the ethnographic descriptions by German adventurer Hans Staden, recounting his captivity with the (ritualistic anthropophagic) Tupinambá indigenous people in 1553/54. Staden's *Warhaftige Historia und beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden Nacketen, Grimmigen Menschfresser-Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen (True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America)* became a global best-seller upon publication in 1557 and remains forever ingrained in the global imaginary, depicting the Americas as a wild territory. This worldview has endured, especially after Theodor De Bry (b. Liège) replicated the images created by Staden some decades later, in his art studio established in Frankfurt, in finer, yet imagined details. De Bry never travelled to the Americas, his imaginary interpretations executed on copper prints were based on Staden's texts and woodcut prints. Furthermore, De Bry's two sons continued his creative productions and replications in the 1600s. These images influenced the drawing of world maps of that time period, illustrated showing 'men-eating' savages inhabiting the American territories. This was the Anthropophagic history told by Europeans of the 'new' continent in the 16/17th Centuries, during Shakespearean time.

In my Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age, I reflect on the entanglements of wildly different cultures coming into contact and the uneven reciprocities that ensued. In Pindorama – Land of Palm Trees, mythical place of the Tupi-Guarani peoples – the 'native' were seduced by European trinkets, such as whistles, mirrors, rattles, gifted to them in exchange for the far more valuable 'Pau-Brasil' wood. Trees which the natives had to fell, chop, carry and load into the Portuguese caravels in a system of uneven value exchange and exploitation. It is worthwhile to reflect here on the significance of that encounter from the native's perspective. Aílton Krenak, one of the most recognised voices in contemporary indigenous thought explains:

> …well before the [European] geographic demarcation of Brazil as a country, the narratives of our ancestors built our own histories, which are many. Their recollection are populated by narratives sounded in

Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

8

> *more than 500 languages, just accounting for those spoken in South America…In each of these ancestral narratives was the prophecy announcing the arrival, the return of the white brother. These narratives dating back to four thousand years already mentioned the life of this other brother, always identified as someone who left our coexistence and was no longer traceable. Having left us, he also lost the sense of humanity we had been building. He had gone to a faraway place and lived there for many, many generations. In this time, he learned another technology, developed other languages and learned a different type of organisation than ours. In our ancestral narratives, he appeared time and again as someone who was returning home, but his thoughts were no longer known, nor what he was searching for. We no longer knew what he wanted. [He learned many things away from us, but also forgot where he came from and found it difficult to know where he was going]. The ancestral narratives are reminders in the form of prophecy or warning of the arrival of the white brother. But the narratives also carry within them a message: the promise to relink with, to reencounter our former brother.* (**Krenak, 2015: 160-162, author's translation**)

In 1920s Brazil, during the rise of the modernist and industrial era, Anthropophagy experienced a revival through Brazilian artistic productions – the Anthropophagic act was transformed from taboo (European construct of indigenous social practice) into (artistic) totem. Anthropophagy was thus invigorated with two remarkable bracketing events: *Semana de Arte Moderna* in São Paulo in 1922, and the *Manifesto Antropófago*[v] by writer Oswald de Andrade in 1928, published in his newly founded *Revista de Antropofagia*. Andrade's Manifesto was a punch in the stomach that laid deglutition claim to just about anything, from all '-isms' to Freudian thought and revolutionary enterprises across time. All the while, the Manifesto demanded access to 'the other', an open license to taste the state-of-the-art influences from outside Brazil without committing to any of them, an unapologetic attitude toward devouring history itself, while fully embracing and celebrating indigeneity and its values, in order to spit out something new, original, worthy of envy. Feeling the effects of swift industrialisation clashing with abreast traditional cultures within reach throughout the Brazilian territory, Andrade also introduced a character in his Manifesto: [Hermann Alexander Graf] Keyserling's 'technified barbarian' (**Andrade, 1928: 3**), a role played by the North Americans.

Almost 100 years later, the role of that 'technified barbarian', an important allegory in Andrade's Manifesto begets the question: 'Who is considered the Barbarian now?' Who, in fact, is the barbarian at the gate, controlling the inputs and outputs of the digital age? This new era was my cue to write

Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

9

the 'Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age' in 2009, a remix of concepts birthed from a paradigm shift, sensing deep changes brewing in the imminent increase of interconnectivity speed about to take over the world via broadband internet service embedded in more advanced mobile digital devices. I translated this new reality into a latent cultural cannibalism in the age of digital culture, of which unceremonious information consumption practices would push the internet-worked information society toward a new type of colonial paradigm. A colonisation via viral ideas with the conquering of new types of property, where digital data becomes an extremely valuable raw resource and new currency, and anyone can be a coloniser. A new practice of consumption – ingestion, digestion and excretion – involving a technological mediation. Using Anthropophagy as both metaphor and strategy to navigate the rough seas of internet constitutionalism and innovation, I set out to consider new power structures favouring 'embrace, devour, share' within a new code of ethics as a holistic natural transparent approach for our socio-economic survival. All the while maintaining a healthy ecosystem online – based on net neutrality – and also offline, to support ethical information traffic and a safer metabolism of such large amounts of information.

But how could this new online frontier be explored any differently than in the past terrestrial colonial scenarios of exploitation? It would not take very long indeed for wild exploits to loom in the horizon. The online community – if there has been ever such a thing as a 'community' – steering wide-eyed in a Jules Verne's Nautilus type of vessel did not manage to reach the cost of utopia. The hope was perhaps to get to the destination navigating the international online waters free from land-based government. However, in a space of just ten years, roughly 2009-2019, the online world has gone from innocent ebullient optimism to fear, scepticism and pollution. A vertiginous trajectory from an environment of relatively equal stake-holders at the beginning of the internet era with a horizon built brick by brick to the current world entirely calculated to fit into a smartphone – the new acculturation tool. Its degenerative dynamics alike a 'Requerimiento' (penned in 1513 by jurist Juan López de Palacios, to be read out loud even in empty beachfronts with the purpose of submitting non-conforming indigenous to the complete rule of Spanish kingdom, under penalty of death). And although history teaches us patterns, models and structures of dominance and subjugation, the long journey traced since the 15/16th Century Iberian caravels only shows us how much today's internet-worked culture has fallen into those same patterns, models and structures.

Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

10

Digital Anthropophagy, a term I coined in 2009, whose sentiment permeates my Re-Manifesto, reflects a globalised user-based practice and cultural manifestation occurring online and outwards into the physical world and back online as a resonating never-ending feedback loop of vast cultural consumption and transformation. Whereas there have been plenty of profound exchanges and symbiotic profiteering online, it has become increasingly apparent that a lesser form of Digital Anthropophagy is unfortunately also possible, namely: cannibalism. While Anthropophagy produces new forms, bodies, effects, original expression, synthesis; cannibalism is an act of poor destruction, at best it produces just a copy, without imagination, without ritual, without magic.

To compound the lesser favourable winds of development, this new era of consuming 'The Other' in a supposedly immaterial way has only revealed that the digital world is heavily material. All the apparatus that support it are based on materials: bodies implicated in the production of devices, content and data; rare metals extracted from the earth and ocean to make our digital lightness/heaviness of being, colourful, pleasant, and chic. We have been paying a high price for the commodification of life. Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to imagine a world without these technological companions and coadjutants to our lifestyles, they have so profoundly changed our humanity. The conveniences and addictive happiness these devices afford users exist in the very tension between the material world and the deep level of abstraction invisible and impenetrable to most who have embarked in this great digital adventure.

Looking back at my Re-Manifesto, I recognise it as a provocation – what does it mean to be Anthropophagic in the Digital Age with the supreme interconnectivity of the information society, in which everyone is consuming the world, and each other, at an unprecedented pace and intensity? By opening up a new blank map on which to inscribe a new history, I was exploring potential: both high and low. In this tension, I recognised that our cannibalistic relations, not only to each other, but also with technology, were causing an ontological shift in the way we see ourselves as human, an ontological turn proposed by philosopher Vilém Flusser in *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* in 1983. Flusser proposes that, starting with the invention of photography, human beings began orienting themselves from the images, which not only stand as surfaces (mediations) between human and world, but also veil what stands behind its algorhythmic representation.

I had proposed *Digital Anthropophagy* as a valuable cultural concept for our time, neither euphoric nor pessimistic. Now, reflecting on what the Internet has become in these last ten years, I see that a global 'user culture' has succumbed in the digital era to meta structures that engulf us

Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

11

and transform us into cannibalised bodies. I am reminded of a constant theme in Flusserian philosophy that speaks of our highly technological moment: 'The change of codes is far more important than the invention of new media…the function of codes is not dependent on a metaphysical 'eidos' of the medium, but on how the medium is handled' (**Guldin, R. et al, 2008: 5**). Flusser himself states: 'Indeed we are actively generating our tools and through them we are generating the world, but it is also true that those tools are hitting back on us and are generating us' (**Flusser, 1991**).

The question now seems to be what world should we generate next in widely and wildly divided global societies? Do we need another paradigm shift, a radical discontinuity to sever deep dependencies on the control mechanisms of the digital age? Flusser believed that the artist is an agent who can intervene in programmed apparatus, be it a technological black box or institutions of control. If an indigenous ritual-philosophy informed artistic and cultural production in the 1920s, why not consider indigenous art production, which has managed to transcend time and western artistic cannons, to inform a new imagination? Aílton Krenak and Bené Fonteles offer the following:

> *[Indigenous artistic expression] is born from a magical world that unveils the unconscious and reveals the 'third bank' of a river that can't be reached with an actual canoe. In order to cross it, what we need is the technology of a mind with imagination, but also an invisible canoe that may take us to that bank without expecting goals or outcomes. Everything requires more than a mystical and magical trance, a free transit between visible and invisible worlds that are not separated. As the Toltec shaman Miguel Ruiz says, 'you are both the dream and the dreamer'.*

> *In order to be that primordial dream and to compose it, indigenous peoples need to be left in peace in the forest, unaffected by the barbarism of 'civilisation', continuing to create an art that can navigate the different banks with interdisciplinary independence, with solidarity and interaction, involved with everything rather than developed, without losing its creative body and its cultural and spiritual essence, which persists from cave and rock painting to the plural and instigating contemporary art forms.* (**Krenak et al, 2019: 148**)

To dream new worlds and new frontiers is the only way out. But to cultivate one's birth ground or chosen home is the only way in, which is what the original populations of the many places called 'America' will tell us. Likewise, Flusser, having escaped the Holocaust seeking refuge in Brazil in 1941, but losing his family in concentration camps, was well aware of Nationalism's project. He saw in the zero-dimension of pure numbers a dangerous capacity to generate (i.e., to project) and effectively change the

Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

12

world supported by meta-apparatus. The danger implicated in a change of our subjectivity, potentially transforming our species into an entirely programmable and predictable subordinate apparatus to be fully utilised in mechanisms of control. But history bears no obligation to repeat itself just for the sake of teaching lessons. It is useful to once again devour history against neo-colonial rule, against cannibalistic destructive binaries that erase diversity, against techno-escapism, and to move toward a multiplicity that celebrates other forms of alterity, different modes of living, fluid identities and the pursuit of happiness landing with our feet back on earth, our home. To embrace the dissimilar absolutely, but away from the obsolete neo-liberal patriarchy and into the welcoming wild arms of 'matriarcado de Pindorama' (**de Andrade, 1928**) … 'From this Earth, on this Earth, for this Earth. And it's about time' (**De Andrade, 1944, author's translation**).

Figure 2: The 10 Year Anniversary Rendition of the Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age. Medium: indigestible ink on edible paper. Image source – author's personal collection.

Acknowledgements

Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

13

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1:   The artist, Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez, biting off a piece of her Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age after reading it to no one in particular. Image source – author's personal collection.
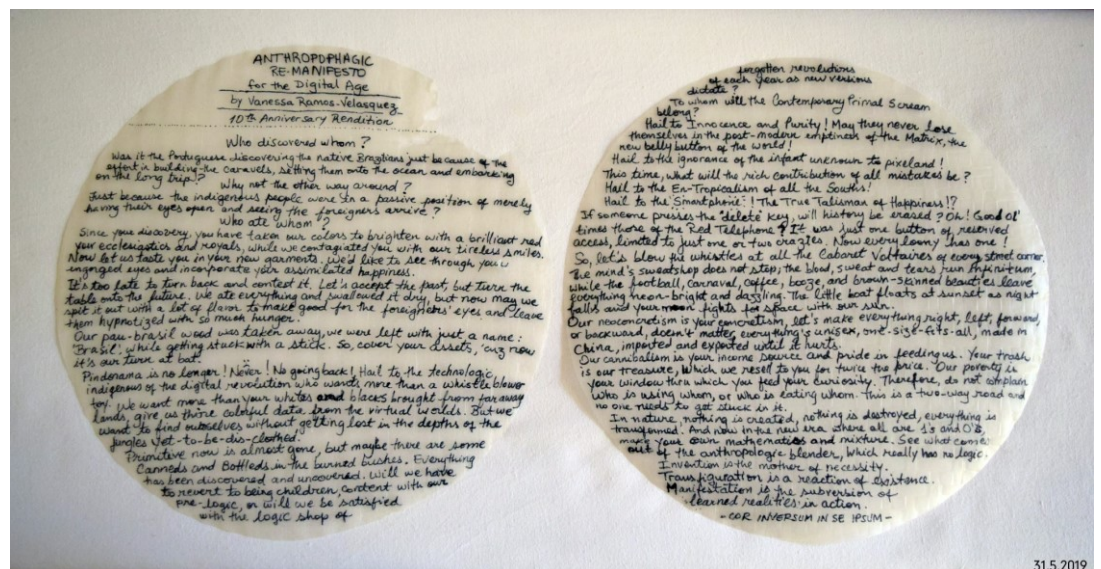
Figure 2:   The 10 Year Anniversary Rendition of the Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age. Medium: indigestible ink on edible paper. Image source – author's personal collection.

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Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

14

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Ramos-Velasquez. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 6-16

15

Endnotes

i See: http://quietrevolution.me/DIGITAL_ANTHROPOPHAGY.html

ii See: http://quietrevolution.me/Anthropophagic_Re-Manifesto.html

iii See: https://www.etymonline.com/word/cannibal

iv See: https://transmediale.de/de/content/vanessa-ramos-velasquez

v See: http://quietrevolution.me/ANTROPOFAGIA_ANTHROPOPHAGY.html

vi This has been published several times but modified by the author for each publication. The first published short version appeared in 2010, with this reference linking to the performance with full text. The most recent publication was in 2013.

'Provisions being scarce and pale death drawing nigh, / They'd try to cast lots to see who should die': The Justification of Shipwreck Cannibalism in Popular Balladry

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Abstract

Ballads actively shaped contemporary popular mentalities and through analysing ballads historians are presented with a world of propaganda and persuasion, aimed at a broad spectrum of society from literate to illiterate. Nineteenth-century ballads describing shipwrecks highlight the moral ambiguities present in extreme life-or-death situations. Many such ballads teach that survival cannibalism was rational, pragmatic, civilised and should be actively encouraged. This article demonstrates how ballads placed cannibalism into a chivalrous context, allowed sailors to vicariously experience the events thereby learning a prescribed 'ritual' to follow and made breaking the anthropophagic taboo socially acceptable, even virtuous.

In fictitious ballad narratives, cannibalism is a test of virtue as one person offers their body as sustenance to preserve a starving friend. It is not a horrific departure from civilised attitudes, but a heroic self-sacrifice. Ballads recounting real events of shipwreck cannibalism helped to promote the 'civilised cannibalism' ritual of drawing lots to select the victim, placing anthropophagy within a democratic, equitable process. Shipwreck cannibalism ballads offer a contrast to other European descriptions of cannibalism, as the sailor-cannibals are never presented with any of the traits associated with the imagined, non-European cannibal of colonial discourse.

Keywords: ballads; cannibalism; shipwreck; nineteenth century; anthropophagy; sailors

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

17

Nineteenth-century British broadside ballads describing shipwrecks often present cannibalism not only as an acceptable practice but as a moral imperative. This is a notable difference to representations of cannibalism in other cultural discourses; particularly European imperialist doctrines in which descriptions of cannibalism as a cultural practice were used as moral justifications for colonial intrusion (**Banivanua-mar, 2010: 262**). In recent years, street literature has become increasingly valued as one of the best insights into popular historical mentalities. The effectiveness of broadside ballads for facilitating this insight is that they were ubiquitous in urban populations and their impact widespread (**Hepburn, 2000, vol 1: 63**). The appeal of broadside ballads was their accessibility. They were inexpensive and, by combining the textual with the visual and the aural, they were accessible to a broader cross-section of society, including the semi-literate or the completely illiterate (**Fumerton, 2006: 133; Roud, 2014: 1**). In the maritime community, books, tales and ballads all functioned as important means of communication, education and entertainment (**Rediker, 1987: 158**). Ballads did not merely illustrate popular opinions by holding a mirror up to British society **(Davey, 2017: 46)**. Rather, they were also instrumental in shaping their audience's perception of the world. Ballads about emigrant shipwrecks, for instance, were often at least partly didactic in purpose, reminding audiences that death might come at any time and a constant state of preparedness for meeting one's maker was vital (**Reid, 2013: 142**). It has been argued that sailors were ideal ballad consumers: irregular opportunities to use their income meant that, temporarily, they had a little extra money to spend, little room to carry books, often had an interest in music, and a lot of time on their hands (**Miller, 2012: 250**). Chapbooks and ballad-sheets taught many under-privileged people in society to read and sustained the practice of literacy in those unable to afford books (**Shepard, 1973: 110**). Their influence on the urban population in particular was significant. This might not be immediately obvious, as the ultimate fate for most ballads – one unavoidable for inexpensive paper – was often being ignominiously repurposed as pipe kindling, or paper for use in the privy (**Hehmeyer, 2012: 11**). However, this allows a broad generalisation to be made: the extant ballads which have managed to survive the test of time are likely to be those which were most numerous and, therefore, probably most popular and often reprinted.

Shipwrecks are crises which test social conventions in isolation from the conditions that normally support them; assumptions about divine Providence, national character, gender roles and civilised behaviour are thrown into sharp definition (**Lincoln, 1997: 155**). Shipwreck accounts were of immense interest to a popular readership in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and accounts were quickly published following a wreck (**Ibid**). Street literature shipwreck accounts held several purposes:

some informed travellers of the risks they would have to face at sea; others appear to have formed part of public mourning; and some offered readers practical hints on survival in desperate circumstances (**Ibid: 155; 159**). Margarette Lincoln argues that shipwreck narratives (though a minor genre) yield significant insights into contemporary popular culture and deserve wider attention (**Ibid: 172**). I wish to contribute to this by including ballads in the source base to be considered. Ballads fulfil many of the same aims as published accounts, but their key differences lie in the manner of their dissemination and in the personal way in which their audience experienced their narrative. In his classic study, Brian Simpson suggested that ballads describing 'the custom of the sea' instructed starving sailors on how to survive shipwrecks (**Simpson, 1994: 141**). I believe this argument can be taken further.

One of the most significant functions of ballads was the possibility they offered for the vicarious experience of disaster. Broadside ballads market variable role-speculation to their consumers. Singers try out identities, taking them on and casting them off as the song proceeds (**Fumerton, 2002: 504**). Patricia Fumerton argues that this is not theatrical role-playing but a vicariously or metonymically 'lived' subjectivity **(ibid: 512)**. Role-speculation was experienced by singing the various parts and, for the audience, by listening and, especially, singing along (**Fumerton, 2003: 227**). Singing a ballad in the persona of someone desperately trying to survive a shipwreck allows for safe participation in the disaster. This article discusses how those hearing or singing a ballad vicariously experienced the extreme situations, in which social norms were inverted, and cannibalism was morally acceptable. I will undertake a close reading of fictitious ballad narratives which place cannibalism into a chivalric context, and ballads recounting actual events which emphasise the drawing of lots to maintain social order and encourage civilised behaviour.

Many themes which appear in nineteenth-century shipwreck cannibalism ballads are prefigured in earlier works. *The Oxfordshire Garland* from the mid-eighteenth-century uses cannibalism as a device for encouraging heroic, self-sacrificial behaviour. In this ballad, a young woman is kidnapped by a merchant. The ship is wrecked in a storm and everyone onboard perishes except for the lady and one sailor. The audience is left to assume that this was divine intervention deciding their fate, and that only this sailor was worthy of being saved. Storms and shipwreck were often interpreted as a divine punishment as the story of the Flood would have been highly familiar to the contemporary audience (**Lincoln, 1997: 160**). The sailor's virtue is proven when they are washed ashore on an uninhabited island and eventually begin to starve. The sailor offers his own body to save the lady: 'if my flesh your hunger would suffice, / Pray take and eat your fill' (**Bodleian, ca. 1736-63**). His only request is that they pray

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

19

first. While they are praying a ship appears and they are rescued. Last-minute salvation after an appeal to delay anthropophagy is common in fictional ballad narratives. The victim, who is often selected by lots, begs for one more day or climbs the mast to search one last time for a sail – which is the case in the ballad *The Ship in Distress* (**Ashton, 1891: 45**). Paul Cowdell argues that, in ballads where cannibalism is postponed and then the protagonists are saved, it is possible that the aspiration not to be reduced to cannibalism was highly significant because the danger of cannibalism was such a reality of life at sea (**Cowdell, 2010: 733**). However, at least in this ballad, it seems that the decision to delay cannibalism is not because of any fear of 'becoming' a cannibal and acquiring the cultural attributes that were assumed to accompany this. The anthropophagic act does not occur in this ballad, but not because it is morally repulsive. The sailor's offer to die to preserve the lady's life, which would turn her into a cannibal, is instead presented as a noble gesture. Cannibalism is placed into a chivalrous context. Significantly, it is only after the self-sacrificial offer is made that help appears. This concept of self-sacrifice, which is extolled as a noble virtue, becomes even more noteworthy when considering ballads relating the ritual of shipwreck cannibalism.

There are numerous examples of survival cannibalism following shipwrecks in the nineteenth century: the *Stefano* (1875), the *Mignonette* (1884), *La Méduse* (1810), and the ill-fated Franklin expedition to the Arctic during the late 1840s (**Tannahill, 1996: 196; 192**). In many cases, lots were reportedly drawn to decide who should die to preserve their crewmates' lives. This practice is reflected in ballads. The early nineteenth-century ballad, *The Silk Merchant's Daughter*, for instance, tells the story of a lady boarding a ship in disguise to find the man she loves. During the voyage, the ship springs a leak and sinks. The ballad describes how, with 'Provisions being scarce and pale death drawing nigh,' the survivors 'cast lots to see who should die' (**Bodleian, ca. 1820**). The ritual of drawing lots is then described: 'The lots they went round, and all cast about / [And] every young Seaman his lot he drew out' (**Ibid**). The deadly lot falls to the young woman. They then drew lots to select who should kill the victim: 'the lots they went round by one two & three / For to see who amoung us the butcher should be' (**Ibid**). The equality of the ritual is maintained as each participant acknowledges that they may either have to give their life or take a friend's. This point is brought home as the man drawn to kill the lady is the very man she loves and went to sea for. She reveals herself to him and he offers to trade places saying, 'in hopes of your long life my dear I'll die first' (**Ibid**). Drawing lots maintains social order when facing the prospect of cannibalism, but if someone heroically offers themselves as a victim then the issue of one person being forced to die is avoided. Cannibalism, in such instances, is presented as the rational and pragmatic

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

20

solution; a concept voiced by the lady's lover as he prepares to die: 'Be quick in your motion let business go on' (**Ibid**). In this ballad too, anthropophagy is avoided as they find a harbour. Ballads were primarily designed for entertainment, and these fictional cannibalism accounts celebrate self-sacrificial behaviour by including cannibalism as simply an enticing addition to a set narrative of reunited lovers. In this ballad, the celebrated, chivalrous, voluntary victim is saved and rewarded as the couple marry and live happily together. Notably, these ballads never present the potential cannibals as monstrous, evil, bestial or with any of the other traits associated with the imagined, non-European cannibal of colonial discourse. The fictional cannibalism ballads mainly celebrate chivalrous, self-sacrificial behaviour, but there are also themes of destiny and fate. Had the lots not selected the lady as the victim and her partner as the butcher, they would not have been reunited. This is highly significant as it invests the lots with authority. This will become particularly important when considering ballads recounting real instances of shipwreck cannibalism.

In a shipwreck, both the physical ship and the social ties that unite the crew begin to disintegrate (**Thompson, 2007a: 14**). This is exacerbated if the survivors are stranded without food or water. Carl Thompson terms this the 'aftermath-phase' and it was often more horrifying than the wreck itself (**Thompson, 2007b: 67**). The 'aftermath-phase' contains harrowing scenes of hunger, thirst and physical deterioration. Here, the survivors' capacity for self-control begins to crumble as they consume anything vaguely edible (**Ibid: 68**). The survivors' physical decline is accompanied by the decay of the less tangible structures that make people human. Cannibalism was the '*ne plus ultra* of horror' in this phase, as it combined the collapse of the fully human self and the collapse of group loyalties and social cohesiveness (**Ibid: 68**). Therefore, a ritual that civilised the impulses of starvation was needed (**Berman, 2016: 281**). Cannibalism, if placed into a structured and fair setting, could restore order and ensure the survival of the many at the expense of the individual. I shall refer to this as 'civilised cannibalism' to differentiate it from the gastronomic and ritual cannibalism famously dismissed by William Arens, and as a more structured and regulated practice than suggested by the term survival cannibalism (**Arens, 1979: 18**). The cornerstone of civilised cannibalism was the infamous drawing of lots, which we saw in *The Silk Merchant's Daughter* and also figures in several other ballad accounts. Making decisions based on the casting of lots has been common practice throughout human history, using everything from pebbles and nuts to coins and dice (**Silverman & Chalmers, 2001: 1467**). In ancient Greece, democracy was a political regime in which offices were equally distributed by the drawing of lots (**Avramescu, 2011: 32**). The drawing of lots at sea to

decide upon a victim in times of starvation is thought to be an old tradition of the sea and it was generally held that, as long as one drew lots, all would be well (**Simpson, 1994: 255**). Ballads encourage acts of self-sacrifice and heroism, but the crucial point is that, in dire situations, civilised cannibalism was the rational choice. The case of the *Francis Spaight* is one of the best documented accounts of shipwreck cannibalism and gave rise to several ballads (**Ibid: 128**). This ship partially capsized on 3 December 1835 (**Simpson, 1997: 130**). The crew survived for twenty days before being rescued. Their story was quickly taken up by newspapers around Britain. The *Morning Post* described the 'aftermath-phase':

> *They continued in that dreadful condition, and without food, until the morning of the 18th Dec., when, finding it impossible to exist any longer without meat or drink, they were driven to the necessity of drawing lots, which fell on a boy, who was killed, and on his body they subsisted until the 20th* (**Anon, 1836a**).

Significantly, the surviving sailors were pitied not reviled. The *Royal Cornwall Gazette* described how the arrival of the ship *Agenoria* 'prevented any more such heart-sickening necessities' (**Anon, 1836b**). It describes the cannibals, not as monstrous figures who have abandoned civilised behaviour, but as 'wretched creatures,' whose 'miserable condition language fails to describe' (**Ibid**). Empathy was also clearly shown to the starving seamen by the *Agenoria*'s crew. The rescued crew reported being treated with the 'greatest humanity and kindness.' (**Anon, 1836a**).

Ballads about shipwreck cannibalism are frequently sung in the first person. Therefore, the role-speculation offered is that of someone who experienced the tragedy and the singer is provided with a preview of the techniques used to survive and the ritual they might have to follow in the future. In *The Loss of the Francis Spaight*, the singer (in the persona of a survivor) recounts their experiences: 'Our vessel it became water-logg'd in dead hour of the night, / The swelling billows o'er us roll'd, which did us sore affright' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910a**). Furthermore, the fact that the ballad is sung in the persona of a survivor means it is being sung by a cannibal. Anyone singing this ballad assumes the identity of a cannibal. Ballads provide cannibals a voice to emphasise the suffering they endured and justify their recourse to anthropophagy.

If first-person narratives allow role-speculation on the part of the singer, the vicarious experience offered to the audience often provides instruction on the cannibalism ritual. This can be seen in a ballad describing the ship the *Essex*. The narrative of this famous whaling ship helped inspire Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (**Simpson, 1994: 125**)**.** This ship sank in November 1820 after it was attacked by a sperm whale and

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

22

the survivors piled into the small whaling boats. The cruel irony of this event is that the captain suggested making for the Society Islands, but the crew refused fearing that cannibals lived there **(Dowling, 2016: 4)**. Instead they attempted the longer voyage, in boats not designed to cross open ocean, towards South America. They slowly starved and repeatedly drew lots to see who would be sacrificed until the crew of twenty had been reduced to eight (**Dowling, 2016: 5**). The ballad *The Shipwreck of the Essex* describes how a sailor was selected through the drawing of lots and 'Then his messmates they killed him and cut off his head, / And all the ship's crew from the body did feed' (**Simpson Appendix C, ca. 1820**). The specific detail of decapitation is an important piece of information for those sailors having a preview of the ritual as it seems to have been a common preliminary action to consuming the corpse (**Simpson, 1994: 142**).

Ballads justified cannibalism by arguing that it was rational and in the interests of the many. One way this was achieved was through acknowledging that sailors' families depended on them for financial support. The captain of the *Francis Spaight* only entered four boys into the lottery because 'they have no wives: to save our lives one of these four must die' (**Healy, 1976: 62**). This might seem unfair. However, family destitution (so often the result of shipwreck) was a constant theme in nineteenth-century popular literature, and the existence of dependents constituted a rational ground for exclusion from the ritual (**Simpson, 1994: 62-63**). This argument also occurs in a ballad describing the ship the *Mignonette*, a famous account of cannibalism which occurred on a yacht in 1884 and later caught the imagination of the British public. The ballad, *Fearful Sufferings at Sea: Lad Killed and Eaten*, describes how the sailors 'thought of their children, their homes and their wives, / They killed the poor boy to preserve their own lives' (**National Library of Scotland, ca. 1884**). With the acknowledgement of the dependents, the ballad explains that the decision to commit anthropophagy not only saved the sailors' lives but their families' too.

In *The Loss of the Francis Spaight*, one of the boys, O'Brien, states: 'I know you are all combined to take my life away' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910a**). The intimation that this selection was rigged occurs frequently in written accounts of the *Francis Spaight* (although this is the only ballad that mentions it). A detailed account of the event was written by one of the survivors, John Palmer. Concerning whether the selection was rigged or not, Palmer answers diplomatically:

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

23

> *Whether there was a previous understanding among some of the ship's crew, that he should be the one selected as a victim…is well known to Him, from whom no human act can be concealed; but…such was the distracted state of my feelings at that moment, that it was impossible for me to determine* (**Palmer, 1837: 7**).

Drawing lots is a game of chance. However, it is rarely presented as such. Lotteries were not only equitable, they put the choice in the hands of God (**Goodwin, 1992: 44**). Therefore, ballads present the results with the solemnity of destiny and fate and not as simple bad luck. As in the *Silk Merchant's Daughter*, the lots themselves hold authority and shape the destiny of the characters. For example, the lot '*said* O'Brien was to die' (**Healy, 1976: 62**). O'Brien is aggrieved at being selected because he does not feel that this is his fate, people conspired against him. The unfair drawing of lots is the only part of this narrative to which the ballad allows its audience to object. The actual cannibalism, on the other hand, is presented as necessary and the ballad reinforces its message that one of the four unmarried boys should have been consumed. Its final verse rejoices that the crew are now safe on shore with '[their] comrades and [their] wives' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910a**). Jacob Berman argues that it is highly likely that the drawing of lots was never a fair selection. Contemporaries reading published accounts knew what to expect in a story of drawing straws: the captain never lost; black sailors, foreigners and cabin boys often did. The lottery brought cannibalism under the cloak of rationality, civility and fairness (**Berman, 2016: 278; 285**). The recurring dramatic events in shipwreck narratives are noted by Thompson who refers to a master narrative familiar to writers and readers of shipwreck narratives, and to some extent the participants in a wreck (**Thompson, 2007b: 66-67**). Kirsty Reid argues that the master narrative concept seems to have a limited application in the case of broadside ballads, which tended to dwell on the initial 'disaster-phase' and pay little attention to themes like cannibalism, survival on desert islands or encounters with savage peoples (**Reid, 2013: 133**). The ballads discussed in this article are an exception to this general statement as they all include depictions of cannibalism.

The possibility that lots were never drawn, or drawn fraudulently, initially seems to conflict with representations of civilised cannibalism in ballads, where it is a key factor (**Cowdell, 2010: 731**). However, this disparity is at the heart of the uncomfortable truth confronted by ballads: starving sailors ate one another to survive. These sailors could not simply be demonised as savages because of the moral areas of uncertainty which clouded their cases. Ballads might be criticised as sources for not reflecting this historical reality. However, as tools of propaganda and persuasion they constructed a reality which extolled the virtue of democratic selection

and encouraged self-sacrifice. While it is likely that the ritual of drawing lots was rarely performed equitably, and the choice of victim rigged or highly unfair, one of the functions of civilised cannibalism ballads was to promote an ideal method of victim selection.

Civilised cannibalism ballads illustrated circumstances wherein anthropophagy was represented as rational and justifiable. One way was through descriptions of dependant families and another was through an emphasis on how long sailors endured starvation before resorting to cannibalism, and on the dangers that they confronted daily. The ballad about the *Essex*, for example, states: 'God bless all poor seamen their children and wives, / In trying to get their bread how they venture their lives' (**Simpson Appendix C, ca. 1820**). Many ballads allude to a distinction between seamen, who can understand the demands of maritime life, and landsmen, who cannot. One such instance of a ballad aimed at a non-maritime audience begins: 'Attend ye British landsmen / And listen unto me, / While unto you I do relate / The dangers of the sea' (**Simpson Appendix C, ca. 1822**). Another of the *Francis Spaight* ballads, on the other hand, speaks to the fraternity of sailors: 'The hardships that we suffered brother seamen you may guess' (**Simpson Appendix C, ca. 1835**). This divide between the maritime and the non-maritime audience is encapsulated in the ballad *The Ship in Distress* (also known by the title *You Seamen Bold*), which states that sailors 'see dangers landsmen never know,' and that 'no tongue can tell what [sailors] undergo' (**Ashton, 1891: 44**). This might suggest that the custom of the sea was more accepted by the maritime community than the non-maritime. However, as an examination of the response to the *Mignonette* disaster will show, shipwreck cannibalism was mostly understood and condoned by the general population. Ballads taught their entire audience, maritime and non-maritime, that civilised cannibalism was rational and acceptable. Emphasis on the divide between the maritime and non-maritime audience was perhaps intended to help the non-maritime audience, who had no direct experience of the struggles of seafaring life, to emote with starving sailors.

The case of the *Mignonette* was a cause célèbre during the final years of the nineteenth century (**Hutchinson, 2011: 14**). The strength of public sympathy for the sailors can be seen from the anonymous threatening letter sent to the mayor of Falmouth which condemned him for issuing an arrest warrant for the men who had survived by eating the cabin boy. The writer stated an intention 'to come to Falmouth to shoot the Mayor… [who had placed] suffering upon men who had already gone through so much' (**Anon, 1884a**). On the other side, a letter was published in the newspaper which stated that the 'magistrates of Falmouth have done a public service

in arresting Captain Dudley [captain of the *Mignonette*].' The letter argues that:

> *It is high time that the hideous tradition of the seas which authorises starving sailors to kill and eat their comrades should be exposed in a court of justice, and sailors taught, once and for all, that the special dangers of their profession furnish no excuse for a practice as directly opposed to human nature as it is to divide law* (**Anon, 1884b**).

On its way to Australia, the *Mignonette* was swamped by a large wave and sank. The four sailors got into the life boat and:

> *On the eighteenth day, they having had no food of any kind for seven days and no water for five days, and their condition having become so bad, they began to discuss the advisability of casting lots as to who should be killed for food for the others* (**Anon, 1884c**).

The next morning, the captain and mate suggested that they should kill the young cabin boy, Richard Parker. The reason for this choice was 'because he was suffering most from having drunk so much salt water. They also reasoned that he was only a lad, with no responsibilities, while they were married men with wives and families depending on them' (**Anon, 1884c**). Parker was killed, eaten and they were rescued a few days later. Once in Falmouth, they were arrested 'on a charge of "wilfully, feloniously, and of malice aforethought" killing Richard Parker on the high seas' (**Anon. 1884a**).

 One ballad persuades the audience to accept their actions by emphasising that anyone who has not experienced the horrors of shipwreck cannot comprehend them: 'God help poor sailors – for we cannot see / What they go through when alone on the sea' (**National Library of Scotland, ca. 1884**). The ultimate didactic message of the ballad is given in the lines:

> *It may seem strange to me and to you,*
> *But we cannot tell what hunger will do.*
> *What must it be when day after day,*
> *Starvation slowly takes life away,*
> *The burning sun on them, 'tis fearful to think*
> *Tho' surrounded by water not [a] drop to drink* (**National Library of Scotland, ca. 1884).**

The fullest expression of the different opinions held by men of the sea and the representatives of the common law is that the survivors were astonished to be arrested (**Simpson, 1994: 11; 10**). They had accelerated Richard Parker's death and, to the law, this was murder but public opinion largely differed (**Simpson, 1994: 65**). In fact, many of the public saw the sailors as heroes who had survived a horrific ordeal and should be

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

26

celebrated rather than prosecuted (**Hutchinson, 2011: 25**). However, this was, notably, not the initial reaction. *The Cornish Telegraph* reported that 'the question most extensively discussed was "why did they not cast lots?" and in the mind of a very large section a feeling of strong antipathy towards the survivors has been created on this point' (**Anon, 1884c**). This might seem surprising as the decision to select a young victim was not questioned in the events of the *Francis Spaight*. One possible explanation for this is that there were multiple youths to be entered into a lottery in that case, whereas on the *Mignonette*, as there was only one young boy, no lottery could be drawn, and fate could not select the victim. In Falmouth, local opinion was initially against the survivors but when the captain's account describing the attempt to draw lots began to circulate, public opinion turned in their favour (**Simpson, 1994: 80**). This might have been selective use of the truth, as they had only discussed drawing lots, however, the turn in public opinion following the report demonstrates that the casting of lots was generally deemed acceptable practice. It was the failure to conform to the civilised cannibalism model which was denigrated. This is highly significant when considering the role of ballads. As noted earlier, it is probable that the drawing of lots rarely occurred, and if it did, that it was unfairly rigged. Ballads, as a form of popular entertainment and education, helped promote the ideal ritual of civilised cannibalism where the process was entirely equitable, and fate selected the victim.

Ballads were particularly significant in the events surrounding the *Mignonette* as they played a part in the survivors' trial. The wording of the ballad cited above, indicates that the story was converted into ballad form while the legal case against the men was still ongoing. This piece emphasised the hardship faced by sailors and called for sympathy:

> *The Captain and mate are now on their trial,*
> *To killing the boy they give no denial,*
> *'Tis a terrible story which they have to tell,*
> *How they have suffered and how the boy fell.*
> *They will never forget those days on the sea,*
> *As long as they live, wherever they be*
> *[God] bless poor sailors alone on the wave,*
> *The ocean alas, is too often their grave* (**National Library of Scotland, ca. 1884**).

This method of circulating a sympathetic narrative was vital to the surviving sailors' legal defence. Ballads were vehicles of mourning and commemoration and played roles in broader public attempts to raise money in the aftermath of shipwrecks; either for the support of survivors and bereaved families or to erect gravestones and monuments to the dead

(**Reid, 2013: 143**). In the case of the *Mignonette*, ballads not only disseminated the story to a wide audience and garnered public support, but it is highly probable that the money gained from selling such ballads went directly to pay for the sailors' legal costs (**Simpson, 1994: 84**). A defence fund was set up and thanks to strong public support, for which ballads can take some credit, a talented and costly lawyer was hired to defend the men (**Hutchinson, 2011: 27**). The gesture which most strikingly captures the public sentiment towards the cannibal sailors was that Daniel Parker, older brother of the deceased Richard, publicly shook hands with the men who consumed his brother (**Hutchinson, 2011: 26**). The sailors were initially sentenced to death, but this sentence was commuted by Queen Victoria to six months in prison. It was decided that this mild sentence would best satisfy the judicial process and appease public opinion (**Hutchinson, 2011: 32**). The money remaining in the defence fund after the trial was used to erect a tombstone for Richard Parker. Hutchinson states that the two biblical quotations inscribed upon it are highly telling of the general sentiment held by the people who paid to erect it: 'Though he slay me yet will I trust in him' and 'Lord lay not this sin to their charge' (**Hutchinson, 2011: 37**). The influence of public opinion, which ballads helped shape, was instrumental in the outcome of this case.

One of the best ways to appeal to public sympathy was to encourage the audience to feel pity for sailors. In the *Francis Spaight* ballads, once O'Brien has been selected, the cook is called upon to bleed him. This was another common step in the procedure. Bleeding someone who is still alive ensures that there is blood to drink (**Simpson, 1994: 122**). The final verses of *The Loss of the Francis Spaight* are positioned so as to legitimise all previous events and inform the ballad audience that the crew had done everything possible to avoid cannibalism. The penultimate verse begins 'hunger and thirst they are two things that are very ill to bide,' before explaining that the sailors had managed to survive for sixteen days, chewing the horn buttons of their jackets for sustenance, before ever 'in human blood our hands we did embrue' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910a**). Another ballad addresses the non-maritime audience, 'come landsmen all and pity we, / Rolling on the raging sea', and states that 'when you hear our awful fate, / You can't but shed a tear' (**Ibid**). It is noteworthy that the awful fate is 'ours' meaning survivors and deceased. The ballad encourages pity for the men who consumed their crewmates. The fact that this verse is addressed only to landsmen suggests that perhaps the non-maritime audience were less familiar with the terrible conditions which could lead to such extreme situations where cannibalism appeared the rational course of action. These were the people the ballad needed to convince, and it achieves this through a ballad formula.

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

28

Ballad formulas are structural devices made of repeated verb-centred lines or phrases which highlight crucial points in the ballad action (**Andersen, 1985: 29-30**). There are two formulas repeated in *Loss of the Ship Francis Spede*. The first emphasises the time endured before cannibalism took place: 'Our vessel on the ocean, / Quite motionless they lay, / For 16 days and 16 nights, / All on the raging sea' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910b**). This formula demonstrates endless suffering and explains that the shipwrecked mariners saw no hope of rescue. The second formula describes the consumption of O'Brien: 'his tender veins were bled, / And on his tender flesh and blood / His hungry messmates fed' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910b**). This formula shows the level to which the crew has been reduced. However, the ballad does not cast judgement. It is highly significant that the fact that the first step in survival cannibalism is to bleed the victim's veins is emphasised through a ballad formula. This supports the notion that ballads helped foster and sustain a prescribed civilised cannibalism ritual designed to prevent the crew devolving into anarchy. Formulas highlight crucial sections of a ballad. The first formula emphasises how hopeless and interminable their suffering was, which it crucially does before the second formula highlights what a desperate state the crew were in. The ultimate message which is reinforced by these devices is that the men are to be pitied not reviled.

Some ballads give O'Brien a final speech in which he does not blame his crewmates or accuse them of murdering him. This final speech almost certainly never happened. In reality, O'Brien was attacked by the crew. Palmer informs us that, 'he was instantly dispatched, and his limbs detached from his emaciated body, and distributed among his still more wretched shipmates!' (**Palmer, 1837: 7**). The ballads describing the event would never include this information. They aimed to promote civilised behaviour and self-sacrifice. The role of survival cannibalism in saving the many at the expense of the individual is made clear in *Loss of the Ship Francis Spede* in a macabre image. The ballad explains that the crew signalled to a passing ship by waving O'Brien's legs in the air, and it was this that 'caused them to draw nigh' (**Bodleian, ca. 1830-1910b**). The description of this gruesome semaphore underlines the fact that the crew would have died if it were not for O'Brien. His death saved them twice: once as physical sustenance, and once as a signal for help.

I support Simpson's argument that ballads instructed sailors on the ritual of drawing lots and the way in which crewmates should be consumed. However, I believe that ballads did more than simply reflect contemporary mentalities; they had an active role in shaping them and affecting their audience's perception of the outside world. Descent into cannibalism suggests the collapse of civil society and a slide into a state of nature (**Thompson, 2014: 142**). This association appeared frequently in European

Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

29

colonial literature, justifying the subjugation of native rights. However, the presentation of cannibalism in shipwreck ballads is radically different. In fictitious ballad narratives, cannibalism was accepted and not portrayed as a monstrous act. These ballads encouraged and rewarded self-sacrificial behaviour. Ballads describing real disasters argued that cannibalism was necessary for the survival of the majority and the welfare of their families. They achieved this through emotive language, ballad formulas, and an emphasis on a community of sailors whose sufferings could not be fully comprehended. Through role-speculation, ballads allowed their audience to vicariously experience the horrors of shipwreck and illustrated the conditions that drove sailors to cannibalism. The function of ballads was to highlight the morality of the circumstances where cannibalism was acceptable. As a form of popular entertainment and education they promoted civilised cannibalism which revolved around a fair, equitable victim selection process where fate and destiny took control. The custom of the sea was not just acceptable and justifiable; it was a moral imperative.

It seems clear that most people, both from the maritime and the non-maritime audience, accepted the custom of the sea, but only when it was accompanied by the drawing of lots. The frequent addresses in ballads to landsmen in particular might suggest that there was more antipathy towards this view among them, or at least that they needed greater help in understanding the dangers and horrors of maritime life. However, it seems that the civilised ritual was rarely, if ever, followed and with dubious fairness when it was. This is why ballads promoted civilised cannibalism. This combatted the uncomfortable truth of the way in which the custom of the sea was followed. The ideal version espoused by ballads removed the anarchic, savage connotations of cannibalism.

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Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

30
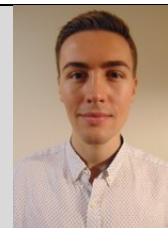
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31

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Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

32

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Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

33

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Frost. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 17-34

34

Consuming and Being Consumed: Cannibalism in the Consumerist Society of Margaret Atwood's 'The Edible Woman'

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Abstract

The article explores how Margaret Atwood demystifies the romance plot in her first novel The Edible Woman by exposing the world of consumerism as artificial and threatening to the point of cannibalism. This is revealed through references to fairy tales and myths with cannibalistic undertones such as 'Snow White', 'The Robber Bridegroom' and 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. It is also highlighted in the reference to the theme of the eaten heart in Boccaccio's Decameron and to Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus. In the tempting world of advertisements and commercials, women are objectified and traded and their roles are diminished. In this realm, Marian, the protagonist, is in search of her identity but first tries to 'adjust' to society's artificial and delusional narrative. The advertisements dictate a behaviour, objectify her body and force her to comply with preformed roles. She consciously tries to defend herself from this consumerist mentality by allowing her body to 'speak' for her. Her body starts to refuse food and she feels it is alive, until it cuts itself off. Therefore, showing how she refuses to 'adjust' to the consumerist society. The narrative points out the inherent cannibalistic quality of the consumerist society in which human beings are commodities and their roles are dictated by commercials and the ferocious rules of profit.

Keywords: intertextuality; cannibalism; postcolonial; consumerism; patriarchal; eating disorder; advertisement

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

35

> *'Nonsense,' she said. 'It's only a cake.'*
> The Edible Woman (**Atwood, 2009**)

In her first published novel, *The Edible Woman* (published 1969), Margaret Atwood exposes the world of consumerism as artificial and threatening to the point of cannibalism. This is revealed through references to fairy and folk tales with cannibalistic undertones such as 'Little Red Cap', 'Snow White', 'The Robber Bridegroom' and 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' (Wilson, 1993: 82-83).[1] It is also highlighted in the reference to the theme of the eaten heart linked to Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Fourth Day, first and ninth stories) and to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. The narrative explicitly mentions *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll and refers to commercials and advertisements of the 1960s.

In this paper, I argue that the intertextual discourse in *The Edible Woman* underlines the cannibalistic aspect of consumerist society, which matters significantly in the reading of the text. Through intertexts and allusions, Atwood shows how the tempting world of advertisements exercises a power that moulds individual identity and influences people's behaviour and that its final aim is sheer profit. It is a constructed world of fantasy where individuals are supposed to attain happiness and satisfaction through consumption. At the same time, its cannibalistic undertones menace and force people into prescribed roles, threatening their integrity. Furthermore, in Atwood's novels, the concept of cannibalism is linked to postcolonial discourses in the sense of the colonisation, exploitation and objectification of women's bodies. As McWilliams claims, in *The Edible Woman* 'food takes a new resonance in the feminist and postcolonial discourse of [Atwood's] fiction' (**McWilliams, 2006: 63**). Atwood explores Canadian identity and culture in relation to female identity in more detail in her second novel, *Surfacing*, and in *Survival: A thematic guide to Canadian literature* (both published 1972). Nevertheless, these concepts are already present in *The Edible Woman*. In this novel, according to Tolan, 'Canada is caught between two opposing power positions. It is both the ex-colonial nation …, and it is undeniably a First World nation, with a position of privilege and power in the world' (**Tolan, 2009: 143**). In Atwood, 'the examination of women's power is frequently employed as a metaphor for Canada's experience as a postcolonial nation' (**Ibid: 144**). Consequently, the concept of identity is shifting and 'the boundary between self and the other – between colonizer and colonized – is fluid and uncertain' (**Ibid: 144**). At the same time, Canadian society is also an 'invader-settler society' (**Ibid: 149**) that is complicit with the domination of the coloniser.

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

36

The Colonised Woman's Body

In Atwood's novels women need to camouflage and mimic the roles dictated by society to survive. The strategies of colonial power are described as 'irony, mimicry, and repetition' by Homi Bhabha (**Bhabha, 1984: 126**), appropriating and threatening the 'other' if they do not comply with the dictated roles. The colonised subject is defined as '*a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (**Ibid, emphasis in original**). This underlines ambivalence, a forked discourse where the subject is alienated and discriminated against by apparently logical and rational discourses. Therefore, according to Bhabha, the inherent contradiction of postcolonial theory violates the 'rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality' (**Ibid: 132**), turning from mimicry to menace and triggering irony. In this perspective, a woman's body is constructed for a man's pleasure and adapted to his desire and to the needs of society. Women are surveilled and controlled by men's gaze and their horizons are limited to being a mother, a carer and a lover to fulfil social and political purposes as an object of pleasure that also reproduces the species. Society can be said to be cannibalistic, threatening women's survival if they do not comply with their role. Its apparently rational discourses hide ruthless exploitation of women's bodies and the logic of profit of the consumerist society. The narratives and intertextual references in *The Edible Woman* highlight the inherent cannibalistic quality of the consumerist society in which human beings are commodities and their roles are dictated by commercials and the ferocious rules of profit. It is consuming 'for its own sake, without thought, discretion or taste', in a mass market where the subjects are induced to accumulate (**Bartolovich, 1998: 206**).

Similarly, according to Maria Mies, the exploitation and colonisation of women as a foreign land are connected to a postcolonial mentality that emerged in the patriarchal capitalist society, fragmenting and objectifying the 'other' so that it was seen as an 'enemy' (**Mies & Shiva, 2014: 5**). The female body is fetishised and mechanised to transform it into a profitable machine, a resource that is appropriated and manipulated so that it can be exploited to supply commodities in a consumerist system (**Mies, 2014b: 26, 33**). In a similar way, native lands are considered empty, unexploited by Indigenous peoples, and therefore the appropriation of their resources by the colonisers is considered an improvement instead of a violation (**Ibid: 32**).[2] Nevertheless, the abuses committed by colonisers against Indigenous peoples is not exactly the same kind of abuse committed by men against women. In fact, white women are part of the dominant society and therefore have a privileged status compared to Indigenous peoples and other groups that are discriminated against, such as Black people.

Mies also observes an increasing 'tendency towards domesticity' in the nineteenth century that secludes women in the home (**Ibid: 102**). Therefore, the housewife becomes a 'social category', and an 'agent of consumption', creating new needs and 'a market for the new products' (**Ibid: 105, 106**). Similarly to native lands and Indigenous peoples, 'women's labour is considered a natural resource, freely available like air and water' (**Ibid: 110**). It is an 'internal colony' that is exploited in the same way as 'external colonies' (**Ibid: 110**). This process is necessary for the 'ongoing capitalist accumulation' process (**Ibid: 170**) that sustains modern society. The work is unpaid and does not empower women (**Federici, 2002: 62**); on the contrary, it 'has been the pillar upon which the exploitation of the waged workers … has been built, and the secret of its productivity' as well as the 'source of capital accumulation' (**Federici, 2004: 8**).[3] In this context, the implicit cannibalism of the consumerist society is evident in the desire for an absolute and unlimited consumption that needs to deplete the increasing mass production by over-accumulation.

As Jerry Phillips claims, consumerism is therefore linked to the Marxian concept of 'primitive accumulation' in which capitalism is cannibalism, a vampire that thrives 'on the blood of the living' (**Phillips, 1998: 186**). It is a 'corporeal dismemberment' in which workers' labour becomes a commodity that is '*disembodied*, detached from the persons who perform it' (**McNally, 2011: 13, 14, emphasis in original**). Therefore, the workers' bodies are fragmented and subjected to surveillance and to the system of machinery (**Ibid: 15**). Marian's body's resistance to this tendency through starvation is evidence of her rebellion against the current consumer role. Her struggle to recover a wholeness of mind and body testifies to this risk of fragmentation and mutilation inherent in the consumerist society.

In opposition to this consumerist world, the objectified exploited female body speaks a distinctive language, taking control of the actions of Marian McAlpin, the protagonist. It leads her to an awakening and self-discovery and to alternative identities to the stereotyped female roles that surround her. It takes action by running away, refusing food and vomiting, or searching for renewal in sexual exploration that encompasses sexual self-pleasure, cleaning, cooking and eating food. Thus, her body speaks of rebellion and subversion while her mind keeps aligning to society's rules. The final act of metaphorical cannibalism (eating the woman-shaped cake) is a reappropriation of the body and the dissolution of the 'enemy' in digestion: the woman is considered to be like a submissive, glossy doll.

The protagonist's eating disorder can be interpreted as an act of self-cannibalism, a 'symbolic (self-) destructiveness' that exposes a 'failure to achieve autonomy' in a society that does not allow self-determination (**Sceats, 2004: 64-65**). Simultaneously, it reveals a creative attitude that

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

38

reshapes the self in a 'ritual of eating [that] becomes metamorphosed into a creative expression' (**Hobgood, 2002: 154**) and exposes different visions of being human.[4] The body becomes capable of resistance and expresses subjectivity through powerlessness, overcoming the dictated mind/body split (**Ibid: 155**). Atwood proposes a re-reading of the female body that 'dismantles the culturally-encoded concept of femininity …; women must re-embody themselves and consequently re-embody culture' (**Sanchez-Grant, 2008: 79**). This possible new ontological vision rewrites the narratives through the body that is resisting the conventions and the consequent danger of becoming edible.

Therefore, in this context, anorexia nervosa is linked to 'body construction and relationships' and self-identity (**Mancini, 2010: ix**).[5] Consequently, refusing food implies a protest and signals the autonomy of the person (**Ibid: 164**). It is an 'extreme way to affirm oneself', to modify the body by 'not wanting to be the one whom a person *is*' (**Ibid: 164, author's emphasis**). The image the anorexic person conveys is both weak and strong in a game of 'consumption and destruction' where the woman's body is 'deconstructed and rebuilt' (**Ibid: 165-166**).

The dichotomy between mind and body is revealed as menacing, contradictory and aiming to control women's behaviour. Simultaneously, Marian's marginal position allows her to develop a different vision that is more fluid, flexible and always in process. As Howells claims, this vision is 'possibly multiple' and 'in constant transformation' (**Howells, 2003: 20**). It is a logic of becoming, a process connected to experience that is expressed in actions and body language to affirm their existence. In this sense, 'the anorexic is the victim of representation, trapped in embodiment through stereotypical and alienating images – but at the same time … only a realistic, nonrepressive and less regulative form of representation will allow women to see themselves as autonomous subjects' (**Bray, 1998: 35**). In this context, eating disorders are a way of opening a woman's body to other possibilities, 'in terms of bodily activity rather than in terms of a repressed or negated "normal" body' (**Ibid: 37**). It is a way of 'thinking-through-the-body and of establishing the corporeal ground of intelligence' (Bray, 1998: 46) in a process of 'self-formation' that is both 'forms of critique' and 'the production of a "being otherwise"' (**Ibid: 58**). Therefore, Marian, through her 'symbolic form of anorexia' (**Sceats, 2004: 98**), not only defies the consumerist society and rejects the women's roles forced on her but also reshapes her body and consequently her identity. She creates possible alternatives that go beyond dichotomous views and point to multiplicity and transformation.

In this perspective, cannibalism has a double significance; it is predatory in the consumerist male-dominant society, and, in an anorexic view, it allows a new vision that reshapes the body and mind in a re-embodiment of culture, suggesting possible alternatives. The intertextual connections emphasise this progress in the protagonist's journey in search of her identity, which is both personal and national. Nevertheless, as Tolan claims, Canada is in an ambiguous position; it is a colony of settlers that exploited the new land and assimilated Indigenous peoples, dispossessing them of their territories, and it is a colony itself, exploited by Britain and influenced by the US.[6] Though Atwood seems to suggest that Canada and women impersonate the role of victim in modern society and that the emancipation of Canada is linked to that of Canadian women (**Zidan, 2013: 13**), Canada can also be seen as a victim that colludes with the victimiser. Similarly, 'women collude in their oppression (in being edible), through passivity and the assumption of innocence' (**Sceats, 2004: 98**). Therefore, they need to reconsider the victim position and reshape their identity both at a cultural and a personal level towards a more disengaged autonomous vision.[7]

Most critics highlight the centrality of the female body in the narrative and how it voices the protagonist's protest against the constrictive and exploitative roles and rules of the male-dominant society, which in part coincides with the consumerist society (**Howells, 2005: 20, 23**). Marian's body 'becomes the site of victimisation, internal conflict and rebellion' (**Ibid: 23**) and 'is subject to sudden metamorphoses, transformations which are symbolic of her mental state' (**Hill-Rigney, 1987: 20**). Marian's refusal of food is interpreted as a rejection of the roles and identities proposed by society, and her prescribed destiny is revealed in both the Pension Plan of the market company she works for and the models of wife and mother proposed in the narrative (**Wisker, 2012: 37**).[8] Her 'loss of appetite marks a resistance to pre-designated roles as both consumed and consumer' (**Davies, 2006: 60**). Her powerlessness is silently acknowledged and leads to a split between body and mind, a crisis and displacement in which the body's self-cannibalism blackmails the mind (**Palumbo, 2000: 74**). The body becomes 'a figurative text' (**Davies, 2006: 61**) that is written and rewritten, resignified in a palimpsestic approach (**Ibid: 67**), in an attempt to shape an alternative identity. It speaks a non-verbal language, a concept pointed out by several critics regarding Marian but also other characters, such as Duncan in relation to his ironing obsession (**Greene, 2008: 31**). In the final performative action of making a sponge-cake woman, Marian creates an edible substitute, a sacrifice (**Ibid: 12**) for the market of the consumerist society in which she was traded as a commodity, affirming that 'she is not food' (**Wilson, 1993: 96**). Simultaneously, by eating the cake, Marian becomes a consumer again,

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

40

which entails 'empowerment … aggression and participation in the *status quo*' (**Sceats, 2004: 99**), denoting 'the impossibility of transcending the "system"' (**Greene, 2008: 12**). Power shifts: the objectified woman is hungry again and therefore powerful. Bouson underlines the 'female protest and revenge in the final – and controversial – cake-woman scene' (**Bouson, 1993: 32**) as a 'way out' from 'the traditional romantic and novelistic ideology that insists on marriage as the end point of the story of female maturation' (**Ibid: 37**). Therefore, the reduction of people to objects to be traded in the consumerist marketplace exposes the objectification of women (but of men too, who need to comply with certain gender roles and are forced into the position of consumer) – their diminishment and complicity. The control exercised by the consumerist society through alluring advertisements induces accumulation and forced consumption.

In this context, the relation with food permeates the whole narrative, defining 'the main characters' growth and development' (**McWilliams, 2009: 76**). It is 'an ideological weapon' (**McWilliams, 2006: 69**) that implements a political protest in power relations where eating and not eating mark the difference between authority and subject and where the body is a battlefield.[9] At the end of the novel, the protagonist 'operates' the cake, pulling, scooping, nipping and decorating it in a symbolic repetition of the painful and diminishing process she has undergone. By eating the cake, she metaphorically cannibalises the female stereotype she was trapped in (**Sanchez-Grant, 2008: 90**), which underlines the impossibility of avoiding a cannibalistic reciprocity in the consumerist society. It also envisages a possible alternative in refusing to be totally moulded by the consumerist society in a more conscious and disciplined relationship with the products, which implies creativity. Consumption becomes 'a passion that needs to be tamed into accepted, rational forms of capitalization or self-improvement' (**Asquer, 2012: 3**). Therefore, the body needs 'to be controlled and restrained, but also had to be transformed, modified, and expanded by the self' (**Ibid: 3**). A reshaping of the body and the self in a more conscious consumer perspective entails creative potential and, at the same time, aims to avoid addictions and manipulations (**Asquer, 2012: 15**).

In this perspective, consumption is linked to the different interpretations of cannibalism. It is considered 'a product of European imagination … a tool of Empire' (**Barker et al., 1998: 3**) and a white man's fabrication denoting a voyeuristic attitude (**Price, 2003: xviii**). At the same time, it is also a practice testified to by ancient and modern texts and interpreted as a way of 'making sense of human life' (**Burley, 2016: 1**) and coping with death. Therefore, cannibalism is considered a different conception of being human, as Montaigne points out in his seminal essay.[10] It is a

complex concept that 'at some level tells us what it means to be human, on another level it separates the human from the bestial' (**Price, 2003: 23**). Simultaneously, consumption cannot be avoided, though it needs to be tamed.

This ambiguous meaning of cannibalism is reflected in the consumerist world of *The Edible Woman*, disguised in symbolic consumption (**Parker, 1995: 363**) that upholds profiteering. This generates behaviour that 'is perceived as normal human behaviour' and exposes 'the disturbing underside of a violent relationship between the sexes that is only thinly disguised as civilization' (**Ibid**). Therefore, consumerism feeds on the subjects, transforming them into objects, commodities to be traded in the production-selling chain where they are, simultaneously, cannibalistic consumers forced to stuff themselves. In this way, society itself is the symbolic coloniser that 'deceives the consumer through mimicry' (**Mijomanovic, 2016: 70**), forcing individuals into roles that control and exploit their behaviour. At the same time, being a consumer, and therefore a cannibal, seems to be part of being human and therefore cannot be avoided in the context of the novel.

Does Consumerism Equal Cannibalism? An Intertextual Reading of Consumerism in *The Edible Woman*

The cannibalistic nature inherent in the consumerist society is highlighted by the intertexts and allusions in the novel. Atwood exposes the artificiality and incongruities of modern society which hides a profit-aimed logic under the apparently harmless world of advertisements. It is a logic disentangled from rational discourses and linked instead to postcolonial strategies. Atwood's approach is critical; she questions the status quo, exploring possible alternative paths, but does not give a final solution. The open ending envisages uncertain alternatives without defining what will come afterwards and emphasises the necessity of a creative reshaping that encompasses a cultural re-embodiment in a possible new ontological vision. This does not deny a consumer/consumed relationship and envisages a possible more conscious way of consuming.

The allusions and intertexts work as citations and pastiche in an intentional self-reflexive discourse and expose the parodic significance of the story. Becker notes that for Atwood 'irony – like parody – presupposes a certain complicity with that which it contests, and that paradox remains unresolved' (**Becker, 2000: 33**). The novel's parodic intent and intertextual essence expose obsolete roles and patterns 'by mirroring them' (**Hutcheon, 1980: 10**), and parody is intended in its etymological sense as 'near' but also 'against' the text; it legitimises and is complicit with what it subverts – it is 'an exploration of difference and similarity' (**Hutcheon,**

1986–1987: 185-86). Parody is not only 'mockery, ridicule or mere destruction'; it is a way to create a new form, which is 'just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form it dialectically attempts to surpass' (**Hutcheon, 1980: 25**). It is 'an ironic form of intertextuality' that deconstructs the 'male-dominant culture', revealing 'the hidden gender encoding' (**Hutcheon, 2012: 110**). Irony and parody are, therefore, critical tools Atwood offers to decode the implications of the text, presenting the intertexts and the events in an inverted oppositional way. Thus, she reveals the artificiality, incongruities and contradictions of the consumerist world and the contrived construction of women's (and men's) roles in society. Furthermore, according to a postmodern view, they 'are never separate from political [concerns]' (**Ibid: 157**) and from power implications. There is a hiatus between the apparently logical discourses of modern society and the disruptive narrative of the novel that prompts irony, whereas parody is an imitation that entails ridicule and defies traditional discourses. They both reveal intertextual references and allusions (**Dentith, 2000: 6**) that, in this case, criticise the consumerist society, emphasising the cannibalistic undertones of its narratives.

The protagonist of *The Edible Woman*, Marian McAlpin, is in search of her identity in a world of consumers where human beings are commodities, dispensable items in advertisements and commercials like all other products. Marian works for a survey agency, Seymour Surveys, her first job after graduating from university. The name 'Seymour' suggests 'see more', a pun that ironically comments on the claims of the company. As a matter of fact, 'see more' implies surveillance and clairvoyance but actually the company's only aim is to find ways to 'sell more'. This job gives her an inside view of the artifice of consumerism and, though her job is not clearly defined and does not satisfy her, it gives her some experience of the outside world. This is a world to which she would like to 'adjust', which she frequently repeats in an attempt to lecture herself, like Alice, and also to physically adjust to comply with the requirements of society, growing or diminishing according to the role expected.

Testing and tasting food are part of her job, obsessions that reveal Marian's eating disorder. She is almost bulimic in the first part of the novel (she is constantly hungry), anorexic in the second (her body starts to refuse food but she feels it is still alive, until it cuts itself off) and seems to reach a balance in the last chapter. Her relationship with food reflects social disorder; her body rebels against the roles and rules imposed by society and refuses to consume, to absorb food, and to adjust to it. Her alienated, or split, self is also stressed by the shift from the first-person narrative in the first part of the novel to the third-person narrative in the second part, then the return to the first-person narrative in the last chapter.[11] At the narrative level, this highlights an attempt to reappropriate the self at the

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

43

end of the novel where the transformation has been enacted by body language in a reshaping that is both physical and mental.

The body, especially the female body, is where sociocultural control is staged in an act of power that aims to guarantee individual survival through nourishment and the survival of the species through procreation. Marian's body voices her unconscious rejection of survival and procreation in power relationships that threaten her individual integrity and are dangerous for her own being. She cannot and does not wish to survive in such an oppressive and aggressive environment, eventually flees it and looks for possible alternatives. Metaphorically, her body is aware that by absorbing food she is also absorbing the ideology of the consumerist society, as food means survival and dieting is a way to control the body image and consequently the body itself, from a social, cultural and political point of view (**Sceats, 2004: 62-63**). She risks becoming an advertisement in a false world where the 'real' is a combination of models; as Baudrillard states, it is a world of images that have no referents and are in a constant play of illusions (**Baudrillard, 1994: 6**). In fact, 'The generalized consumption of images, of facts, of information aims … *to conjure away the real with the signs of the real*' (**Baudrillard, 1998: 126, emphasis in original**).

In this consumption-obsessed society, Seymour Surveys is described as a 'layered ... ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and ... the gooey layer in the middle' (**Atwood, 2009: 95, 345**). The gender division is clear as only men (executives and psychologists) work on the upper floor, engaging in intellectual work and directing whoever is below; women are in the middle, doing mechanical repetitive jobs (filing questionnaires, answering clients' letters and releasing surveys) and taking 'care of the human element' (**Atwood, 2009: 13**) – that is, the interviewers, low-paid housewives and interviewees, who make up the consuming public. Below the women are the machines, on a factory-like floor where anonymous workers print and distribute what is decided and filed above. The hierarchy reflects a rigidly structured society where roles seem unchangeable. Women's roles are vital but undermined and powerless, as are the roles of workers and machines on the bottom floor; the only difference between the two is that women seem to live in a more comfortable environment. In fact, while 'the operatives seem frayed and overworked and have ink on their fingers' (**Ibid: 13**), the women's floor is homely, with a 'chintz-curtained lunch room' (**Ibid: 14**), a tea and coffee machine and the gender-denoting pink washroom, though their spaces are, significantly, narrow and confined. This apparently pleasant female area not only denotes the construction of gender but also the imprisonment of women in prescribed roles that are alluring but seclude them in a tower of domesticity and femininity.

The influence of advertisements and commercials is obsessively present in every part of the characters' lives. Of course, the purpose of the commercials is to improve sales, which is the reason why Seymour Surveys exists, but also to dictate gender roles. Their targets are mainly women, who do the daily or weekly shopping and provide the household not only with food but also with cleaning products, clothes, tools and appliances. Though the main case study of the story is Moose Beer, which is targeted at men, women, as the main shoppers, are the tasters and buyers of food. As Becker claims, Atwood's protagonists 'resist and refuse representation without forgetting the seductiveness of media images of women' (**Becker, 2000: 34**). In the novel, women are seduced and cherish the products displayed in the supermarket aisles and soothed by 'gentle music', like cows who give 'more milk when sweet music [is] played to them' (**Atwood, 2009: 213**), as Marian notices. Therefore, advertisements are ambivalent shifting signs, 'figure[s] of dissimulation', as Kristeva states, with non-disjunctive characteristics; they mock and reaffirm, allure and deceive, and allow multiple interpretations (**Kristeva, 1980: 47**). Commercials train and force people to consume, as Baudrillard argues, without giving them real satisfaction and enjoyment (**Baudrillard, 1998: 80, 84**). Marian consciously defends herself from adopting this mentality, 'willing herself to buy nothing' (**Atwood, 2009: 213**) except what is on her list, which will lead her to become a more conscious and creative consumer. Nevertheless, she feels attracted by advertisements and by the apparently self-assuring role they grant; she wishes to comply with them eventually, to be sensible.

Similarly to the Moose Beer commercial which Marian needs to pre-test, the advertisements of the 1960s represent a man's world. Women make cakes, feed babies and do the laundry (actions which Marian performs in the story); or they are totally responsive to men's whims. This not only confirms and reinforces the confined roles of women assigned by society and mirrored in the narrative of the text, but also exposes the striking contradiction between the constructed world of the advertisements and ordinary people's lives. In this way, the rules are enforced (for example, pregnant and married women cannot keep jobs) and the roles are far from being ideal and satisfying. Marian's friend Clara is worn out by pregnancies, and Marian sees drab and sceptical housewives at the department store after she has been 'operated' on at the beauty parlour for Peter's party, a masquerade she does not enjoy but cannot avoid (**Sanchez-Grant, 2008: 85**).

The Moose Beer commercial is an intertext Atwood creates in the narrative that refers to the commercials of the 1960s, such as Canada Dry ginger ale commercials, in which 'a girl and a Canada Dry' are all a man

needs to be pleased, and women's role is to pour the drink (as Marian does repeatedly for Peter) or show off in a bikini or in a pretty outfit. It reiterates the performatively constructed essence of male and female roles and insists on the toughness of the 'real man', whose main hobbies are hunting and fishing in the wilderness. Confronted with the men's figures in the story, the advertisement's discourse reveals itself as parodic and comical but also threatening. In fact, Peter is a hunter – he has a display of his guns, rifles, knives and cameras in his room. Shooting an animal and 'shooting' a photo become synonymous in the course of the narrative; it is 'an issue of power', as Davies points out (**Davies, 2017: 386**). Besides, Wisker remarks that 'Peter's fascination with "shots", both by camera and gun, suggest death and imprisonment to Marian, who feels Peter will trap her in this role, this performance' (**Wisker, 2012: 42**). Davies also connects the 'predatory' use of the camera to Sontag's interpretation of photography, in which 'to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed' (**Sontag, 1979: 4**). This suggests that surveillance is control, and therefore power (**Ibid: 4-5, 8**). Sontag also points out that '[t]here is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera' (**Ibid: 7**), which implies an observation that looks like 'sexual voyeurism' (**Ibid: 12**). Nevertheless, Peter lacks the real 'tang of wilderness' as he is always well groomed and smells of soap, so he is more similar to a man in an advertisement than a 'stout-hearted fellow'; he is becoming a product of a commercial, a simulacrum, and even a copy of a copy, as Baudrillard claims (**Baudrillard, 1994: 87**). Peter is losing his integrity and identity, like Marian, though, being a man, he seems to be in control by exercising power over her.

The Moose Beer commercial comes to Marian's attention again at the restaurant while she observes Peter's 'capable hands holding the knife and fork, slicing precisely with an exact adjustment of pressure ... and yet it was a violent action, cutting' (**Atwood, 2009: 184**). The aggressive and violent quality of the apparently innocent advertisement is revealed. The scene is followed by the report about a shooting by a young boy 'who had gone berserk', and his violence is referred to as 'remote violence ... a violence of the mind' (**Ibid**). This renewed attentiveness to the Moose Beer commercial has a palimpsestic quality (**Genette, 1997: 399**). It is a recurring sign, a 'process of resignification', that indicates 'shifting interpretations of the same sight … depict[s] amended abductions' and denotes 'the narrator's growing awareness' (**Shead, 2015: 30-31**). Marian has different interpretations of the commercial, which form a map that guides her to an increasing understanding of the controlling and frightening quality of the advertisements and consequently of the consumerist society.

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

46

Thus, the advertisement intertexts are produced using a parodic technique that highlights the artificial, frustrating and destructive quality of the roles assigned by society in both a comic and a disturbing way. They expose patent incongruities that engender confusion and fear in the participants. Avoiding the rules is unsettling but sticking to them can be frightening. As Hutcheon claims, the parodic subversive quality of the trope of irony reaffirms and negates the power structures and attempts to change the sign from within to create an alternative (**Hutcheon, 1989: 154**). Marian's body opposes her refusal; it tries to break the circle, resisting the game of alienation and self-destruction imposed by the advertisements. She attempts to find an alternative path to reshaping her body through starvation to assert a new self.

By using parodic techniques of juxtaposition, reversion and contradiction in *The Edible Woman*, the world of consumerism and the romance plot are demystified and revealed as very different from what is depicted in the jolly, easy-going commercials. They are a glossy layer that covers a grubby society whose relationships are based on constructed, enforced rules that engender confrontational and threatening behaviours. Men are predators disguised as rescuers (but are also manipulated in their turn) and women are objectified entities at their disposal, potential victims (but also self-victimised) who nurture 'fantasies of power and revenge' (**Bouson, 1993: 12**) and try to find their voices.

In this perspective, Marian's friend Duncan, whom she meets during the Moose Beer commercial interviews and at the laundromat, is considered a mentor and a double, or a function by most critics.[12] It is Duncan who points out cannibalism's connections to the Moose Beer commercial, citing the *Decameron*, two Grimm Brothers' fairy tales and *Titus Andronicus* (**Atwood, 2009: 58**). He refers to the first and ninth stories in Fourth Day in the *Decameron*. Both stories are about the killing of the male lover (by the father in the first story and by the husband in the ninth). The hearts of the dead lovers are offered to the unfortunate female lover in each story, who eventually commits suicide. The Grimm Brothers' stories about cannibalism are 'The Robber Bridegroom' and 'Snow White'. *Titus Andronicus* has a notoriously violent sanguinary plot involving multiple murders, rapes and cannibalism. All the stories involve cannibalism, in the specific offering and possibly eating of the lover's (or the enemy's) heart, or of the whole body. The heart is also ironically and metaphorically evoked in the Valentine heart-shaped cake Marian buys and offers to Peter. Significantly, he eats the cake after making love, a performance in which Marian is guided and objectified, but Marian spits out the cake, feeling it spongy against her tongue 'like the bursting of thousands of tiny lungs' (**Ibid, 258**).

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

47

Moreover, the women in all these stories have horrible deaths, like Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (who is violently raped, her tongue and hands are cut off and she is then executed) and the girl in 'The Robber Bridegroom', who is raped, cut into pieces and eaten by the robber. Snow White is momentarily saved, and the huntsman takes an animal's heart instead of her heart to the queen, but then Snow White is poisoned by the queen. Significantly, the only woman who ends up alive and free is the robber's bride, who witnesses the murder and keeps the severed finger of the dead girl to prove her story. This is a warning for Marian, whose love life is in crisis and whose failure to attain love may lead to real or symbolic death in the form of starvation or self-effacement. Therefore, the intertextual link made by Duncan between advertisements and violent stories of women's murders is a metaphoric anticipation of what is going to happen to Marian when she chooses to marry Peter in accordance with the conventions of the modern fairy tale and fake romance in the commercials. This is her fate, unless she becomes aware of her state and keeps a record of what is happening, like the robber's bride.

Cannibalism emerges again when Duncan calls Florence Nightingale a cannibal, as 'hunger is more basic than love' (**Atwood, 2009: 120**). This reveals 'all-consuming female hunger', an aspect of Marian's self she is not aware of, and reverses the selflessness inherent in the nurse figure (**Bouson, 1993: 26**). This is stressed even more by the quotation in the advertisement, 'GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE' (**Atwood, 2009: 121**), in a sinister suggestion that highlights the wish of the woman to be in control and to subdue the invalid male, presenting herself as a saviour (**Hill-Rigney, 1987: 31**). Once again the allusion to the advertisement inverts expectations and problematises gender roles.

In this context, Marian's split role is reiterated in her uncanny experience of getting dressed for Peter's party and seeing the reflection of the two dolls in the mirror that she wishes to dispose of in her new married life. The blonde one looks like Marian dressed up for the party; the other one is older, with an open mouth and a 'red felt tongue inside and two china teeth' (**Atwood, 2009: 125**), which are reminiscent of women's cannibalistic hungry side suggested by Duncan. They are 'two overlapping images; drawing further and further away from each other; the centre ... would soon be quite empty ... they were trying to pull her apart' (**Atwood, 2009: 275**). However, neither of them seems to represent the role Marian wishes to acquire in her search for an alternative self and in the reshaping of her body.

Absorbing the 'Enemy'

In the progress along her 'corkscrew path' (**Carroll, 1994: 81**), Marian runs away from Peter's party. He, threateningly, wishes to freeze her in a doll-like photograph in an 'aesthetic consumerism', as Susan Sontag states about photography in general, and wants to imprison her, to make her 'stand still' in her dolly image (**Sontag, 1979: 24, 163**). She repudiates the masquerade of the glossy party doll and her objectification implemented at the beauty parlour where they beautified her head 'like a cake', 'an operation' (**Atwood, 2009: 261, 262**) Marian undergoes rather than chooses.

Though Marian does not seem to know her definite route, the effects of the episodes of awakening and self-awareness she experiences throughout the narrative, both consciously and unconsciously, take her to the final production of the woman-shaped cake and to the breaking of her engagement to Peter. In this search she is guided by her body, which speaks a pre-linguistic code that acts instead of her mind, which is too constructed by the dominant roles and is distracted by the charm of consumerism.

After Marian's rejection of the simulated world of advertisements and in her search for an alternative identity, her immersion in the ravine, a womb-like cavity but also the wilderness, at the end of the story, is 'close to absolute zero' (**Atwood, 2009: 333**). Her being 'as near as possible to nothing' (**Ibid**) suggests a wish to start from zero, from a prehistoric past – a reappropriation that is also an inevitable misplacement. Looking for a safety net, Marian retries playing the usual role of damsel in distress, asking Duncan to speak with Peter, but this role is rejected in Duncan's discourse and she finds herself climbing up the path alone. This confirms the protagonist's complicity in her role of victim and objectified doll.

Marian's rejection of the narratives of the consumerist society and of its dictated roles entails the need to efface ancient and materialist myths and go back to a prehistoric, pre-amphibian past connected to the Canadian wilderness, a concept that Atwood develops further in *Survival* and *Surfacing*. The ending of *The Edible Woman* is ambiguous and fragmented. Marian regains her appetite and devours the woman-shaped cake, metaphorically cannibalising the glossy doll Peter and the consumerist patriarchal society wished to transform her into. Nevertheless, in her act of eating she affirms her complicity, becoming a consumer again, though for survival and pleasure. In this perspective, fiction itself becomes consumable (**McWilliams, 2009: 76**). In a disseminated world, as in Atwood's poem 'A place: fragments', 'there is no centre;/the centres/travel with us unseen' and 'identity:/something too huge and simple/for us to see' (**Atwood, 2012: 87**). As Baudrillard and Derrida state,

there is no referent, no centre and a loss of the centre (**Derrida, 1967: 427**). The consumerist society only apparently grants safe roles; its signs are shifting, ambivalent and menacing. Its binary power structures devalue human beings, reducing them to advertisements that exert power and aim to sell more and to dictate roles.

At the end of the novel, the preparation of the woman-shaped cake Marian was supposed to personify is Marian's performative pre-language and body language response to all the attempts at assimilation she has endured. It is an offering mainly conceived for Peter but also for the other characters in the story, as an edible substitute that should satiate their consumerist hunger and grant her freedom and survival (**Atwood, 1992: 15**). But no one seems to appreciate it except Marian and Duncan. In a final act of metaphorical cannibalism that negates and reaffirms the roles of consumer and consumed, Marian eats the body and Duncan, significantly, eats the severed head of the cake. This is an act of reappropriation and consumption to ensure that the 'enemy', that is, the role of the glossy party doll they were enforcing on her, is definitely destroyed and, simultaneously, assimilated. Duncan's final remarks communicate the multiple perspectives in which the 'so-called reality' can be interpreted. Misquoting 'Burnt Norton' as 'mankind cannot bear too much unreality' (**Atwood, 2009: 352**), he unbalances the quality of the quotation and alludes subversively and ironically to the metanarratives of the whole story. Suggestively, he ends the novel with the word 'delicious', an appropriate conclusion that, though open-ended and unresolved, seems to grant that at least two people from the story are going to attempt a different path in an endless process of cultural re-embodiment. This is not just a point of departure for Marian and Duncan (**Shead, 2015: 36**), who end with an uncertain future, having no roommates, no jobs and live in an unchanged society, but a question mark that implicitly asks the reader to take a stand.

In Marian's negotiation with the body (her body, marked by starvation, manipulation and objectification), she finally compromises in a search for wholeness that entails domesticity and acceptance of the basic rules of survival: eating. She is still a consumer, but a more conscious one, who is not so easily deceived by advertisements. The final acceptance of her female body and the reshaping of her self through starvation have prompted a transformation that envisages a more conscious way of being a consumer. Simultaneously, the parodic use of intertexts reveals and exposes the dangerous cannibalistic implications of the consumerist society that entail defending oneself from its alluring and threatening roles. Marian resists conventions in her progress towards self-affirmation and attempts to find a different path at personal, national and ontological levels.

Acknowledgements

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52

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53

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D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

55

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Endnotes

[1] Wilson highlights that 'Marian in *The Edible Woman* consumer-product-tests a society in which everyone and everything, including nature, is product and consumer' (**Wilson, 1993: 64**). She also remarks that 'The Robber Bridegroom' is one of the central intertexts of the novel where the different motifs of the fairy tale are repeated in a parodic key (**Wilson, 1993: 87-88**).

[2] According to Mies, in the passage about moving from feudalism to capitalism, a new role was created for women; it is 'the creation of the women … as consumers and demonstrators of luxury and wealth, and at a later as housewives' (**Mies, 2014: 100**).

[3] Federici also links the persecution of the witches in Europe and in the New World with the colonisation of new lands and to the creation of enclosures that expelled the peasants from their lands in Europe (**Federici, 2004:**

12), connecting the devaluation and erasure of woman's power with a political movement that aimed to exploit 'natural' resources and accumulate capital.

[4] Hobgood claims that anorexia is a misnomer because it is not lack of appetite but 'absence of desire' (**Hobgood, 2002: 154**). She remarks that '[i]n Marian's case, her body rejects foods that have the quality of vitality' and that 'critics have read Marian's anorexia as a resistance to consumerism or to preformed models of femininity' (**Ibid: 155**).

[5] Howells states that Marian's eating disorder is not proper anorexia nervosa but 'a pathological condition of self division' where the mind and body act against each other and where the body rebels against the female institutionalised roles that surround her (**Howells, 2005: 27-28**).

[6] About Tolan, see endnote 1. Coulthard claims that the politics of the Canadian government has changed from genocide and assimilation to recognition and accommodation, confirming the colonial praxis and domination to 'facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority' (**Coulthard, 2014: 6-7**). Therefore, colonialism becomes a form of 'structured dispossession', which is linked to Marx's concept of primitive accumulation.

[7] Coulthard recognises a similar strategy concerning Indigenous peoples when she says that they need to recognise themselves as 'free, dignified and distinct contributors to humanity' (**Coulthard, 2014: 43**).

[8] The concept of motherhood in the novel is very different from Adrienne Rich's re-evaluation of motherhood. As we will see, pregnancies wear women out and married women are supposed to quit their jobs.

[9] Notably, in the introduction to *The Canlit Foodbook*, Atwood notes the significant number of texts about cannibalism in Canadian literature at a metaphorical level and at actual levels and positions the act of eating as 'our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk' (**Atwood, 1987: 2**). Therefore, it is a pre-language act linked to survival that permeated human beings before there was any constructed societal influence. In Chapter 9, she includes the extract from *The Edible Woman* where Marian makes the cake woman.

[10] Montaigne believes there is nothing savage or barbarian about cannibalism 'sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage' (except that each of us calls barbaric what is not one's custom (author's translation)) (**Montaigne, 1969: 254**). This situates cannibalism, and consumption, in a wider perspective as part of being human in certain contexts and therefore as shaping the self. Furthermore, the Christian Eucharist meal involves a relevant ambiguous aspect because it implies the need to offer oneself to satisfy the cannibalistic demands of the other.

[11] Wilson remarks that the 'distant third person' suggests 'alienation not only from society but from herself' (**Wilson, 1993: 84-85**).

[12] Tolan speaks of Duncan as 'an embodiment of Marian's subconscious' (**Tolan, 2007: 30**), while Bromberg states that Duncan has an important role but does not wish to rescue her; on the contrary, he establishes a relationship of 'otherness and separateness' which seems more genuine than the traditional romance (**Bromberg, 1988: 19-20**). However, Duncan is a character rather than a pure function (though he accomplishes some functions in Marian's search for identity) and has a fundamental role in Marian's self-discovery and reflects Marian's lack of eating in his 'emaciated figure' (**Atwood, 2009: 53**); he is her alter ego or double (**Grace, 1978: 93; Hill Rigney, 1987: 29-31; Banerjee, 2016: 22**).

D'Antonio. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 35-57

57

Anthropophagy of the Werewolf: An Eco-Feminist Analysis of Justine Larbalestier's Liar (2009)

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Abstract

Lycanthropic anthropophagy is the main concern for Justine Larbalestier's novel Liar (2009). The novel is about the mysterious killing of highschool teen, Zach, in contemporary New York City. Zach's girlfriend Micah, notorious for being a pathological liar and an outcast, is considered highly suspect as the murderer, particularly by her parents who know she is secretly a werewolf. The werewolf is both exceptional for its special abilities yet also cursed with uncontrollable, bloodthirsty urges at each full moon. This article argues that anthropophagy of the werewolf is metaphorically an act of social taboo when one lives and behaves in opposition to the socially prescribed. Through Micah's surreal and unstable narration Larbalestier explores contemporary issues such as authority over the individual, gender non-conformity, and mob mentality, in order to criticise popular opinions that ostracise people perceived as outsiders. This article will explore these themes in greater detail and prove the ways in which Larbalestier uses eco-feminist fiction to communicate these criticisms.

Keywords: werewolves; lycanthropy; Larbalestier; anthropophagy; gender; eco-feminism

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

58

Introduction

Justine Larbalestier's novel *Liar* (**2009**) is about the mysterious killing of highschool teen, Zach, in New York City. This sudden death causes the microcosmic world of highschool to self-implode as adults suspect teenagers and the teenagers suspect each other. Zach's girlfriend Micah, notorious for being a pathological liar and an outcast, is considered highly suspect as the murderer, particularly by her parents who know she is secretly a werewolf. The werewolf is both exceptional for its special abilities yet also cursed with uncontrollable, bloodthirsty urges at each full moon. This article argues that anthropophagy of the werewolf is metaphorically an act of social taboo when one lives and behaves in opposition to the socially prescribed. Larbalestier manipulates this situation by confusing the masculinised characteristic traits of a werewolf with that of a misfit and 'unfeminine' teenage girl. The novel constructs lycanthropic anthropophagy as a metaphor for the social stigma experienced by a seventeen-year-old girl who does not comply with feminine stereotypes. Because Micah is unique and non-conforming her werewolf metamorphosis means that she is judged as something inherently wrong and a danger to the culturally constructed order.

The article will explore concepts of reality and identity that reveal the extent of social conformity within the modern highschool setting as an homogenising method of control over individuals. This method of control is expressed in multiple ways: through adults' fears of allowing teenagers some freedom, the institutionalisation of education, and the biases of the city community that mould students into stereotypical feminine females and masculine males. The novel is a contemporaneous extension of latter twentieth-century eco-feminist literature which discusses female repression and posits a deep connection, both spiritually and socio-politically, between womanliness and nature, prominent authors including Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. Like these authors, Larbalestier parallels lycanthropic anthropophagy with sexuality, the menstrual cycle, and with female masculinity. By linking this text to these earlier authors it becomes apparent how eco-feminist discussions of thirty years ago remain relevant in the present moment. Thus, this article will textually analyse these comparisons in greater detail.

Reality and Conformity

The setting of this novel surrounds a class of senior-year teenagers who live in New York City and attend a progressive, private highschool. The event of a highschooler's death acts as a catalyst to reveal the reactions of fellow school peers and their guardians—parents, teachers, principals, and detectives alike—when their microcosmic world is shattered by the tragic

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

59

death. Adults are fearful of losing control over the teenagers. Zach's murder is a horrifying confirmation of that worst fear being realised. Throughout the whole investigation suspicion is aimed at Zach's school peers but there is no mention that an adult could have possibly killed him. This absence of mention implies that the possibility has not even been considered.

In light of her werewolf abilities that are treated as a shameful condition rather than something exceptional, Micah's parents enforce strict rules upon her. This includes no boyfriends, no coffee, 'no sex, no drugs, no alcohol. No nothing' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 248**). While Micah's parents have no evidence that any of these things will turn Micah into an uncontrollable beast, there is still an anxious fervour to suppress her due to their own hysterical fears. When Micah insists to her father that she did not kill Zach because she 'loved him', her father accusingly retorts that she loved him 'so much that' she 'slept with him, changed, and killed him?' (Larbalestier, 2009: 288). One can read this accusation as a parents' fear of their hormonal teenager and the assumption that teenagers have an inability to maturely react to emotions such as love and anger. This aspect of the novel resembles the 1957 film *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, which is about a boy turned werewolf struggling with anger issues. This film exploits adults' irrational fears of uncontrollable adolescents whence the era of the teenage came into existence in the early twentieth-century. Larbalestier criticises this anxiety in a blog posted on 24 August 2016, in which she states that 'teens right now, especially in the USA, are the most surveilled generation ever' (**Larbalestier, 2016**). Yet she does not provide an explanation for this increased control. The reason behind these restrictions is perhaps explained when Micah states that 'grown-ups don't remember what it was like when they were teenagers. Not really. They remember something out of a Disney movie and that's where they want to keep us' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 137**). In referencing 'a Disney movie' Micah insinuates that her parents have a selective memory that causes them to enforce the same suffocating social system that plagued their own upbringing.

For the teenagers who grow up in a microcosm where adults do not trust them they learn to imbue the same behaviours and hurl accusations at their peers. As Micah narrates, 'At school the word "murder" has seeped into everything. We look at each other differently' (**Ibid: 33**). At the beginning of the novel Micah places emphasis on describing the type of highschool she attends as 'progressive' with students who are 'independent thinkers', who 'volunteer' and 'don't discriminate', who 'recycle and care and argue about politics' (**Ibid: 29**). Yet Micah makes the distinction that these practices only happen 'in class' and that 'out of class it's the same as any other school' (**Ibid: 29**). Therefore, the school's status

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

60

as being 'progressive' is a thin veil for the typical highschool environment that includes bullying, cruelty, and a strict social hierarchy. This social hierarchy includes the promotion of masculine and feminine stereotypes and the rejection of non-stereotypes as outsiders. Micah is at the bottom of this hierarchy and her highschool experience plays out accordingly. When the parents and students throw suspicions and accusations, most of these are directed at Micah and this reinforces her status as the social outcaste.

This promotion of gender stereotypes means that there is an implied violence to strictly conform. As the novel delves deeper into Micah's surreal narration, she overturns her initial description of the school rooms: 'Bars surround me. Prison guards bind my arms, bring me pills several times a day. They ask me—beg me—to tell them the truth' (**Ibid: 232**). The helplessness of this scene conjures the dread felt when Winston Smith is sent to room 101 in George Orwell's *1984* (1949), or the mental and physical incarceration of a drug induced stupor that the narrator describes in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). Micah's description portrays a physically and chemically induced conformity. The insistence to 'tell them the truth' after being imprisoned and fed medication is not about truth at all but about verbally affirming her submission to them. As Micah states:

> *I am.*
>
> *Every single word.*
>
> *Truth.*
>
> *They don't believe in my wolves* (**Larbalestier, 2009: 232**).

Micah cryptically explains that her community refuses anything other than what they want to hear. This is again reiterated when Micah insists to her parents that she did not kill Zach because she 'loved him', but they do not listen to her, disbelieving that a werewolf is capable of feelings other than bloodthirst (**Ibid: 288**).

The suspicion of Micah's guilt is further exacerbated by her pathological lying, causing greater distrust from her peers and for the readers of the novel who are given an incredibly unreliable account of events. The reader is introduced to Micah through first-person narration, in which, from the beginning of the story, she promises to tell the truth:

> *I will tell you my story and I will tell it straight. No lies, no omissions.*
>
> *That's my promise.*
>
> *This time I truly mean it* (**Ibid: 3**).

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

61

This implied instability is a precursor to the narrative flow of the rest of the novel. The reader is repeatedly forced to decide whether they trust Micah's recount of events, or if they decide that because of her distorted reality that automatically makes her a killer. While all circumstantial evidence logically points to her as Zach's murderer, Micah is continually insisting her innocence to a community that distrusts her. All Micah has to offer is her word which is repeatedly scrutinised due to her past and continued unreliability – 'I can't expect to be believed. I am the girl who cried wolf' (**Ibid: 302**). But the point of Micah's pathological lying is to reveal that one's reality is shaped by external pressures to conform to a doctrine. The werewolf is a rebellious symbol, testing what one believes and what one does not believe.

The novel uses the catastrophic event of Zach's death to reveal mob mentality in a contemporary, metropolitan society in which the weakest link is targeted. The importance of placing it in a contemporary, metropolitan society that is meant to be highly civilised and rational, and also within a school that considers itself to be 'progressive', reveals that despite all of the advancements of our contemporary living the irrationality of social prejudice is still extremely prevalent. In times of crisis people will still hysterically point their fingers and blame the first person so obviously not part of the majority.

Gender Stereotyping as a Form of Conformity

The novel reveals that multiple realities concurrently exist in the one place because a sense of reality is only in one's head, and thus, everyone's reality is different. But when one reality is so far from everyone else's it creates a problem within that microcosm, particularly one that is incredibly rigid in its social construction. As Micah later states to her readers, 'maybe I lie because the world is better the way I tell it' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 264**). This narrative tactic by Larbalestier posits a deep irony. While Micah is diagnosed as a pathological liar, the highschool culture in which she is immersed is also revealed to be a make-belief, a place where people falsely conform to social stereotypes. There are many ways that someone can be perceived as an outsider, but for Micah it is because she does not conform to the feminine stereotype in a community that strictly adheres to gender categories of masculine males and feminine females. She is ostracised first for not being feminine enough, and second for being a pathological liar. S. J. Miller has argued that 'were society more accepting of gender non-conformity, gender variance, and how gender norms are enacted, Micah might very well turn out to be a very "normal" person' (**Miller, 2014: 57**). While there are many people who are *naturally* cis-gender, the problem is when this becomes a regulation enforced upon people who are not cis-gender. When Sarah Washington, Zach's other

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

62

girlfriend, confronts Micah about her secret relationship with Zach an argument ensues:

> *"Why won't you tell the truth?" she asks, glaring at me.*

> *"Why won't you?" I ask, even though she is an incorrigible truth teller. I glare right back* (**Larbalestier, 2009: 60**).

By Micah retorting in this way, the novel is highlighting Sarah's narrow sense of reality and that of her school peers. It is this lack of knowing, an ignorance to an alternative way of being, that makes Sarah an 'incorrigible truth teller' because this prescribed reality is *her* truth, even though it is not Micah's. Sarah becomes confused by the question because she cannot conceptualise a differing notion of reality other than the current existence that is presented to her, which she finds belonging by fitting into a category. As Judith Butler asserts, 'the question of who or what is considered real or true is apparently a question of knowledge' (**Butler, 2004: 27**). This inflicted confusion makes her angry and she lashes out at Micah by calling her 'an ugly boy' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 61**), self-righteously defending her sense of reality that has just been challenged, while simultaneously denouncing Micah for not conforming to it.

The desperate tone of Sarah's insult recalls Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* (**1975**). Arguably Sarah could be policing herself by fear of who would be watching were she to open her mind for other possibilities. Foucault's theoretical analysis of the 'Panopticon' explains modern methods of exercising control over an individual in which 'the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary' because 'he' or she 'knows himself' or herself 'to be observed' to the point where the person 'has no need' to be totally watched any longer (**Foucault, 1979**: 201). This again conjures up images from *1984* with the enforcement of 'News Speak' and the fear of always being watched (**Orwell, 1983**). In this way, Larbalestier begins a story about the pain inflicted on a non-conforming teenage girl and slowly turns it into a thrillingly surreal observation of the ramifications of authoritarian control over the individual; something that modern history has already seen too much of with the totalitarian dictatorships that arose in Europe and Asia in the twentieth-century.

These notions of truth and lie pose an important question: how can one know what normal is when normalcy of the individual is defined by continually changing conventions and dominant attitudes of the collective? Furthermore, while gender is completely individual, it creates the potential for multiple possibilities in the way people self-identify that contradicts this binary between what is constituted as normal and abnormal.

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

63

It is significant that Micah's first big lie is her claim that she is a boy. This lie is not a transgender desire but an attempt to fit in because of her apparently failed status as a girl. She states: 'Why not be a boy? A quiet sullen boy is hardly weird at all. A boy who runs, doesn't shop, isn't interested in clothes or shows on TV. A boy like that is normal... I would be a better boy than I'd ever been a girl' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 7-8**). In an essay titled 'Introducing Myself' Ursula K. Le Guin satirises the static artificiality of masculine and feminine stereotypes, stating that 'women have been invented several times in widely varying localities' (**Le Guin, 1992: 3**). Le Guin further states that because women do not technically exist that makes her 'a man', but even so she states that she is 'a very poor substitute or imitation man' because she is 'just not manly' enough (**Ibid: 3**). Furthermore, Micah claims to be a boy only *after* her teachers and peers initially assume that she is male based on her appearance, because she wears her hair 'natural and short, cut close to' the 'scalp' and she doesn't 'wear makeup or jewelry' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 7**). The novel aligns with Le Guin's argument in which male and female stereotypes are as artificial and superficial as each other. Failure to meet the standards of one gender puts you in an in-between category that confuses and upsets people. After her lie is exposed, Micah is then repeatedly scrutinised by her peers for lying and her unfeminine appearance, and this is accepted by the teachers who punish or denounce Micah for her differences to the rest of the student body.

Micah's identification as a werewolf becomes a metaphor for the social ostracism of a gender diverse individual that does not conform to the stereotype. In light of this theory the danger of the lone wolf can metaphorically be communicated as the perceived danger of those who are different. June Pulliam asserts that the werewolf is symbolic to literature that counters mainstream culture, because 'the werewolf is not so much an animal as it is *an animal in drag in a human skin,* a position that calls into question the parts of ourselves that we designate as animal Others' (**Pulliam, 2014: 277**). Pulliam supports this concept by referring to Judith Butler's highly regarded performativity theory. Butler reveals that the 'sex/gender link is constructed rather than natural' (**Ibid: 77**). In this sense, the werewolf is the natural being while the human is the constructed. Indeed, in Butler's highly-acclaimed text *Gender Trouble* (**1990**), she states that 'the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity' of gender can cause 'splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of "the natural" that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status' (**Butler, 1990: 147**). Micah is not naturally split into two selves. Her identity is a fluid amalgamation of wolf and human, of feminine and masculine, but due to the rigid stereotype structure one half of her is forced into a state of

[Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75](#)

64

repression. This wolf-half then becomes the Other that must manifest out of herself in some spectacular way. This is a trope of nineteenth-century gothic and horror fiction, such as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, where the repressed self is an Othered identity struggling to break free. Marina Warner describes this Othered identity as created to inhabit 'your innermost, secret self, and act epiphanically to unveil you to the world—and to yourself' (**Warner, 2002**). But while gothic horror fiction has traditionally denounced this Othered identity, in eco-feminist literature the reader sympathises with Micah's struggles.

The Social Taboo of Lycanthropic Anthropophagy

Lycanthropes are half-werewolf, half-human, thus an act of eating a human is an act of anthropophagy. Marina Warner credits the first werewolf story to ancient Greek mythology. This is a 'cautionary' tale about Lycaon, King of Arcadia, who was transformed into a werewolf as punishment for serving Zeus a 'cannibal meal' of human flesh (**Warner, 2002: 6**). Since this 'original sin'-type of story, werewolves have been inexplicably linked to the crime of cannibalism. In Medieval Europe belief in lycanthropy was real. Many people were arrested, tortured, and executed under accusations of lycanthropic cannibalism, closely resembling the Witch trials (**Copper, 1981: 106**). Centuries later, in a modernised world where growing urbanity means most people do not have to worry about getting mauled by a wolf pack in the woods, belief in lycanthropy has faded. Yet its narrative ability in modern fiction is significant because the stigma of the werewolf can metaphorically be used to imagine a scenario in which society's worst fears are actualised. The original sin story of Lycaon represents the fact that cannibalism has been a social taboo in Western society since ancient times. Therefore, the most direct way to stigmatise an identity that is out of the culturally constructed order is to link that identity with the taboo of cannibalism. One of the ways in which this taboo of cannibalism is directly linked with Micah's unfemininity is through the subtle, silent rejection by her father, as she engorges on a plate of meat in the family's kitchen:

> *I get up, open the fridge, and pull out the remains of their dinner: half a chicken. I slip back down to the floor and finish it off, not bothering with knife and fork or napkin or ketchup, eating with my fingers, shoveling the food in so fast I don't even taste it.*

> *Dad Looks at me. I can see the disgust. My daughter eats like an animal, he's thinking* (**Larbalestier, 2009: 290-91**).

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

65

The scene metaphorically uses the social conventions of food etiquette that causes her father disgust to portray the shame Micah is forced to feel in her lycanthropic abilities. The guilty gluttony insinuated in Micah's animalistic, uncivilised performance of eating, happens during the same time that her parents begin to accuse openly her of killing Zach, of gluttonously engorging on his flesh.

Werewolves first began appearing in fiction in the 'early 19th century through the medium of the penny dreadfuls of the day' (**Copper, 1987: 111**). Penny dreadfuls were very affordable magazines aimed at a growing literate class and usually depicted sensationalised stories of crime, horror, and adventure. The werewolves in these nineteenth-century stories were configured around medieval beliefs in the werewolf who, at each full moon, went on a cannibalistic rampage, mauling innocent townsfolk. By the horror genre nature is conveyed as evil and something that humans should steer away from in the name of human-made progress, a notion that fantasy werewolf literature blatantly rejects. This genre also went on to produce novels and films; some famous titles of werewolf horror fiction include films such as the *Werewolf of London* (1935), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). These movies encompass moral concerns of the human reverting back to primal savagery in a post-Industrial, modern world. Darryl Jones argues that 'classic Hollywood horror movies offered werewolves of both the Darwinist (external invasion) and Freudian (internal neurosis) types' (**Jones, 2002: 171**). The former type refers to a fear of racial outsiders and the latter refers to the fear of the repressed inner-self, encapsulating societal anxieties about those perceived as social or geographical Others threatening the mainstream, homogenised body.

Eco-Feminist Werewolf Fiction

Retaliating against an Othering of identities deemed outside the mainstream, the genre of eco-feminist fantasy fiction was borne out of the need for a counter narrative against this Othering. As Karen Ya-Chu Yang states, 'ecofeminism's core agenda is to break down exclusive and static categorizations of binary thinking in favor of diversity, complexity, and infinite becomings' (**Yang, 2016: 502**). Eco-feminist tales that include the werewolf figure generally portray the protagonist struggling to balance the needs of human and that of the wolf sharing one body. While the horror tales still continue to be produced in the contemporary, it has gained a very popular competitor in stories that portray the werewolf as a misunderstood protagonist rather than a monstrosity. Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, an academic who specialises in fairy tales and genre fiction, argues that 'It is the sanctioning of an ecological perspective that largely differentiates representations of the werewolf in fantasy from its cousins

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

66

in the genre of horror' (**Bourgault du Coudray, 2003: 60**). The ecological perspective 'develops a far more positive and accepting relationship with the inner wolf', whereas the 'horror' genre depicts 'nature' as 'an alien presence (the wolf within) that destroys the tragic werewolf hero by forcing him to behave like an animal' (**Ibid: 60**).

But while fantasy literature favours the ecological, it is important to note a key difference between fantasy werewolf literature and its sub-genre of eco-feminist literature. Many fantasy werewolf fictions still promote a strict conformity to heteronormativity[i]. Whereas eco-feminist werewolf literature is a sub-genre of fantasy that seeks to redeem the figure of the female outsider who does not conform to the feminine stereotype. As Patrick D. Murphy argues, 'ecofeminism from its inception has insisted on the link between nature and culture, between the forms of exploitation of nature and the forms of the oppression of women' (**Murphy, 1998: 23**). The literary genre of this political movement is no exception. The literature focuses on gender politics, female sexuality, and women's connection to nature – spiritually and socio-politically. Chantal Bourgault du Coudray claims that 'women writers have frequently used lycanthropy as a means of exploring a specifically feminine process of individuation' (**Bourgault du Coudray, 2003: 60**). *Liar* can be defined as eco-feminist werewolf literature because Micah describes her individual womanhood through the figure of the werewolf. The novel concerns itself with the feminine process of individuation by discussing issues of adjusting to the menstrual cycle, growing pains, and sexual politics governed by the social conventions introduced to girls at puberty. Furthermore, Micah identifying herself through the figure of the wolf is connecting her to nature, stating that her identity is all natural and in opposition to the culturally constructed order of stereotypes.

Eco-feminist literature gained popularity with the rewriting of gothic and Disney fairy tales in the 1970s and '80s by authors such as Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. Their aim was to reconstruct these fairy tales to discuss issues with gender politics. As Marina Warner explains there is a 'misogyny present in many fairy stories – the wicked stepmothers, bad fairies, ogresses, spoiled princesses, ugly sisters and so forth' (**Warner, 1995: 417**). Similarly, Anne Cranny-Francis rejects the traditional tales of 'Little Red Riding Hood' on the basis of them being 'the training afforded girls' for the purpose of 'their accumulation into a patriarchal society' (**Cranny-Francis, 1992: 124**). The relevance of discussing eco-feminist issues in the present moment is more obvious when one compares *Liar* to past eco-feminist literature, such as Angela Carter's short story *The Company of Wolves* (1979), and Tanith Lee's *Wolfland* (1983). These two stories are but few examples in a larger movement in eco-feminist literature in the latter twentieth-century. Basic and obvious signifiers that relate this novel to this

fictional precedence is Larbalestier's use of a matriarchal leader of the family wolf pack, Micah's grandmother. Additionally, the relationship between girl, male intrigue, and grandmother, that make up the main characters in the archetypal 'Little Red Riding Hood' story are again re-signified in the novel. However, instead of the male character imbuing the werewolf figure it is Micah.

By comparing Larbalestier's 2009 novel to iconic texts of the late twentieth-century, that were memorable for their ground-breaking contribution to gender politics, one can surmise as to how much has really progressed within the thirty year difference. Carter and Lee contextualise their stories in medieval, magical worlds, that seek to reconfigure misogynistic fairy tales. Larbalestier's novel is set in the contemporary urbanity for the purpose of directly portraying what eco-feminist issues remain unresolved in our present existence. The novel discusses different kinds of violence within the present that are not so obvious as the brutality of the medieval world. Carter and Lee posit their female heroines in medieval settings where women are faced with violence and therefore retaliate with violence as a method of self-empowerment. In *Wolfland*, Anna the Matriarch evokes the wolf magic within her so she can defend herself against her tyrannical, physically abusive husband. Anna's empowerment is a bloodthirsty revenge:

> *the final thing he sees through the haze of his own blood, which has splashed up into his eyes, and the tears of agony and the inclosing of a most atrocious death, are the eyes of the wolf, gleaming coolly back at him. He knows they are the eyes of Anna. And that it is Anna who then tears out his throat* (**Lee, 2014: 128-129**).

In *The Company of Wolves* the handsome wolf figure has already killed and eaten grandma before the unnamed Red Riding Hood figure has arrived. When she arrives they consummate their love in grandma's house while 'the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering' (**Carter, 2006: 138**). The girl does not seem bothered that grandma is dead because by choosing the bloodthirsty life of the wolf the girl frees herself from the instilled restrictions upon her human body.

Larbalestier's novel reveals that instances of violence still exist in the contemporary, teenage world even though it is incredibly surveilled and governed by adults. These forms of violence happen within the misogynistic gender politics because those women who defy feminine stereotypes are responded to with violence. For instance, Micah is targeted when her secret relationship with Zach is exposed because Zach already has a girlfriend. Another girl named Erin is targeted after she attempted to run away from home with her older boyfriend and was caught by police. Both girls are subject to taunts, bullying, and labelled a

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

68

'slut' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 91, 237**). But this kind of derogatory treatment is only the beginning. Micah exercises her physically masculine abilities when she protects Erin from being sexually harassed by a boy in their school. Her peers stare at her suspiciously: 'Any doubts they might have had about my ability to kill Zach are gone now' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 239**). While Brandon, after committing the sexual harassment, is not publicly scrutinised like Micah, it reveals the dominant assumption that a woman who can physically protect herself and others, must be a physical danger to the patriarchal order that instils these gender stereotypes. The actions of this boy, Brandon, are juxtaposed against Micah, because while Micah may be the werewolf, he is the one that is preying on others. As Angela Carter states in 'The Company of Wolves', the 'worst wolves are hairy on the inside' (**Carter, 2006: 137**).

In 2015 Larbalestier published a short story titled 'Little Red Suit', which thematically and narratively holds more direct links to the eco-feminist literary movement in reappropriating the Red Riding Hood story. The short story is about a girl in a red suit who hikes across a dystopic wasteland to visit her grandmother. During the walk she is being stalked by an unknown predator that howls like a wolf. But as the wolf 'grabbed her from behind. She slashed with her knife. Twisting to get away' and realised that it was 'not a wolf' but 'a man in a suit' (**Larbalestier, 2015: 35**). The story defends the misunderstood wolf character while indicating that humans, more so than werewolves, are capable of dangerous predatory behaviour. While *Liar* does not follow this storyline, Micah's narration argues this same point that humans are more of a danger to themselves than werewolves, and that the sinister one is among the faceless majority rather than a rogue individual. But due to her status as a social outcaste Micah experiences the stigmatisation of always being a suspect over those who stereotypically fit into the mainstream, and therefore the story mourns a lacking freedom for the individual.

This argument leads to another comparative analysis between the texts on sexuality and female appetite. The female werewolf is controversially more open about her libido to the equivalent of her male counterparts because there is no gender construction to instil double standards. As June Pulliam argues, 'while the male werewolf typically exhibits behaviours that are well within the parameters of normative masculinity, the female werewolf represents' an anxiety of the social sexed hierarchy being upended, of 'patriarchy's worst fears about women's relationship to nature' (**Pulliam, 2014: 73**). Pulliam further explains that 'the female werewolf' becomes 'monstrous because her lupine body puts her outside of conventional femininity' (**Ibid: 76**). Part of narrating an eco-feminist werewolf story is embracing one's own female sexuality because it is typically deemed a very unfeminine trait. When Micah admits that her

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

69

relationship with Zach was physical she repeatedly insists to her readers that she did not kill Zach, because the reader fails to see the difference between being sexually active and being a murderer (**Larbalestier, 2009: 274**). The cultural assumption of an unrepressed female sexuality equivalating to murder is the method in which women are repressed. Indeed, some werewolf narratives that do not concern themselves with an eco-feminist perspective have directly expressed this link between female sexuality and murder[ii].

In opposition, Carter shockingly mocks this trope within the social establishment that deems a woman's appetite as taboo. Lucie Armitt argues that Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) 'is driven by an active interest in women's sexual appetites' and that 'the Gothic allowed her and many twentieth-century writers the opportunity to extend the limits of social acceptability through extending the physiological and physical limitations of the human form' (**Armitt, 2016: 70**). Without delving into the question of how much of eco-feminist werewolf literature can be considered gothic, one can see that these stories are a means for women writers to fantastically express a sexuality not socially acceptable during the place and time they were writing. Ultimately Larbalestier is metaphorically communicating to readers that a woman's sexuality is still prevalently taboo in the contemporary Western mainstream.

The expression of appetites in eco-feminist werewolf literature also varies. Linden Peach explains that the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* 'are not only an exploration of women's sexuality but of the ways in which men have sought to control that sexuality, of how both men and women need to reconfigure their sexualities, and of the commodification of women as 'flesh' ' (**Peach, 1998: 33**). Likewise, Abigail Dennis argues that this is also a concern in one of Carter's later novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984), in which 'the power to satisfy one's own appetites and those of others are seen in the novel to be central to the workings of gender relations' (**Dennis, 2008: 117**). She points out that although sexual hunger can be good, it can also be problematic when 'appetite plays a part in the process of objectification, particularly of women' (**Dennis, 2008: 117**). Larbalestier has reiterated this loaded meaning in *Liar*. Micah's lycanthropic hunger for meat and her relationship with Zach is juxtaposed against Brandon's objectification of his female school peers. The girls he chooses are perceived as easy targets because of their social status as outsiders. Brandon preys upon them as something he has a right to sexually dominate, humiliate, and taunt.

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

70

Yet while the female werewolf is metaphorically used to portray a misunderstood and persecuted identity, these stories should not be misconstrued as stories of victimhood. Tanith Lee's Anna the Matriarch, and Angela Carter's protagonist in *The Company of Wolves* are obviously stories of self-empowerment for the way in which they break free from the socially constructed restrictions on their human bodies. By using her lycanthropic abilities to protect another girl from unwanted advances by Brandon, Micah is expressing woman's inner-strength and reigniting the empowering symbolism of the female werewolf within eco-feminist literature. The female werewolf figure symbolises a freedom that is only attainable through nature when it is because of culture that one is being oppressed. But this again raises the question as to why Larbalestier would create a character with such an unstable recount of events when she could have written a more celebratory fantastical piece. By being narratively unreliable Micah implicates herself as the problem. Sara Martin observes that some feminist writers such as Carter, Fay Weldon and Jeanette Winterson have used the monstrous body to discuss female identities that are considered 'monstrous' because of their 'grotesque' looks (**Martin, 1999: 194**). But Martin argues that these stories prove that true 'monstrosity is not a matter of extraordinary physical appearance but of whether one sides with the abusers or the abused in the universal contest for power' (**Ibid**). This precedence gives some insight into the unstable narration of Micah. Like Anna the Matriarch in *Wolfland* who enraptures readers with her sublime qualities, Micah's unstable narration toys with readers who sympathise with her struggles but ultimately distrust and fear her capabilities, because she retains a power that no one understands. Based on Martin's argument, Micah's narration is a desperate plea for her reader to believe her against a majority that would have the reader assume otherwise.

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have argued that Justine Larbalestier's novel *Liar* metaphorically uses lycanthropic anthropophagy to represent the marginalised identity of Micah, who is socially ostracised for being different. In this instance lycanthropic cannibalism is metaphorical for the taboo of acting out of non-normative stereotypes. The symbolism through this werewolf image is most evident at the conclusion of the novel when Micah confesses on the very last page: 'You can read between the lines, pull away the werewolf bullshit, and see what's left' (**Larbalestier, 2009: 370**).

Accusations of murder against Micah reveal much about the dominant cultural mindset of contemporary Western society. Micah never narrates that she ate a human, but due to the unreliability of her narration readers

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

71

are forced to decide whether the mere presence of a lycanthrope is enough to throw an accusation of murder. The novel is a psychological thriller that remains open-ended and forces the reader to surmise a conclusion via their own socio-politically-conditioned assumptions; thus making the reader either complicit in or advocate against Micah's ostracism. By connecting circumstantial evidence of a bloodied dead body with Micah's lycanthropic abilities, Larbalestier questions how much of popular accusation is credible and to what extent it reveals our own inner-fears about perceived outsiders. Micah could have killed and eaten Zach. More likely, though, she is innocent, and the accusers are victims merely of their own self-cannibalistic fear-mongering.

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Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

72

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Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

73

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Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

74

Endnotes

[i] For a greater understanding into these promoted gender stereotypes watch films such as *Teen Wolf* (1985), *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2012), and television episodes such as *Wild at Heart* in season four episode six of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003)*.*

[ii] Consult *Wild at Heart*, episode six of season four in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

Henderson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 58-75

75

The Camera Devoured: Cinematic Cannibalism in Pedro Costa's *Casa De Lava* (1994)

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Abstract

Pedro Costa's Casa De Lava (1994) draws on the cannibalistic potential of cinema in order to excavate the history of colonialism in Cape Verde. Cannibalism operates in a two-fold manner in Casa. Firstly, it refers to Costa's practice of employing cinematic references in order to draw out otherwise concealed elements of earlier films. Secondly, it denotes an aesthetic practice in which the film is cannibalised by the people and geography of Cape Verde. By operating in a zone between documentary and fiction, Casa undermines the commodifying and exoticising tendencies of cinema. Instead, by drawing on the stories of the people of Cape Verde, the film illustrates the way in which the legacy of colonialism continues to haunt the island. Cannibal cinema in Casa is a method for making these otherwise concealed histories speak, and in doing so, create new forms of cinematic invention.

Keywords: Pedro Costa; Casa De Lava; post-colonial aesthetics; documentary; cannibalism; Portuguese cinema

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

76

Pedro Costa's film *Casa De Lava* (**Down to Earth, 1994**)[i] exemplifies the cannibalistic power of the cinematic medium. I will argue that the cannibalistic quality of the cinema operates in *Casa* not as a force of exploitation or objectification, but as a power of cinematic invention. This paper seeks to develop a new theorisation of cannibalism as an aesthetic strategy by focusing on how it can operate within cinema. Cannibalism functions in a number of ways in *Casa*. Firstly, cannibalism characterises Costa's approach to cinematic history, through the film's loose adaptation of Jacques Tourneur's horror classic, *I Walked with a Zombie* (**1943**) and Roberto Rossellini's neo-realist *Stromboli* (**1950**). Secondly, cannibalism structures the relationship between the film and the people and landscape of Cape Verde, which eventually overtakes the original script and begins to determine the direction of the film. Finally, cannibalism is understood as the basis for a formal approach to creating films, in which the film's attention to the specificity of people and geography allows cinema to tap into the otherwise concealed histories of Portuguese colonialism.

Costa was born in Lisbon 1959 and was part of the first generation who came of age after the fall of the *Estado Novo*, the far-right corporatist regime led by Prime Minister Antonio de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970). *Estado Novo* had governed Portugal since 1933 and was overthrown in the Carnation Revolution of 1974. This event which returns in Costa's film *Cavalo Dinheiro* (**Horse Money, 2014**) is one of the many historical undercurrents which shape his work. But what is most relevant to *Casa* is the anti-colonial struggle in the Portuguese colonies of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau which destabilised the dictatorship during the 1960s. Cape Verde gained its independence in 1975, but, as *Casa* shows, the colonial legacy remains.

Costa was a musician in the Lisbon punk scene before deciding to study film at the Lisbon Theatre and Film School in 1979. There he was taught by the famous Portuguese director Antonio Reis (1927-1991) and Costa has been characterised as belonging to the 'School of Reis' (**Lim, 2012: 101**). Reis was an important influence on Costa's approach to cinema. Reis made films about the impoverished peasants of the Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro province in north-eastern Portugal. But as Costa himself notes, Reis was also a lover of classical Hollywood and avant-garde European cinema, meaning that his films were never straightforward documentaries and instead destabilised the boundary between documentary and fiction. (**Costa, 2015: 19**) The relationship between fiction and documentary is important to understanding *Casa.* But what is also significant about his film school education is that it provided Costa with a large canon of cinematic references which he would use to great effect in his first film, *O Sangue* (**Blood, 1989**). This film was shot in chiaroscuro black and white lighting

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

77

and is full of references to the history of cinema, from Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* (**1948**) to Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter* (**1955**).

In order to understand the significance of *Casa* we must understand the place it has within Costa's broader filmography. Costa is most famous for the series of films he made in the Lisbon slum of Fontainhas, an area populated mostly by immigrant workers from places like Cape Verde. The film *Ossos* (**Bones,** 1997) was made after *Casa* and the series continued with *No Quarto da Vanda* (**In Vanda's Room,** 2000) and *Juventude em Marcha* (**Colossal Youth,** 2006). These films have been grouped as the 'Letters from Fontainhas' and along with his most recent film, *Cavalo Dinheiro* (**Horse Money,** 2014), are characterised as works of 'docu-fiction', eschewing scripts, employing non-actors and pieced together from hours of improvised shooting. The notion of the 'Letters', which recurs as a motif throughout these films emerged after the shooting of *Casa* in Cape Verde when Costa was given a large number of letters by islanders to bring back to relatives who had emigrated to Portugal to find work. In this way, *Casa* is key to understanding the development and direction of his filmography.

Casa is therefore often characterised as a transitional work, between the more straightforward fiction of his first film *O Sangue* (**Blood**, 1989) and the more experimental mature docu-fictional works. Jonathan Rosenbaum notes that *Casa* represents a 'constant and furious tug of war between Hollywood narrative and the non-narrative portraiture of both places and people, staging an almost epic battle between the two' (**Rosenbaum, 2010: 210**). Similarly, Volker Pantenburg notes that the Fontainhas Trilogy, 'indicates a shift on several levels: from the film-historical references of *O Sangue* and *Casa de Lava* to the social reality of Fontainhas, from fiction to documentary, from working under 'professional' conditions to working in small communities akin to family contexts' (**Pantenburg, 2010: 56**). What is essential to consider is the way in which *Casa* initiates an approach to filmmaking which still characterises Costa's work to this day.

Cannibal Cinema: Beyond Cannibalism as Critique

This paper builds on the existing theorisation of cannibalism as a form of aesthetic resistance to colonial and post-colonial exploitation. An exhaustive account of the troubled history of the concept of the cannibal, which examines its place in the European imaginary and its role as a means of demonising indigenous and native populations of the Americas, is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead I am drawing on the notion of anthropophagy as a conceptual practise, evoked most famously in the Lusophone context by the Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade in his 'Cannibal Manifesto' of 1928. In this poetic declaration Andrade seeks to develop a Brazilian art which 'neither apes nor rejects European culture,

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

78

but "devours" it, adapting its strengths and incorporating them into the native self.' (**Barry, 1991: 36**). For Andrade cannibalism serves to fuel a mythopoetic practise by inventing an origin story of pre-colonial Brazil as utopian, tribal and matriarchal. It stages a reversal of Freud's structure of the origin of civilisation in which the law of the father is established through the passage from totem to taboo an act that is founded on an act of ritual cannibalism. (**Freud, 1919: 234**) Instead Andrade valorises the act of cannibalism as a resistance to the civilised injunction to respect the law of the father which in the colonial context is understood as the imperative to emulate bourgeois European progressive culture. In this sense Andrade's cannibalism is a symbolic reversal of the telos of modernity by nonetheless adopting modern practises to develop a disjunctive artistic practise.

While academics have critiqued the ostensibly exoticising or primitivist impetus behind Andrade's original manifesto, it is essential to understand, as Carlos Jáuregui notes, that anthropophagy 'was a collective practise' which exceeded the original modernist moment and has recurred within a number of colonial and post-colonial aesthetic experiments. (**Jáuregui, 2012: 26**). While not the focus of this study, but of particular interest in this regard, is the work of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* movement, particularly the work of Nelson Pereira dos Santos and his film *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (**How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman,** 1971) and closer to Costa's time the work of Luis Alberto Pereira and his film *Hans Staden - Lá Vem Nossa Comida Pulando* (**Hans Staden – Here Comes Our Food Jumping,** 1999**). Both films are entirely scripted in the language of the Tupis, one of the indigenous tribes of Brazil who were devastated by European colonisation, and in very different ways examine cannibalism both as a narrative concern and more crucially as a formal trope. While Costa is not concerned with cannibalism in a literal sense, like these filmmakers his work involves a close attention to the linguistic, cultural and historical context of the island of Cape Verde, a place that, like Brazil, was a former Portuguese colony. It is also essential to note that my understanding of cannibalism is drawn as much from cinematic and artistic practise as from its theorisation within academic discourse.

At the same time, it is evident that cannibalism has operated as a form of cultural critique. As Richard King argues in this context, 'Cannibalism is not the eating of human flesh but an asymmetrical system of cultural appropriation and consumption' (**King, 2000: 112**). In his genealogy of the term he suggests that cannibalism in this critical form has come to signify everything from capitalist exploitation, to the tourism industry, to the appropriation of non-Western culture within art. King tellingly draws on Australian director Dennis O'Rourke's film *Cannibal Tours* (**1988**), which critiques the exploitative nature of Western tourism to Papua New Guinea.

[Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95](#)

79

The film echoes Andrade's reversal of cannibalism although in this instance with critical connotations, as the cannibal is no longer the exoticised other, but the cultural practises, particularly that of photography and cinema, which contribute to the creation and consumption of the exotic image. O'Rourke's film is merely the most overt expression of an underlying assumption in much contemporary film criticism which uses cannibalism as a means to critique filmmaking practises which rely on appropriation and exploitation. This discourse has its roots in artistic debates that have long preceded the institutionalisation of anti-appropriation discourse. Of particular relevance is the Senegalese filmmaker Ousmene Sembène's critique of Jean Rouch's ethnographic films and the work of critical ethnographic filmmakers such as Trinh T. Minh Ha which I will discuss in more depth below. While I do not deny the power of cannibalism as a form of cultural critique, I want to emphasise what can be described, following Andrade, as a form of active cannibalism. In other words, I am proposing a cannibal cinema, which does not feast on those it films, but turns the cinematic apparatus into a vehicle of cannibalistic creation.

My understanding of cannibal cinema is thus drawn from a careful attention to Costa's filmmaking practise. I seek to show the way in which his films do not passively consume the body of those he films, but rather stage an active encounter between the apparatus and the actors. In this way cannibal cinema draws on cannibalism as both a critical discourse for diagnosing exploitation as well as an impetus for creation. It is important to note that cannibal cinema is not a prescriptive definition or an attempt to rewrite film history from first principles, but rather a means of understanding certain tendencies within *Casa* which reflect Costa's wider filmmaking practise.

Referential Cannibalism: Between Horror and Neo-realism

The use of cinematic references is one element which recurs throughout Costa's work and represent the first level of cinematic cannibalism in *Casa*: the tendency toward re-making, adaptation and referentiality. As noted above, *Casa* primarily draws on two films; Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* and Rossellini's *Stromboli.* Tourneur's film is itself an evocative example of cinematic cannibalism. It is an adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (**1847**) combined with an account of Haitian vodou by Inez Wallace (**Bansak, 2003: 146**). *I Walked* is set on the fictional island of Saint Sebastian in the Caribbean and home to sugar plantations. The film follows a young nurse, Betsy (Frances Dee), who comes to the island to take care of the wife of the plantation's owner only to find herself at the centre of an intrigue involving family disagreements, *vodou* practises and the legacy of slavery. Rosselini's *Stromboli* also follows a young woman, Karin, travelling to an isolated island. Karin (Ingrid Bergman) travels to the

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

80

volcanic island of Stromboli located between Sicily and the Italian Coast, which is the home of her new husband, a young Italian soldier. The films are produced in vastly different contexts, Tourneur's within the Hollywood studio system of the 1940s and Rossellini's as part of the post-war Italian neo-realist movement. But, they both share a concern with an outsider in an isolated community and the effect of the violence of capital accumulation on such places. Both of these elements are of particular importance to *Casa*. These two films are by no means the only works referenced in *Casa* nor is there universal critical agreement as to which films are most essential for understanding the film. For example, film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum has dismissed comparisons to *Stromboli.* He has argued that its 'less politicised form of mysticism' is 'a distraction and an obstacle' and only *I Walked* is a useful reference point. (**Rosenbaum 2012 np**) But I will argue that the films original sources are transformed through their collision with other references.

Casa's cannibalism is a means of recontextualising the cinematic past as well as forming the basis for a new cinematic work. By combining these two films, Costa reconsiders the supposed distinction between the fantastical horror of *I Walked* and the social realism of *Stromboli*. Through this juxtaposition we can begin to see the historical and social elements which the genre film taps into as well as the fantastic and mythic quality which Rossellini's neo-realism employs in order to represent social reality. *Casa* is the product of this cannibalistic union drawing on both films for inspiration and sustenance. Costa's film follows a young nurse, Mariana (Inês de Medeiros), who travels from Lisbon to the Cape Verdean island of Pico Do Fogo with a comatose man, Leão (Isaach de Bankolé). Leão is a migrant worker, one of the thousands who have travelled from Cape Verde to Lisbon in search of work. Like Bergman's character Karin in *Stromboli,* Mariana struggles to be accepted by the local community in part because she cannot speak the local creole, just as Karin cannot speak the local Italian dialect. Similarly, Medeiros, like Bergman, is a recognisable face of European art cinema and, like Bergman, she is working largely with a cast of non-actors. Another profound similarity between the films is that the Island of Pico do Fogo, like the island of Stromboli, is an active volcano and the black ash covered landscape is a central visual reference in both works. Consequently, both islands have been largely depopulated. This is in part due to the geological disturbances, but also due to the tendency within capitalism which generates a movement from the countryside to industrial centres. *Casa* brings out the way in which the volcano attains an almost mythic significance in both films, dramatising the conflict between modernity and tradition. *Stromboli* becomes a kind of horror film viewed in light of *Casa*, in which the horror is not tradition or modernity, but the impossible conflict in which neither appears to be desirable.

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

81

A crucial distinction between *Casa* and *Stromboli* is the post-colonial context, which links *Casa* to the colonial horror of *I Walked*. To simplify greatly, Bergman's Karin is at odds with the locals of *Stromboli* because she is a figure of modernity who refuses to conform to the traditional pattern of island life. But in *Casa* Mariana is even more compromised by her status as a white Portuguese woman on an island that has been devastated by colonialism. In this way the history of the Portuguese colonies emerges as a significant narrative and formal element structuring *Casa*. The legacy of colonialism is also crucial to *I Walked*, which is set on the fictional former colony of Saint Sebastian in the West Indies, home to sugar cane plantations worked by the descendants of enslaved peoples. This resonates with the history of the islands of Cape Verde, which were uninhabited until the sixteenth century when they began to serve as a stopover points for the Portuguese slave trade, during which slaves were transported from West Africa to Europe, the Americas and the Atlantic islands. While the specificities of these colonial contexts are different, what is important is the way in which both *I Walked* and *Casa* draw out the atmosphere of haunting which besets both places. But, as Nuno Jorge notes, what is merely latent in *I Walked* is brought to the forefront in *Casa* (**Jorge, 2014: 260**). *I Walked* after being cannibalised by *Casa* is transformed from a supernatural horror film to an even more terrifying tale of the all too human brutality of slavery.

In *Casa* there is a further element of complexity as the zombie body is not only that of the comatose Leão, but also that of a character named Edite, (Edith Scob) an alcoholic white woman who lives on the island with her son (Pedro Hestnes). Edite's blonde hair, languorous expressions and trance-like alcoholism reference one of the zombie figures in *I Walked,* Jessica (Christine Gordon), the wife of the plantation owner, whose coma is the result of a *vodou* ritual. As Nuno Jorge notes, Costa's casting of Scob in this role is another intertextual cannibalisation of a canonical horror film. Scob is most famous for her role in French director Georges Franju's film *Les Yeux sans visage* (**Eyes Without A Face,** **1960**), playing a disfigured woman who spends much of the film in a mask (**Jorge, 2014: 256**). The medical horror of *Eyes* is also cannibalised by *Casa* when the vaccines which Mariana brings to the island are revealed to be out of date and make the children who receive them incredibly sick. Mariana slowly begins a fraught relationship with Edite and learns that she was the wife of a man who was imprisoned on the island during the anti-colonial struggle of the 1960s. Cape Verde was the site of the notorious Tarrafal prison which imprisoned opponents of the Portuguese regime in its first phase and anti-colonial dissidents in its second. Thus *Casa* moves beyond the colonial legacy into the history of the decolonisation process.

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

82

Cinematic references in *Casa* do not merely function as empty signifiers of taste but are instead means of addressing the complexity of history through other works which have attempted to do the same thing. What Adrian Martin describes as the 'cinephile experience' in Costa's work is insufficient if we understand this experience merely to constitute the pleasure of recognising the references to earlier films (**Martin, 2009: 3**). Instead, the references should be understood as ways of thinking with cinema, using cinema as a means of conceptualising problems of representation and history more broadly. *Casa* also allows for the recontextualization of *I Walked* and *Stromboli* in effect transforming the source material to bring to light otherwise invisible or concealed elements of these films. In particular it brings out the colonial horror which underscores Tourneur's *I Walked.* We do not merely recognise these earlier films so much as we consider them anew, reinterpreted in light of Costa's use of them. They are cannibalised by *Casa* and begin to take on new qualities, new resonances most of which are as sinister as the history they represent.

The Camera Consumed: Beyond Fiction and Documentary

Cinematic cannibalism is not only a question of referentiality, but of the potential for cinema to consume or be consumed by what is filmed. *Casa* is a film which is open to being cannibalised by the place and process of filmmaking. Such a notion challenges the predominant understanding of cannibalism in cinema, the potential for cinema to exoticise, commodify and simplify which has been the focus of much film criticism. Susan Sontag's critique of ethnographic photography, summarised by the aphorism that 'the camera is a sublimation of the gun', has been extended to cinema, particularly cinema which focuses on formerly colonised peoples (Sontag, 1973: 10). But beyond criticism, filmmakers themselves have explored this problem. For example, the work of filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha has engaged with this dilemma, as evidenced by her film *Reassemblage* (1982), which focuses on Senegalese women and seeks to 'not speak about/just speak nearby'(Trinh, 1982: np). This sentiment echoes Gayatri Spivak's famous post-colonial ethic of not speaking on behalf of the other. Trinh's films are essayistic documentaries and address the problem of representation through self-reflexive voice-over and internal commentary. *Casa* opts for a different method, to address the problem through a cannibal aesthetic that blends documentary and fiction.

As a European filmmaker making a film about a former colony, Costa is open to the charge of the exploitative notion of cannibalism. bell hooks famously described this as the tendency of European art to 'eat the other' (**hooks, 1992: 59**). For example, Quintín argues that Costa's movement

[Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95](#)

83

toward a documentary approach in his later work overcomes the problem of a distance between the filmmaker and the subjects of the film, which he sees as particularly apparent in Costa's earlier work (**Quintín, 2009: 33**). I will argue that such a categorisation of *Casa* fails to see the way in which the film is shaped by the people and place of Cape Verde. *Casa*, like Costa's late work, already displaces the boundary between fiction and documentary. It is precisely the fictive, or the capacity for cinema to create and elaborate stories, which allows him to undermine this false opposition between the honest documentary and the dishonest work of fiction.

Casa's process of production is evidence of a form of cinematic cannibalism in which the direction of the film adapts to the conditions and histories of Cape Verde. With regard to the specificity of the site, Cape Verde is never merely an exotic backdrop for a love story, but a crucial element of the work. In short, it is the camera which is consumed and not those which it shoots. The initial script, entitled *Terra a Terra*, was largely abandoned during the process of filming (**Jorge, 2014: 257**). *Casa* bears little resemblance to the original script, which was closer to a more straightforward adaptation of *I Walked.* Costa notes, 'at one point I just left the script behind, because I thought that if I'm going to try to shoot this girl in this new place that's foreign and dangerous, then I have to shoot it from her point of view' (**Rosenbaum, 2010: 209**). At one level this reflects a pragmatic decision: the filming process was beset with difficulties brought about by the isolation of the location. It was a constant struggle to transport cameras and equipment around the island. Costa describes the project as his *Apocalypse Now,* 'people fell ill […], half of the team had been dismissed; I had a fight with a member of the cast' (**Jorge, 2014: 258**). We can see that this pragmatic change is also linked to an aesthetic decision. It was impossible for Costa to make the film he initially set out to make and it was this impossibility which led to the cinematic invention that, in turn, allowed him to challenge the commodifying logic of both narrative cinema and ethnographic documentary.

Mariana can be understood as a reflexive stand-in for Costa. She, like Costa, arrives in Cape Verde with certain expectations only to find them undermined by what she finds there. As Jonathan Rosenbaum writes, 'Costa can't interrogate her motives for remaining on the island without interrogating his own' (**Rosenbaum, 2010: 211**). Throughout the film characters ask her: 'why are you here?' and she cannot answer. At first, she has a clear duty; to deliver the comatose Leão to his family and administer the vaccines she has brought from Lisbon. But, when no-one comes forward to claim 'the dead man', she becomes disillusioned and begins to wander aimlessly around the island. By the end of the film this disillusionment has intensified, Leão wakes up and seems disappointed to be home ('This land has fooled me', he cries). They have a short erotic

[Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95](#)

84

relationship, but he abandons her for the Frenchwoman Edite. By the end of the film Mariana is utterly demoralised. The vaccines she had brought are out of date and the children she has given them to become sick. This narrative crisis is echoed at a formal level by the ways in which Costa exposes the apparatus of cinema and in doing so undermines what he describes as cinema's 'false innocence' (**Jorge, 2014: 261**).

Cinema's 'false innocence' is exposed from the very opening shots of the film. *Casa* begins with archival footage of the 1951 eruption of Pico do Fogo shot from above by the Portuguese geographer, Orlando Ribeiro (**Jorge, 2014: 260**). The grainy footage clearly indicates that the film to follow will not support the illusion of cinema as a form of innocent documentary reportage or an escape into a self-contained fictional world. Firstly, because these images are clearly shot by a different camera to the one which shoots the rest of the film. Hence the camera, as a presence, is immediately exposed. Secondly, because the grains themselves designate the materiality of film, indicating that what we are seeing is the product of a technical apparatus whose illusion of continuity is formed through the labour of shooting and editing. The camera as a distinct presence remains our constant companion as we move through the island with Mariana. These techniques have appeared before, for example, they were essential to the grammar of American structuralist film which sought to undermine the notion of film as a window or mirror onto reality (**Gidal, 1978: 10**). But in *Casa* they also indicate the history of representations of Cape Verde, particularly those which also operate in the zone between fiction and documentary. Ribeiro's book on the volcano *A Ilha de Fogo e as Suas Erupções* (**Fogo Island and its Eruptions,** 1954) was influenced by the Cape Verdean author Baltasar Lopes De Silva and his novel *Chiquinho: Romance Caboverdeano* (**Chiquinho: A Novel of Cape Verde,** 1947), which itself blends fiction and autobiography. Cannibal cinema finds its precursors to be similarly drawn to the indeterminate zone between fiction and fact.

In *Casa* these defamiliarising strategies are combined with a focus on the act of framing. Jean-Louis Comolli argues, 'The frame distinguishes between nature and art. It is artifice, and the value of this artifice is precisely that it is not natural…naturalism is something that the deliberately pictorial quality of Pedro Costa's films rejects' (**Comolli, 2010: 63**). The archival footage cuts to a series of still shots which frame the faces and bodies of Cape Verdean women in this 'pictorial' style. In these cinematic portraits the women are filmed looking out of the frame, indicating the off-screen space which the camera is missing and giving the sense that there is more to these images than can be understood in a single glance. As Comolli argues, 'The off screen is the site of what remains: what remains to be shown, to be acted out, to be experienced' (**Comolli, 2010: 65**). These women will later appear in the film as characters in the

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

85

narrative. When they return, we cannot help but recall that they are playing a role, that they are actors. The film remains suspended within this ambiguity – these are characters and yet they are also individual lives. We are never sure when watching the film what is fictional and what is documentary. The final shot in this sequence frames a woman looking directly at the camera confronting the viewer with a piercing and implacable stare. The soundtrack, Hindemith's violin sonata, reaches a climax. It is the only time non-diegetic music appears in the film and so its presence is particularly disturbing. We are confronted with the subjects of the post-colonies staring directly at the viewer. The remarkably economical series of images which opens the film establishes the mandate of *Casa* and Costa's cannibal cinema more generally, to investigate what it means to enter a colonial space and make a film with colonised peoples. That is, what it means for cinema itself to be cannibalised. At the same time, it also suggests that what is to follow will remain within an indistinct space, between fiction and documentary.

The film is cannibalised by the fragments of history gleaned through the stories of locals which Costa incorporates into the film. From the character of Edite, the white woman whose husband was a political prisoner, to the local nurse, Amalia, who worked at the notorious prison camp of Tarrafal, the film conveys history through the form of conversations. In these dialogues, which more often appear as a monologue, Mariana's difficulty in understanding Creole means that the stories subvert and overtake her questions. Perhaps this is because a direct approach cannot properly get to the heart of the complex layers of the island's history. A local man, the *morna* musician, Bassoe tells the story of his travels around the islands of Cape Verde. He warns, 'Not even the dead rest here. Can't you hear them?' At first Mariana cannot 'hear' them, in part because she cannot properly understand Creole. Her exhortations to 'Speak Portuguese' are almost always ignored. But it is the camera which allows the dead to speak, because Costa allows the direction of the film to be dictated by 'the dead', in the sense of those who have died on the island, whether as slaves or as political prisoners, or as those who have been left behind as the island is slowly depopulated. The camera which is open to these stories and meandering echoes the improvisation of Bassoe on his violin. 'Even the dead dance', he says. And it is this deathly dance which allows for the film to elude the strictures of documentary reportage and the conventions of narrative film.

Cannibal cinema displaces the opposition between fiction and documentary in favour of the ambiguity of storytelling. It is too simple to say in relation to *Casa* that all documentary is ultimately fictive. Or conversely that all fiction is ultimately reducible to a historical truth. Instead, in being cannibalised by the stories of the people of Cape Verde

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

86

Casa draws on what Gilles Deleuze describes as 'the storytelling function of the poor' (**Deleuze, 1985: 145**). Deleuze writes, 'What is opposed to fiction is not the real; it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or colonisers; it is the story-telling function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster' (**Ibid**). It is this trinity, of memory-legend-monster which I will explore in depth in the next section in relation to the figure of the zombie and the volcano. The point that Deleuze makes is not that fiction is displaced by truth. It is this opposition between truth and fiction which is displaced, in favour of the possibility of the false – that is a kind of storytelling which transforms into myth or legend. Bassoe and the people of Cape Verde destabilise the film and in doing so elevate storytelling to a power. These are not the kind of myths which reify history. The central tension of *Casa*'s aesthetic is between the tendency to expose the cinematic apparatus while simultaneously giving the camera over to these stories. Cannibal cinema suggests that the only way to access history is to pass through the mouths of those who have been devastated by it.

The Haunted Island: The Zombie and the Volcano as Images of Resistance

Cannibal cinema is a form of resistance to the violence of colonialism which continues to haunt the islands of Cape Verde. Drawing on the notion of the power of storytelling, outlined above, I will outline two images, that of the zombie and the volcano, which in *Casa* are used to address the history of colonial violence. They are ways of accessing what Michael Taussig describes as the colonial 'space of death' (**Taussig, 1984: 467**). Taussig argues that the cannibalism imputed to colonised Indians in the Americas was predominantly, the 'construction of colonial culture - *the colonial mirror* which reflects back onto the colonists the barbarity of their own social relations, but as imputed to the savage or evil figures they wish to colonise' (**Taussig, 1984: 495**). Cannibalism for Taussig is an inverted image of the barbarism of colonial society as well as serving as a metaphor for the colonial process as a whole. Taussig is thus concerned with finding an aesthetic or poetic mode which is capable of representing colonial violence without revelling in it (**Ibid: 470-1**). Through the figure of the zombie and the volcano Costa's cannibal cinema finds such a mode.

The zombie in *Casa* is a figure which designates the colonial legacy as a continuing state of suspension between life and death. Slavery has been theorised as a form of living death, as Achille Mbembe argues, 'The slave is kept alive but in a state of injury, in a phantom like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity…Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life' (**Mbembe, 2003: 21**). As discussed above, *Casa* cannibalises the zombie from Tourneur's horror film *I Walked.* This zombie is not the flesh-

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

87

eating zombie of modern cinema, but it is nonetheless a cannibalistic form. It is cannibalistic in the sense that it developed as a way for formerly colonised people to address the violence that they were subjected to. The zombie is first found in the tradition of Haitian *vodou* which itself is a syncretic religion combining West African religious folklore with Christianity. *Vodou* developed in the slave plantations of 17th century Haiti, then the French colony of Saint Domingue (**Métraux, 1959: 282**). The zombie of Haitian folklore refers to a person who has died, but who has been reanimated by a *bokor* or necromancer. Alfred Métraux notes the profound similarity between the condition of the zombie and that of the slave. He writes, 'The zombie is a beast of burden which his master exploits without mercy, making him work in the fields, weighing him down with labour, whipping him freely and feeding him on meagre, tasteless food' (**Métraux, 1959: 282**). The undead body, dispossessed and existing within a state between life and death, allegorised the condition of slavery.

In *Casa* the colonial resonance is transfigured in order to address the post-colonial condition of the immigrant worker through the figure of the comatose Leão. As Fillol, Salvadó-Corretger and Bou I Sala argue, in *Casa,* 'the connection between zombies and colonialism is explicitly established…[and]a clear parallelism is established between slavery and exploited immigrants' (**Fillol et al., 2016: 62**). In this way they argue that Costa brings together both the Haitian zombie, which allegorised slavery, with the more familiar cannibalistic zombie, which allegorised the alienated producer under capitalism (**Ibid: 54**). Leão embodies this state of zombification. He is economically alienated from the labour he performs and socially alienated from his cultural origins. The brief glimpse of Lisbon shown near the beginning of the film shows it as a grey ruinous hellscape. The film cuts from workers demolishing a building to Leão looking vacantly into the middle distance. His eyes are glazed over and there is a sense that he is in the control of something else. By shooting Leão from below the image directly references the way the zombie is shot in *I Walked*. But, unlike the earlier film, this possession is not supernatural but rather what Amadeo Bordiga describes as the condition of the labourer 'possessed by the devil' (**Bordiga, 1951: np**). If capitalist exploitation is cannibalistic, it is so horrifying in *Casa* because it never fully digests those it swallows. It keeps them alive, just enough to continue drawing sustenance from them by extracting surplus value from their bodies. The next scene shows another worker reporting the accident. There is an implication that Leão may have jumped. Suicide is presented as a way out of this cycle of living death. But instead of dying Leão is shown in a hospital bed. The coma intensifies the zombie condition of a subject suspended between life and death, unable to live but incapable of dying. As Sarah Lauro notes, the threat of zombification was used by slave drivers

[Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95](#)

88

to dissuade slaves from committing suicide (**Lauro, 2015: 110**). When Leão returns to Cape Verde he is immediately identified as 'the dead man'. The doctor notes, 'No-one ever comes home…Every day they leave. I've never seen one return.' He haunts the islanders by returning from Lisbon as a spectre of living death. The hope of a new life in the city is shattered by the zombie body. When he wakes up his disappointment is palpable, 'I'm meant to be dead', he complains. Leão shows the terrifying cannibalism which awaits them in the slums of Lisbon and the manner in which colonialism, while no longer official, remains the fate of those from the former colonies.

The condition of zombification is extended to the entire island, to the history which cannot be exorcised, cinematically or otherwise. The whole film appears to take place within a kind of trance, from the slow still camera to the way in which characters appear to do things without motivation. In part this is the result of Costa's use of ellipses, his refusal of standard narrative conventions. At times characters begin to speak seemingly unprompted, as if by some force outside their control. Edite's son tells Mariana about his father's imprisonment on the island in the graveyard where the political prisoners are buried. He seems for a moment to be possessed by the spirits that linger there. At other times this possession is the effect of alcohol. Edite wanders around for much of the film in an alcohol induced trance. In a particularly powerful sequence, we see the young girl, Tina, stumble through the streets of the village holding a bottle. While it is never clear, due to the ellipses, it is implied that Edite convinced her to sleep with the comatose Leão, in order to 'wake him up'. And when Leão does wake up he and Mariana drink until they are utterly stupefied. The film exacerbates this sense of alcoholic time distended: the long shots of characters stumbling through the landscape are another way of showing the island's zombie enchantment. Deleuze describes a form of political cinema, which moves away from inspiring political consciousness towards showing the temporal effect of post-colonial time. He writes that such films, 'consist of *putting everything into a trance*, the people and its masters, and the camera itself, pushing everything into a state of aberration, in order to communicate violence as well as to make private business pass into the political and political affairs into the private' (**Deleuze, 1985: 211**). The camera entranced evokes the sense of the undead which hangs over the island. Leão is merely the most dramatic evocation of it.

In *Casa* the zombie is a figure through which cannibal cinema steals from colonialism an undead power. It puts this capacity to use as a form of resistance, transforming it into a mode of understanding one's condition. The zombie is, as Annette Trefzer notes, a form of cultural memory (**Trefzer, 2000: 205**). The zombie state is one which speaks of the colonial

past more generally, it lingers unable to be worked through or forgotten and yet also unable to be fully comprehended. It is the product of a cannibalistic process, in which the only way to resist is to consume and create new legends. *Vodou* is one such form of resistance. As Métraux argues, 'For the slave, the cult of spirits and gods, and of magic too, amounted to an escape; more, it was an aspect of the resistance which he sustained against his oppressive lot' (**Métraux, 1959: 30-33**). But unlike Métraux's anthropological interpretation of the zombie, in *Casa* there is a genuine sense of the power of such a legend which seems to possess the island and in turn possesses the camera.

The volcano of Pico Do Fogo is the other image which haunts *Casa*. As noted above the image of volcanic activity opens the film, and returns repeatedly, towering over the landscape. Even when the volcano itself is not visible in the shot it is present through the black ashen soil which covers the island. The landscape is never merely a backdrop, it is a seething miasmatic force within the film. This is conveyed quite literally when Bassoe tells Mariana to take off her shoes to feel the heat of the ground. In another scene which echoes *Stromboli* Mariana and Leão stumble up its slope and make love against the black ash. The scene is melancholy, there is no sense that anything can emerge from their relationship and framed against the soil we have a sense of their pathetic finitude within the scope of geological time. But if the volcano of *Stromboli* evokes a geological time scale the volcano in *Casa* fuses the geological with the historical. The ash which covers everything is a continual reminder of the past. It is a condensation of the time which has already passed. Given that this past is haunted by the colonial origins of the island the volcano serves as another image which allows the film to access Taussig's 'colonial space of death'. (**Taussig, 1984: 467**) Indeed, the island was only inhabited once the slave trade began and the volcano has since erupted a number of times, most famously in 1680.

The volcano is a constant reminder of the destructive history which continues to inform the island. The title of the film *Casa De Lava,* or *House of Lava,* is hence metaphorical and literal. The volcanic ash is used to build the houses in which the islanders live. The camera frames a group of islanders repairing Leão's house, preparing it for when he wakes up. Like all the images in the film it is beset with a profound ambiguity. In one sense it suggests the continuing legacy of colonialism, the impoverished house of a victim of post-colonial capitalism. If as noted above, we see this soil as a reminder of the still active quality of the landscape, then the house is a sign that this colonial legacy is still present within the walls in which the people of Cape Verde live. But the phrase also appears in a love letter which Leão sends back to Edite from Lisbon, 'I will build you a house made of lava'. The house made of lava thus comes to take on a utopian quality

in direct contrast to the concrete buildings of Lisbon in which Leão toils. The house of lava is an affirmation of the colonial origins of the immigrants who have built the cities of Portugal and a memory of their home. Therefore, it also suggests that even within these haunted spaces a life is lived. The final image of the film is a woman's feet passing across the threshold of one of these houses. It is an image which contains the entire project of cannibal cinema, to make the silent walls speak, of destructive history and of everyday passions, which are impossibly intermingled and can never be separated.

Epilogue

Casa exemplifies the cannibalistic power of the cinematic medium, which does not objectify or exploit, but rather is transfigured by its encounter with the history and continuing legacy of colonialism. Costa's cannibal cinema draws on the history of cinema, not merely as a reference point, but in order to actively transfigure the original source material. In this sense cannibal cinema feeds on the history of cinema allowing us to reconsider hidden elements within canonical works such as Rosselini's *Stromboli* and Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie*. Secondly, cannibalism operates at the level of method in that Costa's approach to filmmaking is attentive to the people and place of Cape Verde through his use of non-actors and his improvisational filmmaking method. In doing so Costa draws on the stories of the inhabitants of Cape Verde who were involved in the making of the film. But instead of being swallowed and commodified by the camera the residents of Cape Verde metaphorically cannibalise the film, derailing the original script and leading the film into new and unexpected territory. Essential to this is the thin line between fiction and documentary, which is constantly blurred in *Casa*, and which underscores a more general disruption of existing aesthetic paradigms within cannibalistic cinematic practise. Finally, cannibalism is a formal strategy which transforms these stories and experiences into a cinematic work and becomes a way of approaching cinema as a form. It allows *Casa* to excavate the colonial legacy of the island while simultaneously elevating storytelling to a form of resistance and an impetus for cinematic creation.

The year after the completion of filming the volcano erupted, covering the island and completely transforming the landscape. This event can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the destructive and dangerous forces of colonisation continue to wreak havoc over the lives of colonised peoples. So-called natural disasters disproportionately effect the poor and marginalised of the former colonies. This is undoubtedly the case and Costa has spent next 20 years continuing to develop a cannibal cinema with the immigrants of Cape Verde living in Lisbon. But there is another conclusion to be drawn from the unstable geology of the earth. The

eruption suggests that the landscape is not fixed, nature itself is a dynamic force. Far from serving as a marker of reification, naturalising unequal social relations and suggesting that impoverishment is merely the way of the world, the volcanic activity present in *Casa* says the opposite. If even that which appears unshakeable and unchangeable, the very earth itself, is in fact subject to transformation, then perhaps the history which appears to weigh down upon us can one day be overcome. Overcome not in the sense of being forgotten or expelled but made to serve a new purpose, in the hands of the poor and impoverished whose power of storytelling elevates this volcanic instability into a legend. Until then cannibal cinema will continue to make houses out of lava, to craft films from the fragments of ruinous colonial time, unable and unwilling to forget, creating new legends and new stories with which to destroy and remake the world.

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Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

92

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93

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Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

94

Endnotes

[i] Editor's note: Translated titles appear italicised in citations with the year of release. Films are listed alphabetically in the references by director.

Moran. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 76-95

95

Consumption from the Avant-Garde to the Silver Screen: Cannibalism, Fetish, and Profanation

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Abstract

In Oswald de Andrade's 'Manifesto Antropófago' of 1928, he explicitly calls for Brazilian and Latin American artists to resist the vestiges of colonial cultural politics by appropriating the cannibal trope and unabashedly plundering and consuming the European cultural tradition to radically rewrite cultural discourse. While Andrade's Manifesto has been used as a critical lens to examine the Latin American avant-gardes, as well as other modes of post-colonial cultural production, it has not been as widely used as a theoretical apparatus for examining the question of commodity production and consumption. In this paper, I revisit the Manifesto by focusing on its critical dialogue with Marx's concept of the fetish of the commodity. Linking this fetish with Apparadurai's recent thinking on the fetishism of the consumer, I trace how cannibalism can be reworked as a mode of 'profanation,' to use Agamben's terms, of the power apparatuses of consumption itself. Then I test the concept of the profanation of consumption with two film case studies - Nelson Perreira dos Santos' Como era gostoso o meu francês (dos Santos,1971) and Ruggero Deodato's Cannibal Holocausto (Deodato, 1980). My readings situate these films in their cultural and political contexts and read them as texts which profane the apparatuses of the construction of historical and spectacular images for global consumption.

Keywords: cannibal; consumer; fetish; commodity; violence; history; profanation

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

96

Introduction

Oswald de Andrade's 1928 'Manifesto Antropófago' ('Anthropophagist Manifesto,' henceforth the *MA*) is a text which continues to both animate and confound contemporary theoretical debates over the critical valence of the figure of the cannibal. In C. Richard King's survey of the field, almost twenty years ago, he cites the *MA* as one of the first radical attempts to invoke the figure of the cannibal 'to challenge Western cultural practices' and to 'outline a complex critique of global modernity and national development' (**2000: 110**). Yet King also suggests much of current critical thought on the cannibal hinges on unmasking Western cultural practices as cannibalistic. This inversion simply reifies old binaries of civilised and savage and decouples the cannibal's 'moral and social significance from its empirical and embodied attributes' at the expense of analysing cannibalistic practices 'in specific sociohistorical contexts' (**Ibid: 121, 122**).

More recent work on the cannibal seems indicative of greater emphasis on these 'embodied attributes' and 'sociohistorical contexts' of cannibalistic practices. In her book *Cannibal Writes: Eating Others in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Women's Writing,* Njeri Githire explores the metaphorical trope of cannibalism as it has been evoked in 'ongoing instances of encounter Caribbean/Indian Ocean peoples and global consumer cultures' (**2014: 7**). Githire posits that 'cannibalistic consumption' can be viewed as a 'transformative act of eating' situated in a specific context to problematise 'questions of power, incorporation, and counter tactics' (**Ibid**). From a different vantage point, Jennifer Brown sees the expression of Western political anxieties in the shifting use of the figure of the cannibal over the 20th century. Unlike King, however, Brown argues that historicizing the particular use of the cannibal trope at different moments can indeed unmask the West's intellectual and economic systems as inherently cannibalistic, not by reifying the dividing lines between civilized and savage, but by demonstrating 'the permeability of those boundaries' (**Brown, 2013: 9**).

In light of this ongoing contemporary debate over the use of the cannibal trope as a reproduction of hierarchy or an invaluable subversive critical practice, a re-examination of these questions within de Andrade's manifesto itself is in order. While de Andrade undoubtedly criticises the power dynamics shaping European and Brazilian relations, the question of whether his critique is levelled at modernity as such remains up for debate, particularly when, as Arjun Appadurai argues, the idea of the modern rupture with tradition is a myth, and 'modernity is decisively at large' (**1996: 4**). By invoking the historical figure of the Tupinambá Indian and the Caraíba revolution, a revolution which, for Stephen Berg, 'must be regarded as the central image of the cannibalist proposition,' de Andrade

appears to invert this hierarchy and tip the scales in favour of a re-privileged tradition (**1999: 90**). On the other hand, Fernando Rosenberg contends that de Andrade and his Latin American avant-garde contemporaries conceived of modernity 'spatially, not temporally' (**2006: 7**)**.** For Rosenberg, the overall emphasis of the critique of modernity in *MA*, lies more in how de Andrade 'engages consumption and production on a global scale,' and less in the question of relative autonomy from Western cultural colonization (**Ibid: 80**).

In what follows, I revisit the *MA* to unpack the relationship between de Andrade's perspective on commodities and the figure of the cannibal as an avatar of political anxieties surrounding consumption. I will then explore the affinities between de Andrade's critique of commodities and consumption and Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital*. Placing Marx and de Andrade's ideas into dialogue leads to a discussion of Giorgio Agamben's concept of profanation as a way of troubling what Appadurai calls the fetishism of the consumer. Finally, I will test this rereading of the manifesto as a critique of commodity and consumer fetishism by analysing two films with a central theme of cannibalism: *Como era gostoso o meu francés* (**1971**), directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, and *Cannibal Holocaust* (**1981**), directed by Ruggero Deodato. The choice of these two films may seem odd, as the former was directed by a Brazilian, the latter by an Italian, and each film involves starkly different aesthetic and ideological choices. However, it is precisely *because* they were produced in such different contexts, that their juxtaposed analysis demonstrates how cultural anthropophagy is an effective critical lens for thinking about consumption patterns in very different places and across artistic genres.

Rereading the Manifesto

Many critics read de Andrade's *MA* as a call to arms for Brazilian artists to recover their cultural autonomy which had been destroyed by colonization. According to Jean-Louis Olive, the aggressive posture cultural cannibalism takes toward European power combats the mere re-subordination of the Other. This inversion involves a concomitant 'pesquisa do outro, do estrangeiro, do exótico, das raças indígenas e africanas' (*'investigation of the other, of the stranger, of the exotic, of the indigenous and African races'*) (**Olive, 2013: 34**). Rather than offering a vision in which the historically subjected 'savage' comes to dominate the 'civilised' oppressor, de Andrade's cannibalism urges Brazilian intellectuals to consume and incorporate the work of their European counterparts without simply repeating in reverse the ideology of domination.

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

98

At the beginning of the *MA*, de Andrade describes a past in which consciousness of the maternal deity 'the Great Snake' united the 'the immigrants,' the 'slaves,' and the '*touristes*' within a heterogeneous Brazilian society (**de Andrade & Bary, 1991: 38**). In her translation into English, Leslie Bary uses the word 'slaves' for what is rendered in de Andrade's Brazilian source text as 'traficados' (**1928: 3**). This is a curious choice, even when one acknowledges the clunky nature of the need to render 'traficados' as 'trafficked ones' due to the linguistic conventions of English, simply because the word 'escravo' for 'slave' exists in Portuguese. But moreover, the subtle differences between 'slave' and 'trafficked one' is telling in this context. 'Slave' alludes to exploitation, of course, but especially in the context of exploitation of a labour force. 'Trafficked ones,' on the other hand, places emphasis on the commercial aspect of the circulation of commodified human flesh for profit. This distinction takes on a greater impact when one follows the trail of commodities littered throughout the *MA*. It is 'clothing' which 'clashed with the truth'; it is a 'raincoat' which separates 'the inner and outer worlds'; 'canned consciousness,' imported from abroad, sealed for circulation, sale, and consumption in metal, testifies to the capacity of commodification to penetrate the human mind, to standardise and homogenise thought, such that progress is measured 'by catalogues and television sets' (**1991: 38, 38, 39, 41**).

The logic of the commodity, imposed as a result of colonial economic trauma, is counterposed to what Sara Castro-Klarén calls '[t]he force of the discourse of Tupi anthropophagy, a subalternized knowledge,' which she claims de Andrade idealises in his manifesto (**2000: 313**). Western economic and philosophical systems are contrasted with the idealised structures of Tupi 'subalternized knowledge' to form the manifesto's central tension. Western networks of commodity production, distribution, and financial 'speculation' replaced the '[m]agic and life' of the Tupi 'social system in harmony with the planet' (**1991: 42, 41, 42**). Here the fundamental difference in the imposition of a Western economic model which de Andrade alludes to is the replacement of traditional and sacred ritualistic structures of life with networks of commodity circulation.

As Marx reminds us in volume 1 of *Capital,* under capitalism, the value of the commodity is not determined by its use value, but rather by its exchange value once brought to the marketplace and sold for money. This process results in the obfuscation of the social relations under which the commodity itself was produced, a curious phenomenon Marx calls the 'fetishism of the commodity' and describes in the following terms:

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

99

> *The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social* (**Marx, 1990: 164-165**).

In other words, for Marx, the exploitative social relations of production between employee and employer which define capitalism are masked through the process of commodification. Once a commodity such as a pair of pants is taken to the marketplace, the monetary value they garner appears to be an inherent characteristic of the pants, rather than a social product of the labour that went into them. Yet in this same section Marx makes a telling analogy. Noting that to properly understand his use of the term fetishism 'we must take flight into the misty realm of religion,' he invokes the totemic figurines of certain non-western religions, created by humans, but which 'appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race' (**1990: 165**). This passage suggests that alongside the partition of use value and exchange value inherent in the logic of the commodity, there is a simultaneous restructuring of the realms of the sacred and the profane.

Taking Marx's words as more than mere metaphorical appropriation of so-called primitive religions, Giorgio Agamben notes how capitalism mimics religion in dividing the world into realms of the sacred and the profane, and defines profanation as 'open[ing] the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation, or, rather, puts it to a particular use' which 'deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized' (**2007: 75, 77**). The religious divisions of sacred and profane are paralleled in an endless partitioning under capitalism, which find its original form in the commodity. Here it is worth quoting Agamben at length:

> *there is now a single, multiform, ceaseless process of separation that assails every thing, every place, every human activity in order to divide it from itself. This process is entirely indifferent to the caesura between sacred and profane, between divine and human. In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that*

> *there is nothing left to separate. An absolute profanation without remainder now coincides with an equally vacuous and total consecration. In the commodity, separation inheres in the very form of the object, which splits into use-value and exchange-value and is transformed into an ungraspable fetish. The same is true for everything that is done, produced, or experienced – even the human body, even sexuality, even language. They are now divided from themselves and placed in a separate sphere that no longer defines any substantial division and where all use becomes and remains impossible. This sphere is consumption* (**Agamben, 2007: 81**).

Here Agamben argues that consumption has become a sacrosanct sphere in which nothing – from the language we use to communicate to our bodily needs – can be allowed to have any meaning or use beyond its value in the marketplace. In this passage, Agamben gestures toward Appadurai's concept of the 'fetishism of the consumer,' which gives the consumer the illusion that 'he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser' (**1996: 42**). Both of these thinkers suggest the ever-increasing production of commodities has led to a pure sphere of sacred consumption which alienates human beings from their potential and political agency. As such, they update Marx's belief that political struggle must be waged over the means of production. For their part, Agamben and Appadurai locate the sphere of consumption as a key site of future political struggle. Agamben goes a bit further in arguing that profanation – or the playful use of objects and spaces outside their supposed functions designated by the demands of the market – is a political strategy that can inform struggles against the contemporary imperatives of consumer culture. As a result of these insights, we can continue to read de Andrade's concept of cannibalism as a trope which can be deployed to playfully profane the apparatuses of consumption, thus undermining the power relations which inhere in global commodity flows.

While he would hardly disagree that the production of commodities entails a great deal of social exploitation, de Andrade's work flags another dialectic that Marx neglects to discuss in his elucidation of the commodity fetish. The organization of social life around the commodity production also forces human beings to satisfy their needs and desires through the consumption of such exploitation. Moreover, de Andrade argues that humans are also deeply motivated by their desire to consume, and as such consumption must be a site of political struggle against exploitation as well. It is for this reason that de Andrade writes in a text entitled 'Os erros de Marx' – 'The Mistakes of Marx' – that 'O que interessa ao homem não é a produção e sim o consumo' (*'what interests man is not production but rather consumption'*) (**2009: 81**). Thus, he invokes anthropophagy as a

[Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114](#)

101

mode of consumption which disrupts our forced complicity in global networks of commodities. Contrary to the process of division inherent in the commodity, the cannibal practices the '[a]bsorption of the sacred enemy' so as 'to transform him into a totem' (**1991: 43**). Such integration is a microcosm of the struggle between '[e]veryday love and the capitalist way of life' (**Ibid: 43**). The twin fetishes of the commodity and consumer elevate consumption of commodities into a realm of utterly banal worship, relegating any non-utilitarian uses of objects and acts of consumption outside the church of the marketplace to the realm of the profane. We can read de Andrade's anthropophagy as imagining acts of consumption which break this process of division through a profanation of consumption itself.

Yet the question remains, if we approach the concept of cannibalism from this perspective, does it provide a framework capable of escaping the racist legacies attached to the cannibal, which, according to Robert Stam, has long been 'the very 'name of the other,' the ultimate marker of difference in a coded opposition of light and dark, rational and irrational, civilized and savage,' (**1997: 238**)? According to Bary, rather than leaving the orbit of colonial ideology, anthropophagy reproduces the 'dualities of self and other, nature and culture, mother and father – archetypal oppositions which at a deep level structure the *MA* even as it attempts to dismantle the more squarely socio-political dualities of native and foreign, civilization and barbarism' (**1991: 15**). This same contradictory nature leads Castro-Klarén to describe how the *MA* 'expresses the anxieties posed by the break with European reason that the embrace of Tupi (subalternized) logic implied' (**2000: 302**).

This anxiety in part stems from the impossibility of resurrecting an idealised past. But if we recall Rosenberg's insights about the Brazilian avant-garde's preoccupation with its marginal position within global flows of goods, we can also detect de Andrade's ambivalence about the status of indigenous and other marginalized peoples within Brazil. Bary problematizes this ambivalence as de Andrade's practice of 'fetishizing heterogeneity,' in which a vision of 'Brazil as a kaleidoscopic but nevertheless unified nation state […] works to elide the question of marginality within its borders' (**1991: 13, 17**). The reification of cannibalism as a specifically indigenous mechanism of accessing forgotten ancient knowledge is complicit in the elision of the discourse of the legacy of slavery, especially when conceived as the perverse extension of commodification to human beings. By avoiding this tendency to reify the aspects of cannibalism which relate to the recuperation of indigenous culture, we can reincorporate a vision of anthropophagy which properly accounts for the fetishes of the commodity and the consumer in discursive constructions of modernity. In turn, this lens helps interrogate and

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

102

decentre Western origin stories of modernity which Richard Appignanesi demystifies when he claims:

> *Europe is a 'myth', to be sure, but with innumerable graveyards to commemorate the blood spilled on its mythic behalf. Its most crucial myth is that of giving birth to itself by gestating modernity. Europe's modernity was in fact made, or I should perhaps say secured, at its peripheries. Empire confirmed Europe's absolutely central modernity. Europe is not itself but a manifold colonial reproduction of itself* (**Appignanesi, 2007: 482**).

This mythologization of European modernity even holds in its intellectual histories. The peripheral trace of African culture is even present in the supposedly Western concepts of the commodity and the commodity fetish, despite Marx's focus on the developed capitalist world when he elucidated these ideas. Wyatt MacGaffey has demonstrated how European explorers and colonists, after encountering African religious practices and interpreting them as 'fetishistic,'

> *were challenged to rethink the capacity of the material object to embody religious, commercial, aesthetic, and sexual values. What was originally a problem in understanding African culture became, in the work of such thinkers as Marx and Freud, a perspective, or a group of perspectives, on European culture* (**MacGaey, 1994: 123**).

It is clear how Europe's encounters with other cultures through colonial practices simultaneously resulted in the circulation of new goods and ideas, but under unequal relations of exchange. If the European emphasis on the temporal aspect of modernity led their avant-garde intellectuals to look toward so-called 'primitive' knowledges and futuristic machines to reconceptualise their worlds, this perspective often obscured the geographic relations underpinning the circulation of these ideas.

While de Andrade's manifesto does wrestle with some of the same temporal issues in his idealisation of the Tupi past, his foregrounding of the problems of commodification and consumption in the construction of racial and cultural inequities works to offer a corrective to Eurocentric conceptions and critiques of modernity. On the one hand, de Andrade's concept of cannibalism functions, according to Rosenberg, 'as a particular stance in a global symbolic economy that keeps reproducing a colonial dynamic of modernity,' a geopolitical dynamic which will not be resolved through the embrace of a far-flung culture or the latest technology (**2006: 80**). On the other hand, the emphasis de Andrade places on acts of consumption by his cannibal figure respond to Marx by suggesting that

alongside the political struggle to overcome the commodity fetish which alienates workers from their labour, we must contemplate the need to reconfigure the relations of consumer society to imbue consumption with 'magic' and 'everyday love.' Agamben's concept of profanation suggests a strategy of exposing the mechanisms by which consumer culture is rendered inviolable. One of these mechanisms is the construction of histories wherein trajectories toward capitalist consumer society are construed as the natural course of progress. A second is the circulation of spectacles of consumption which propagate the sacred aura surrounding acts of consumption. Accordingly, I would like to argue the critical purchase of de Andrade's concept of anthropophagy resides in demystifying the conditions which bestow a sacrosanct status upon the consumption of commodities. By reading the *MA* through the films *Como era gostoso o meu francês* and *Cannibal Holocaust¸* we can test this vision of anthropophagy through two films which deploy the cannibal trope to critique different relations of consumption.

How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman

Como era gostoso o meu francês (*How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman,* 1971) by Nelson Perreira dos Santos premiered at the height of the rebirth of the avant-garde trope of anthropophagy with the advent of what Robert Stam identifies as the tropicalist second wave of Brazilian Cinema Novo (**1997: 233**). This film movement, characterised by 'self-referentiality and anti-illusionism,' formed a response to the 1964 coup d'état which ousted Brazil's democratically-elected leftist government and installed a military junta provoked deep introspection among the country's young, creative filmmakers such as dos Santos (**Ibid**). The film takes place in the 16th century and centres around an episode of contact between the Tupinambá indigenous people and European conquistadors. The narrative story about this encounter is periodically interrupted by ironic sequences which comment on overtly Eurocentric narratives of the history of the contact between Europeans and indigenous Americans. During the film's fictional encounter between the Europeans and the Tupinambá, the indigenous people capture a French explorer. They incorrectly identify him as Portuguese, one of their enemies, and decide to sacrifice and eat him. The erroneous identification of the European by the indigenous tribe is a dialectical inversion of the long tradition of imposing alterity on other cultures through a case of mistaken identity, a tradition famously inaugurated in the Americas with Christopher Colombus' assertion upon arrival in the Caribbean that he had encountered 'Indians.'

Before eating the captured Frenchman, the Tupinambá pair him up with a woman named Seboipepe. He begins to live with her among the other members of the tribe in the interregnum before he is to be sacrificed.

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

104

When the tribal leader wants gunpowder and demands that the Frenchman living in their midst acquire it, the latter kills another European who has regular trade relations with the tribe to steal his goods. Even though he brings the tribe leader the gunpowder he seeks, and later uses this same gunpowder in battle alongside the Tupinambá to kill members of a rival tribe, none of this is enough for him to sufficiently integrate himself into their social structures. He cannot stave off his fate. Shifting the traditional vectors of oppression from the colonizing European to the colonised peoples of the Americas, the film's final scene of cannibalism subverts, according to Stam:

> *the conventional identification with the European protagonist of the captivity narrative […] – the 'hero' does not escape alone, nor does he escape with his wife, nor does he become a happy 'white Indian' – all the while maintaining an ironically neutral attitude toward the protagonist's deglutition* (**Stam, 1997: 249**).

Stam also argues the plot 'superimposes (at least) two versions of history. The first consists in a historical reconstruction of the life and times of a Tupinambá village. The other version of history is relayed by the intertitles that offer the Eurocentric impression of various Europeans' (**1997: 250**). Through these two 'versions' of history, the film comments on the perspectival nature of historical interpretation. Moreover, by staging a fictionalized scene of anti-colonial violence amid ironic sequences which undermine the historical authority of the powerful, dos Santos' film can be read as an allegorical imagining of an act of rebellion against the repressive dictatorship under which he was living. Yet our reading of de Andrade's critique of consumption should make us wary of reading anthropophagy at the film's denouement *only* as an act of decolonial retribution or allegorical rebellion. Tracing the broader relationship between the Tupinambá, the French explorer, and the networks of commodity consumption in which they are intertwined, demonstrates the way in which the film deliberately repurposes – that is, cannibalizes – historical discourse itself.

When the Frenchman realises that his only chance to save himself might lie in obtaining gunpowder for the tribal leader, he first asks for help from the other European to procure him this item. The merchant responds to him that he cannot help, and asks him 'Don't you understand you can't own anything for yourself? Everything you have is the property of Cunhambebe' – the leader of the Tupinambá (**dos Santos: 1971**). Tension in the contrast between depictions of the Tupinambá people as maintaining the sacred, pre-modern rituals, and their increasing incorporation into an uneven modern network of commodity

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

105

consumption peaks in a later scene in which the tribal leader becomes furious at the sight of the local women adorned with jewellery purchased from the merchant. 'Why do you need so many necklaces?' he screams at them. He condemns what he deems superfluous consumption of commodities, taking place as it does in the realm of frivolity, and not what could be construed as the productive sphere of intertribal war, fetishizing their mutual benefit from trade with the Europeans and the social conditions in which those commodities were produced. Thus, the film depicts the dynamics of political repression – in the narrative present of the 16th century and in the allegorically alluded to present of the Brazilian dictatorship – as situated within a broader struggle to control the consumption of commodities, and the purpose of commodity consumption.

The film's final scene which stages the anthropophagic act occurs just after the battle in which the gunpowder the Frenchman obtained is critical in the Tupinambá victory. If, due to the film's many anachronisms and ironic use of intercalated historical sequences and textual references, dos Santos seems to acknowledge that he is not capable of redeeming history outside of his filmic world, the film nonetheless posits the human body of the Frenchman, who is repeatedly termed a slave, as an absurd example of the commodification of flesh. Contra Kenneth David Jackson's claim that the film represents a 'didactic lesson in cultural relativism,' the insistence that the Frenchman is a slave works against the concept of relativism, considering he has been labelled as property, and the consumption of one's property would hardly be a relativistic practice (**1994: 95**). Put differently, rather than merely imagining an act of vengeance against the colonizing power, or provocative recreation of a taboo, dos Santos' film depicts the ambivalent incorporation of an indigenous tribe into a burgeoning modernity at large through their consumption of commodities. The acquisition of gunpowder, a commodity of warfare, and of foreign jewellery, are presented as disruptive acts of consumption which modernize the tribe. Even as the tribe's attempts to maintain their sacroprofane traditions of ritual anthropophagy as a bulwark against modernity are undermined by the ritual enemy's status as a modern, chattel slave who cannot own property. Thus the film's focus on the characters' relationship to the commodities they consume cannibalizes the truth claims of historical discourse to question *both* the legacies of colonialism, *and* fetishistic exaltations of supposedly anti-modern, anti-capitalist, and alternative modes of life. At a moment of historical defeat for the forces of democracy in Brazil, dos Santos' film reminds spectators that idealizing the past is a less useful political strategy than attempting to return historical discourse to the common use for contemporary struggles over the relations and purposes of consumption.

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

106

Cannibal Holocaust

Cannibal Holocaust (1981) by Ruggero Deodato offers a different frame for reading de Andrade's anthropophagy. Deodato's film retools the cannibal trope within the conventions of the Italian *mondo* film, a genre which, in broad strokes, plays with cinema verité aesthetics, found footage, and the cinematic effects of low-budget documentary filmmaking. According to Mikita Brottman, Deodato innovated on these artistic characteristics by combining them with the supposedly low-brow genre of horror and cannibal films, executing the first ''cannibal mondo' movie' (**1997: 127**). Jennifer Brown argues that these generic innovations of the cannibal mondo film had a particular political resonance in Italy. She notes that the exploitation of violence with a documentary aesthetic was Deodato's way of commenting on the exploitative coverage of violence perpetrated by Italy's left wing militants by a sensationalist press (**2013: 73**). Moreover, Brown contends the film's problematic exoticization of foreign jungle locations and indigenous people were also a provocation for Western audiences to rethink their 'appetite for the world's resources, and tendency to exploit others' during 'times of post-colonial turmoil' (**2013: 81**).

Its commentaries on the geopolitical milieu notwithstanding, *Cannibal Holocaust's* profoundly graphic portrayal of violence, coupled with its *verité* grittiness, embroiled the film in censorship scandals in Italy and the United Kingdom (**Hobbs, 2015: 129**). Despite the public opprobrium and suppression by censors, Julian Petley describes how the film found an audience through its '*samizdat* existence,' while Simon Hobbs observes that the lifting on the film's ban and its more recent reappraisal by academic critics has bestowed upon the film a strange combination of 'the traditional capital of critical validation and the subcultural kudos of excess and extremity' (**Petley, 2005: 174; Hobbs, 2015: 130**).

The question of why this has attracted both cult and academic audiences over the years has been a central concern of its critics. This focus in no small part due to the ways *Cannibal Holocaust* openly criticizes the spectatorship of the same displays extreme violence contained within the film text. It is for this reason that much of the criticism written about this film homes in on its self-referentiality. Brottman describes how *Cannibal Holocaust*:

> *progressively but deliberately breaks down the boundaries between spectator and camera, between spectacle and violence, between shock and freedom, thereby questioning the nature of cinema, of voyeurism, and of the rights of the filmmaker to fictionalize reality and to realize fiction* (**1997: 128**).

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

107

For Hobbs, Deodato's film simultaneously represents 'one of the most extreme exploitation narratives ever released,' and a cultural product whose self-referential 'filmic paraphernalia' styled the text as a work of highbrow cinema, turning *Cannibal Holocaust* into 'a hybrid from which slips between art and exploitation' (**2015: 128; 145**). Neil Jackson, for his part, focuses on the blurred lines separating reality from fiction through the usage of documentary tropes and found footages. He concludes that the film's 'dual strategy of distanciation from, and immersion in, its horrors' has the effect of 'implicating the audience in a conspiracy of prurience' (**2002: 40; 43**). Ultimately, this complicity in the spectacle offers audiences the chance to contemplate how 'the film does "exploit" extreme imagery but simultaneously provides commentary on processes of production and dissemination' (**Ibid: 34**). Julian Petley broadly agrees with Jackson's analysis, arguing *Cannibal Holocaust's* documentary aesthetics and conceits 'operate self-reflexively' to 'blur the boundary between the representation of fictional and actual death' (**2005: 179; 181**). Yet Petley also argues the film's true subversive nature stems precisely from how its filmic strategies transgress 'carefully erected and culturally sanctioned distinctions between fictional and factual modes of representing death' (**Ibid: 184**).

While these critics are persuasive in cataloguing the diverse ways Deodato's film questions its audience's appetite for on-screen bodily horror through self-reference and provocation, they overlook *Cannibal Holocaust's* pointed critique not just of the consumption of images of violence, but of *commodified* images of violence. Our analysis of the *MA* underscores the need to consider the ways in which commodity production both obscures exploitative social relations and forces consumers to conceive of and satisfy their needs within such global networks of exploitation. Because the critical potential of anthropophagic discourse lies in profaning the sacred assumptions which surround a given cultural practice, our reading of *Cannibal Holocaust* will focus on how the film traffics in exploitative imagery of violence and death which confront the spectator vis à vis their consumption of media footage which commodifies death.

Cannibal Holocaust begins on what is ostensibly the principal narrative plane with Professor Monroe, an anthropologist, who travels to the Amazon jungle to find a quartet of guerrilla filmmakers who disappeared while making a documentary. With help from his guide, Professor Monroe locates the Yanomomo people, the so-called People of the Tree, and he discovers to his horror that they killed the documentary crew. The professor nonetheless decides to try and recover the reels of footage from the documentary which the tribe maintains in their possession. He gains the tribe's trust by offering them his voice recorder and they return the

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

108

film footage to him. To consummate this pact between Western civilization and the Amazon people, a ceremonial feast is served of human flesh. The reels recovered by the professor contain the schizophrenic footage of the journey into the jungle of four young filmmakers whose *modus operandi* is transgression. During their search for the legendary Yanamomo people, they have several chilling adventures, culminating in the burning of the Yanamomo village to simulate a tribal massacre for their 'documentary.' When the Yanamomo exact their revenge on the filmmakers, the crew's cameras continue to roll up until the very last moment. After watching these recordings with a group of television executives interested in broadcasting this documentary, Professor Monroe convinces them to destroy the footage, so nobody sees it. It is then revealed that the version the spectator has just viewed had been smuggled out of the executive's office.

However, the narrative levels of the found 'documentary' footage from the jungle and the professor's journey to recover and then prevent the broadcast of this footage are not the only planes of narration in *Cannibal Holocaust*. After revealing that the supposed documentary on the barbarism of this indigenous tribe was, in actuality, a pre-edited version of staged and manipulated acts of violence perpetrated by the four young filmmakers, Professor Monroe tells the television executives that the film is a fake and should not be broadcast. However, the executives seem unbothered by the fact that the film contains outright lies. One executive proceeds to show Monroe another documentary that the now-deceased filmmakers had previously recorded. This one involved an African army who graphically executes several captives by firing squad. The executive tells Monroe that this documentary is also a fake in which the African soldiers were paid to summarily execute several prisoners on camera. This documentary film was a commercial success, despite its complicity in crimes and its staged nature.

In many senses, this fake documentary filmed in Africa represents the logic of commodification at its purest. It is unadulterated artifice which commits grievous ethical violations even as it knowingly and falsely presents itself as making historical truth claims. This fake documentary does so for one purpose – to generate profit. Yet if we step outside of the universe of the film, the footage of violence shot in Africa was indeed genuine, a newsreel shot for mass consumption. This not only blurs the line between artifice and actuality, as many critics have argued, but it also blurs the separation between use value and exchange value which is the essence of commodification. This first reel of footage, I argue, must frame our reading of the second attempt to create a 'documentary' which purports to depict Amazonian barbarism. If we accept that the first documentary is an articulation of the logic of commodification carried out to a radical

extreme, a logic which is only exposed to the spectator through the meta-commentary by the television executive, then it is possible to think of the raw, unedited footage of the second, jungle documentary as containing not just the raw materials of a commodity, but footage of the film's commodification process separating use value from exchange value. In other words, the deceased film crew who went to the Amazon and recorded their own exploitative and misleading practices in an attempt to create a 'documentary' commodity accidentally provide the spectators with 'raw footage' which offers a glimpse of the process by which a film object becomes a commodity.

The unfinished jungle film was to be called *The Green Inferno*, while the finished film taking place in Africa was called *The Last Road to Hell*. Yet if in the former the spectator, at the level of diegesis, sees supposedly staged acts of murder that were passed off as organic events of history (which, in fact, they were), these acts of violence are only as valuable as the cash they command from audiences looking to be entertained. Yet this slippage between truth and fiction chafes against the disturbing portrayal of the completely real, gratuitous violence against animals which forms part of the second, fake documentary in the Amazon. In light of our hermeneutic framework of the logic of commodification, scenes such as the decapitation and dismemberment of a turtle, whose legs and viscera quiver as the filmmaker characters break the shell and remove the animal's flesh, gruesomely display the social relations of process of producing meat for consumption. It is precisely this process, which triangulates issues of capital, labour, and natural resources, which commodification obscures. Erik van Ooijen is thinking along these lines when he writes:

> *Meat, it may be suggested, could be considered as a form of reification of violence. In reification, the industrial product achieves a kind of 'phantom objectivity' making it appear as a pure thing, a commodity disconnected from the processes of production and the (often exploitative) relations making industrial production possible in the first place* **(Van Ooijen 2011: 11)**.

Taking this idea even further, the aesthetic of exploitation, the relentless focus on the killing of the turtle (and a pig, a monkey, etc.), seems to insist that as spectators we recognise that commodification *is* exploitation. Moreover, the exploitation inherent to commodity production ensnares us and contaminates us as consumers, as our only real agency involves choosing between which forms of exploitation we require to satisfy a present need, including hunger. In this sense, the primordial transgression of *Cannibal Holocaust* is to profane death itself, by forcing us to become

Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

110

consumers of commodified images of genuine violence against animals, rather than mere consumers of commodified animal flesh. Likewise, the film makes consume images of violence against human beings which is in the process of becoming a commodity (in the case of the actor/filmmakers), and images of violence against humans which is presented as non-commodified (in the case of the tribe's acts of anthropophagy). That the films both presents these images for critique *and* traffics in these images through its own status as a film commodity is a critical act of anthropophagy itself in the spirit of de Andrade's manifesto. *Cannibal Holocaust* obliges us to recognize ourselves as individuals already implicated in the consumption of both images and products of commodified death, and profanes the sacred sphere of consumption by turning the camera's eye on the social relations underpinning such arrangements.

Conclusions

Rereading Oswald de Andrade's 'Manifesto Antropófago' through the lens of the fetish of the commodity helps us tease out de Andrade's critique of the processes of commodification and the consumption of these commodities. Giorgio Agamben's concept of profanation provides a hermeneutic tool which facilitates analysis of instances of cultural production which attempt to return the apparatuses and sites of cultural power to a common, distinct usage. In Nelson Perreira dos Santos' *Como era gostoso o meu francês*, this framework lends itself to a reading of the encroachment of capitalist commodity production and consumption on the idealised depictions of pre-modern pasts, defetishizing our relationship to the apparatuses of history and the construction of historical truth through self-referential distortions of historical truth claims. Ultimately the film invokes the trope of cannibalism to destabilise the very impulse to idealise an imagined past, demanding we focus on power relations which inhere in acts of producing and consuming commodities in the present. Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* deliberately unmasks the inherently exploitative nature of the *verité* cinematic pretensions, in which regardless of the blurred boundaries between truth and fiction in documentary, commodify images and products for consumption. In doing so, the film also forces the spectator to confront genuinely grotesque depictions of the violence of commodification in a haze of gore which profanes the very apparatus of the camera as a fetishistic mode of reproducing images to obscure social power. Taken together, both films point to a potential avenue for further examination within cannibal studies which focuses on the profanation of different apparatuses of power in myriad global contexts.

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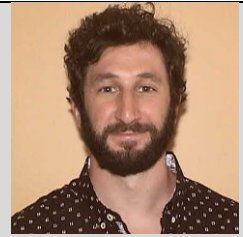
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Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

112

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Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

113

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Shames. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 96-114

114

For Fame and Fashion: The Cannibalism of Creatives in Chuck Palaniuk's *Haunted* (2005) and Nicolas Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon* (2016)

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Abstract

This research explores the ways cannibalism in Chuck Palahniuk's novel Haunted (2005) and Nicolas Winding Refn's film The Neon Demon (2016) are a consequence, and reflective, of the consuming nature of creative industries. The research draws from this exploration that the consumptive characteristics of cannibalism often allegorise the processes and careers of artists. Specifically, the sacrificial nature of putting oneself into one's work, the notion of the tortured artist, and the competitive nature of creative industries, where the hierarchy is ascended through others' losses.

In the framing narrative of Haunted, seventeen writers are trapped within an isolated writing retreat under the illusion of re-enacting the Villa Diodati and writing their individual masterpieces. When inspiration fails them, they sabotage their food supply in order to enhance their suffering, and thus their eventual memoirs. The writers turn to cannibalism, not only to survive but to remove the competition. By consuming each other, they attempt to manufacture themselves as 'tortured artists', competing to create the most painful story of the 'writing retreat from hell'.

In The Neon Demon, the protagonist, Jesse, begins as an innocent young woman who becomes embroiled in the cutthroat modelling industry. Favoured for her natural beauty, Jesse antagonises her fellow models, developing narcissistic tendencies in the process. At the film's end she is cannibalised by these rivals, indicating the industrial consumption of her purity, the restoration of individual beauty by leeching off of the young, and the retaining of the hierarchy by removing the competition.

Employing close readings of both literary and cinematic primary source material, this interdisciplinary study investigates a satirical trend within cultural representations of cannibalism against consumptive and competitive creative industries. In each text, cannibalism manifests as a

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

115

consequence of these industrial pressures, as the desire for fame forces people to commit unsavoury deeds. In this regard, cannibalism acts as an extreme extrapolation of the dehumanising consequences of working within this capitalist confine.

Keywords: cannibalism; capitalism; Marx; horror; literature; film

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In the first volume of *Das Kapital* (**1867**), Karl Marx draws upon the language of horror in order to critique the bourgeoisie's endless thirst for wealth. 'Capital,' he writes, 'is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, more labor it sucks' (**1990: 342**). For Marx, capitalists and capitalism are leeching presences, possessing no life of their own; they feed off of the working population in order to sustain themselves, relinquishing their hold only once there are no more hours to be worked, no more labour to be wrought, no more blood to suck. A century and a half later, such a grotesque image continues to sustain itself, lent ever-increasing weight by the proliferation of zero-hour contracts, misclassified independent contractors and tax evasion.

Yet, the relationship between capitalism and horror extends beyond simply Marx's application of its tropes. The horror genre is a phobic cultural form, critiquing and reflecting society's cultural preoccupations, fears and anxieties during any given period (**Jones, 2018**). Thus, horror becomes a lens through which capitalist infrastructures can be interrogated and dismantled, with the development of modern capitalism shadowed by a development of counterculture genre fiction. As David McNally suggests, 'as capitalism globalises war, hunger and environmental destruction, [horror warns us] that monstrous forces prowl our planet' (**2011: 16**).

Considering literature, for instance, Horace Walpole's seminal Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), cemented the generic convention of the corrupt, wealthy authority during 'the rise of an early capitalist configuration of financial speculation, public credit and other ghostly abstractions of value' (**Kantor, 2017: 136**). In turn, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) offered a monstrous vision of the dehumanised and manipulated proletariat worker, while Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) repositioned the vampire as a symbol for the fear of foreign capital.

Similarly, the horror fictions of other mediums, such as cinema, have frequently warned against the dangers of unchecked capitalism. Until the ending was altered to suggest the narrator's own madness, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) censured the abuses allowed to anyone with 'unlimited authority that idolises power as such, and, to satisfy [their] lust for domination, ruthlessly violates all human rights and

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

116

values' (**Kracauer, 2004: 65**). More recently, Greg McLean's office battle royale, *The Belko Experiment* (2016), portrayed employees fighting to the death at the behest of their employer, while Jordan Peele's *Us* (2019) adapted the trope of the doppelgänger in order to expose America's growing social inequality.

The office building, shopping mall, deforested land and other symbols of modern capitalism have all been warped through the medium of horror in order to expose the exploitation upon which capitalist societies are built. These fictions take aim at particular substructures, such as the transformation of humans into commodities in Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005), and come from varied social and global perspectives, as evidenced by Bernard Rose highlighting the racial biases of capitalism in *Candyman* (1992), yet the overarching critique remains. As an ideology, capitalism dehumanises the population, fabricates competition between individuals, exacerbates social divides and is prone to recurrent and wide-reaching crises (**Frieden & Rogowski, 2014**). Judith Halberstam concludes this link by suggesting that capitalism is 'positively Gothic in its ability to transform matter into commodity, commodity into value, and value into capitalism' (**1995: 103**).

Yet, within these critiques there remains a singular figure: that of the cannibal. The consumerist zombies of George Romero's original, *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), have only intensified following the turn of the millennium, be this due to the global financial crisis of 2008 (**Drezner, 2015**), the increasing capitalisation of health (**Shapiro, 2014**), or a post-apocalyptic swing in discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 (**Abbott, 2016**). A horde of new zombie media has risen, including video games (*Dead Rising*), films (*Train to Busan*) and literature (*World War Z*), with each critiquing a generation increasingly zombified by materialism and increasingly left behind in turn.

Alongside this, an increasing number of capitalist cannibals have shed their zombified skin; the shambling and senseless zombie has given way to the civilised serial killer. A transition has taken place from the cannibal fictions of the 1970s and 1980s, where flesh-eaters were either foreign others (*Cannibal Holocaust*) or backwoods savages (*The Hills Have Eyes*). Now, as with Patrick Bateman or Hannibal Lecter, the cannibal has become one among many, indistinguishable from the common populace and able to operate freely within a capitalist society which enables them. As Priscilla Walton highlights, 'the cannibal, instead of appearing as a savage, [has become] an ultra-sophisticated being, with impeccable taste and a refined sensibility, whose desires are never satiated' (**2004: 144**).

This article considers these cannibalistic anti-capitalist critiques in particular reference to creative industries. In these fictions, the quest for

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

117

profit necessitates a need for personal branding, publicity and perfection, in order to become the best artist, writer, model or designer. The frequent fallacy of fame and fortune, and the rivalry inherent to capitalist infrastructures, leads to cannibalistic competition between creatives as they attempt to consume and surpass their peers. As such, this article extends Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry: of 'culture as the realization of the right of all to gratification of desire while in reality continuing the negative integration of society' (**Bernstein, 1996: 3**). However, instead of focusing on the impact upon the consumer, this essay examines the position of the creative within such a system, at once cannibalised and forced to commit cannibalism by the practices of the industry. As Ashley Lee Wong explains,

> *in creative work in particular, we are willing to sacrifice our free-time, work more for less, pursue unpaid internships and often work for free in exchange for the preeminent currency of the creative economy: recognition … through promotion of lifestyle, recognition and fame, the creative industries makes [sic.] jobs desirable and at the very same time creates the conditions for self-exploitation and exploitation by employers.* (**Wong, 2017: 199**)

Both Chuck Palahniuk's 'novel of stories', *Haunted* (2006), and Nicolas Winding Refn's dark fairy tale, *The Neon Demon* (2016), use cannibalism in order to critique different creative industries. Specifically, Palahniuk finds fault with the writing industry, while Refn censures fashion and modelling. Coinciding with Walton's analysis that, 'following a postmodern displacement paradigm, flesh-eating has shifted from 'there' to 'here'' (**2005: 152**), these works present two distinctly American narratives; the once outdated and xenophobic associations of anthropophagy with 'exotic' or 'less civilised' cultures have since been thoroughly dismantled (**Arens, 1979**). Instead, *The Neon Demon* transports the cannibal into the supposed glitz and glamour of Los Angeles, while *Haunted* contrasts this with the faux luxury of a dingy writing retreat hidden somewhere within the absent American dream.

First considering *Haunted*, Palahniuk employs cannibalism in order to construct a depraved satire of the writing industry, literary celebrity and the notion of the tortured artist. Comprised of a framing narrative interspersed with poetry and short stories, it is within this overarching structure that the majority of the text's anti-capitalist critique resides.

Seventeen writers sign up to an isolated writing retreat, organised by the illusive Mr. Whittier. Believing that they will be completing their 'masterpieces', the writers envision the retreat as a re-enactment of the Villa Diodati: the now-infamous night of spontaneous creation which acted 'the genesis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori's *The*

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

118

Vampyre (1819)' (**Camilletti, 2018: 214**). 'Writers' Retreat: Abandon your life for three months,' the advertisement reads:

> *Just disappear. Leave behind everything that keeps you from creating your masterpiece. Your job and family and home, all those obligations and distractions – put them on hold for three months. Live with like-minded people in a setting that supports a total immersion in your work. Food and lodging included free for those who qualify. Gamble a small fraction of your life on the chance to create a new future as a professional poet, novelist, screenwriter. Before it's too late, live the life you dream about. Spaces very limited.* (**Palahniuk, 2006: 83–84**)

A. L. Kennedy suggests that a creative career is often seen as a 'ridiculous luxury if it's for non-paying, non-middle-class people' (**2013: 252**). In this advertisement, Mr. Whittier seems to offer the writers the financial security and middle-class lifestyle that will allow them to write unimpeded: the removal of the capitalist 'obligations' of maintaining a job, a family, a home.

Providing an initial glimpse of the reification used by Palahniuk to critique the dehumanising and commodifying culture of creative industries, the writers are then introduced as stock figures, their names representing their personalities at a glance. 'Comrade Snarky' is snide, acerbic, uptight. 'Chef Assassin' is cold and good with knives. In lieu of cinema's ability to convey personality through physical presence, with film actors able to portray a unity of body and character (**Hanke, 2008**), literature proves uniquely reliant upon the connotations of names. As Benedicta Windt-Val suggests, names in fiction can convey 'family history, social setting, environment, self-image, personal ambitions, social status, and relationships between the characters' (**2012: 278**). In *Haunted*, the writers' names become grotesque exaggerations of their experiences and behaviours. Consequently, each writer is consigned to their brand, never more than a caricature and distilled from the outset.

Upon arrival, the writers are fully intent on completing their masterpieces: 'those three months we'd spend writing and reading our work. Getting our stories perfect' (**2006: 25**). However, almost as soon as they settle, they begin to make excuses. Lady Baglady asks, 'how can I write anything profound if my environment isn't… ideal?' (**2006: 40**), while Miss America refuses to write because 'her breasts were too sore … her arms, too tired' (**2006: 41**). Eventually, procrastination consumes every writer within the retreat: 'they'd complete their masterpiece. Just not here. Not now. Later, outside' (**2006: 44**). The illusion of doing what you love, 'living the life you dream about', as the advertisement claimed, is no longer enough to motivate the writers. Miya Tokumistu explains that:

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

119

> *there's little doubt that 'do what you love' (DWYL) is now the unofficial work mantra of our time … labor is not something one does for compensation, but an act of self love … in masking the exploitative mechanisms of labor that it fuels, DWYL is, in fact, the most perfect ideological tool of capitalism.* (**Tokumitsu, 2014**)

As this ideology dissipates, the veil of personal gratification is removed, and the writers begin to recognise their own positions within the capitalist infrastructure of the writing industry. They decide that they are no longer there to write their masterpieces: their eyes are set on 'books, movies, plays, songs, television, T-shirts, money' (**2006: 82**). The writers shift from implicitly operating within the culture industry to actively facilitating it.

By abandoning their masterpieces, the writers subsequently abandon any belief in the cultural worth of fiction. 'Screw the idea of creating anything original,' they claim. 'It's no use writing some let's-pretend piece of fiction' (**2006: 96**). Individually and collectively, the writers decide that in place of their masterpieces must come marketability: doing what you love gives way to the fame and fortune of literary celebrity. Instead of their fictional creations, each writer thus chooses to tell their own narrative of the writing retreat: 'this three months trapped together could be enough to make a memoir. A movie. A future of not working a regular job. Just being famous. A story worth selling' (**2006: 85**). The allure of wealth and no work further inches the writers from passion to profit. However, they conclude that in order for this narrative to sell, they must become a specific form of literary celebrity: that of the tortured artist.

George Becker proposes that 'the combined force of the most recent studies has led to something resembling a consensus, one that views the link between creativity and illness as a genuine, pervasive, and timeless phenomenon with decided biological roots' (**2014: 3**). However, Arne Dietrich counters this with the claim that 'creative imagination and expression is the hallmark of a well-adjusted, self-actualising, fully functioning person' (**2014: 3**). Regardless of the scientific truth, the image of the tortured artist has sustained, through the likes of William S. Burroughs and Kurt Vonnegut. Indeed, Judith Schlesinger highlights that 'the notion of the "mad genius" – the artist who is both brilliant and doomed – is too popular to ever disappear' (**2014: 60**). In *Haunted*, Palahniuk takes this image to its extreme. As each writer decides to write their memoir of the retreat, they conclude that they will need to position themselves as its most sympathetic character. As with a capitalist creative economy, the writers are placed in direct competition with one another to become the most marketable and thus the most publicised. To do so, they embellish their narratives.

The writers' retreat subsequently becomes the writing retreat from hell: 'we'd say how the place was freezing cold. There was no running water. We had to ration the food … we'd turn our lives into a terrible adventure. A true-life horror story … we'd survive to talk about' (**2006: 85**). Within this fabrication, Mr. Whittier becomes the villain due to his refusal to let the writers leave, holding each to their word that they would write their masterpiece. 'Evil, sadistic old Mr. Whittier' (**2006: 86**), they call him. 'Mr. Whittier, our villain, our master, our devil, whom we love and adore for torturing us' (**2006: 89**). The writers' desire to surpass their competition leads them to manufacture their own tragic narratives. However, their embellishments swiftly become true. The writers start to believe that a slight increase in their actual suffering will increase their worth in the creative economy: that pain begets publicity. Joe Moran identifies literary celebrities as a 'fetishised commodity' (**2000: 9**). In order to achieve the invaluable currency of recognition, to make themselves the most prized commodity to the market, the writers compete to increase their own suffering.

The Countess Foresight breaks every door lock. Comrade Snarky disables the heating. Saint Gut-Free and Chef Assassin spoil the food. As these self-sabotages increase, the writers become the architects of their own collective misery:

That's how it happened. How no one knew everyone else had the same plan. We just wanted to raise the stakes a little. To make sure our rescue team wouldn't find us pillowed in silver bags or rich food, suffering from nothing but boredom and gout. (**2006: 102**)

Having deliberately shed the image of comfort afforded by their temporary middle-class lifestyle, soon afterwards the writers begin to fall. Lady Baglady bleeds to death having cut off her own ear. Mr. Whittier dies shortly thereafter. Consequently, the writers begin to understand that the removal of life equates to the removal of competition: 'the royalties to our story split one less way' (**2006: 206**). However, each writer cannot bring themselves to kill another, for fear of becoming the villain. Instead, they turn the knives on themselves.

Through increasingly extreme self-mutilation, the characters seek to increase their eventual sympathy with consumers. 'We all want some way to pad our role,' the narrator says, 'whoever can show the worst suffering, the most scars, they'll play the lead in the public mind' (**2006: 147**). Director Denial cuts off her fingers and toes. Saint Gut-Free chops off his thumb and the Reverend Godless hacks off the smallest toe from each of her feet. In their competition for literary fame and fortune, the writers slowly destroy themselves, reified now into 'characters' and slowly carving themselves up for the market. However, as a consequence of their

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

121

previous self-sabotages, food swiftly becomes scarce. Reaching the final extreme of their embellishment, the shortage of food and desperate hunger that follows pushes the survivors into cannibalism.

At first, the writers joke that anthropophagy will become another of their exaggerations: 'in our version of what happened … every toe or finger, it was eaten by the villains whom no one will believe' (**2006: 150**). When they discover Comrade Snarky passed out and presumed dead, however, they realise that their hunger necessitates this extreme act. To overcome the moral dilemma of cannibalism, the writers thus rationalise their behaviour in a manner reminiscent of the meat paradox:

> *By somehow separating the animal we eat from their animalness, we can think of them, in effect, as merely meat. This tendency can help explain the linguistic camouflage and the ways in which we try to create a mental distance between an animal capable of thought and a possible source of food.* (**Zaraska, 2016: *np*.**)

First dehumanised into brands, then into carved-up characters within their own narratives, the writers enter the final stage of capitalist dehumanisation: they become products to be consumed, become meat. Comrade Snarky is described as little more than 'a thin steak. The way a cutlet looks. Or those long scraps of meat labelled 'strip steaks' in the butcher's case' (**2006: 240**).

When it is later revealed that Comrade Snarky is not dead, but had simply fainted, the writers' conceptions remain resolute. 'Nobody says anything … all our mouths are stuffed full. We're picking at shreds of meat stuck between our teeth' (**2006: 252**). The distinction between Comrade Snarky as person and as product then fully dissolves when she consumes her own flesh: 'standing there, her face and the pile of her wigs collapse onto the plate of meat' (**2006: 253**). Palahniuk uses cannibalism to facilitate his broader cultural criticism. If to Marx the lexicon of reification was human becoming machine, within the anti-capitalist critiques of cannibal fictions it is humans becoming meat. Rather than ascending to literary celebrity, the writers thus descend to the bottom of the creative economy's food chain. Laurence R. Goldman suggests that 'cannibalism invariably implies a set of *products*, *producers* and *processes*' (**1999: 3**). Through exploitation and self-exploitation, the writers have become meat, become products to be consumed by capitalism.

Yet, still the writers believe that being pushed into the final extreme of cannibalism will only increase their value. Much like the horrific eating challenges of *I'm a Celebrity… Get Me Out of Here!* (2002–), anthropophagy becomes a means for the writers to further increase their worth as tortured artists:

> Even the Link knows that eating a dead man's severed penis will get him extra prime-time exposure on every late-night talk show in the world. Just to describe how it tasted. After that it will be the product endorsements for barbecue sauce and ketchup. After that, his own novelty cookbook. Radio shock-jock shows. After that, more daytime game shows for the rest of his life. (**2006: 359**)

Come the text's conclusion, Palahniuk finalises his connection between capitalism and cannibalism. He suggests that writing is a method of cannibalising the self:

> *You digest and absorb your life by turning it into stories … Those are stories you can use to make people laugh or cry or sick. Or scared. To make people feel the way you felt. To help exhaust the past moment for them and for you. Until that moment is dead. Consumed. Digested. Absorbed.* (**Palahniuk, 2006: 380**)

Throughout *Haunted*, the writers are not only carving up themselves but carving their experiences into stories. Interspersed throughout the framing narrative, the writers consume their own lives and perform them for the group as poetry and short stories, with Palahniuk's combination of narrative forms and use of multiperspectivity making the text itself cannibalistic. In 'Guts', Saint Gut-Free recounts an early childhood trauma. In 'The Nightmare Box', Mrs. Clark recalls how her daughter's life was irrevocably changed. The writers' experiences are chewed up and regurgitated throughout the novel, until, at the end, their stories have been told and little of them remains.

As a consequence of operating within the writing industry, the writers first must dehumanise themselves into products, commodities, literary celebrities, tortured artists, stories or meat. To achieve status, they are forced to stave off their competition and fight for recognition through increasingly extreme self-sacrifice. Before being consumed by the industry, Palahniuk suggests, writers must first consume their rivals and then themselves. Returning to Marx, the interrelationship between capitalism and cannibalism was twofold. It emphasised 'the sheer brutality of the profit-motive as a measure of human affairs', and it exposed 'the profound irrationality of a system that must perforce devour itself' (**Phillips, 1998: 115**).

Similarly, Nicolas Winding Refn uses cannibalism as a culmination of the anti-capitalist critique he develops over the course of *The Neon Demon*. Specifically, Refn interrogates how the fashion and modelling industries enforce hierarchy, objectify and commodify women, and encourage consumptive competition between individuals. Joanna Finkelstein suggests that 'fashion is really about maintaining the eternal sameness, preserving the status quo; it is a quixotic gesture, a coin trick, a sleight of hand, which makes us thing change is happening when the opposite is closer to the truth' (**1998: 5**). Proving reflective of Marx's capitalist vampires, Refn highlights this cyclical stagnation by portraying the modelling industry as consuming the young in order to retain the hierarchy of the old.

The Neon Demon is the story of Jesse (Elle Fanning), a sixteen-year-old girl who moves to L.A. with the hope of becoming a model. With her parents suggested to be dead, Jesse is initially presented as innocent and pure, frequently wearing virginal white in contrast to the darker shades of surrounding characters. Consequently, Jesse allows herself to be guided by the industry. Her talent agent, Roberta Hoffman (Christina Hendricks), is overwhelmed by Jesse's natural beauty and potential for profit. As such, she encourages Jesse to fraudulently sign a parental consent form and to lie about her age, selling her on the capitalist dream: 'you'll work with all the top designers. International success' (**Refn, 2016: 0:17:59–0:18:04**). As Jesse alters her age, she takes the first step towards becoming something she is not. Refn plants the initial seeds of Jesse being pressured to transform, and thus her gradual commodification into an object to be consumed, be that as model or meat. Rebecca Arnold suggests that models are 'physical emblems of consumerism' (**2001: 32**). In the opening scene of the film, Jesse is introduced as the perfect commodity: a corpse.

For the duration of this scene, Jesse is entirely still. With no semblance of life, she is presented only as something to be photographed and thus consumed. Victoria E. Collins and Dawn L. Rothe explain that 'by reducing women to faceless, broken, body parts, they are stripped of their humanity and more easily objectified … for the purpose of selling goods' (**2017: 67**). In positioning death as the perfection of beauty, Refn critiques this trend in advertising; he suggests that fashion's perfect commodity is lifeless. Furthermore, Laura Mulvey proffers that:

> *the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual pleasure tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative.* (**2009: 19–20**)

This opening scene is indeed constructed as a moment of immobility and eroticised voyeurism, with the camera slowly approaching Jesse's motionless body. However, Refn intertwines this disruption of narrative flow with the narrative itself, establishing the common processes of women becoming ornaments that occur within the fashion and modelling industries. Mulvey furthers that in order to overcome the castration anxiety, men build 'up the physical beauty of the object, transforming [the female body] into something satisfying in itself' **(2009: 22)**. As the blood pools beneath Jesse's arm, Refn ensures that the bleeding wound of the castration anxiety is made manifest. The scene then concludes by cutting back to the original shot, with Jesse now absent.

With the photographs taken, and Jesse converted into a product for mass market consumption, she ceases to exist as an individual. Having been dehumanised and commodified, the only reminder that she existed is the blood still pooled on the floor. All that remains is Mulvey's bleeding wound, a provocation to the male even in the loss of the female. As a consequence of Roberta's influence, Jesse then completes her first photoshoot in L.A. with Jack McArthur (Desmond Harrington). In this scene, Refn's next overarching criticism of the fashion and modelling industries is established: that women are commodified through a predominantly male gaze. E. Ann Kaplan defines this suggestion in her explanation that 'the gaze is not necessary male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position' (**2009: 216**).

In his previous breakthrough films, *Drive* (2011) and *Only God Forgives* (2013), Refn critiques two distinct images of masculinity. In *Drive*, Ryan Gosling's Driver embodies the action-hero mentality, with Refn engaging with 'the contemporary focus on masculinity in crisis via this nostalgia for a 'real hero' who lives by his own ethical code and is always able to act accordingly' (**Rogers & Kiss, 2014: 52**). Meanwhile, in *Only God Forgives*, Julian, again played by Gosling, enacts Freud's Thanatos, wishing to be engulfed by his own mother and thus return to the womb.

The Neon Demon maintains this critique of masculinity by interrogating fashion photography's predominantly patriarchal perspective. In a scene of meta-construction, as the events can be viewed with Refn himself behind the camera, the voyeuristic male gaze is once again exposed as Jack composes Jesse into a second object of desire. Highly eroticised, Jack rubs gold paint over Jesse's body, transforming her into a statue. Once more, Jesse becomes an object traditionally lifeless and appreciated only for its aesthetic qualities. Further demonstrating the corruptive influence of the male gaze into Jesse's world of light and purity, Jack is positioned against a backdrop of total darkness. Mark Featherstone suggests that this scene

is unsettling 'because it's clear that she's a thing, a valuable commodity, an object in his visual field and that he has no sense of her humanity' (**2017: 282–283**). As Jesse then encounters more male presences, including her boyfriend, Dean (Karl Glusman), and her landlord, Hank (Keanu Reeves), the voyeuristic gaze is maintained, removed from the safety-net of the camera.

Yet, Refn broadens this critique to also include the female, portraying fashion and modelling as at-once patriarchal and matriarchal. As Jesse continues to immerse herself in Los Angeles, she is soon taken under the wing of Ruby (Jena Malone), a make-up artist who introduces her to two other models, Gigi (Bella Heathcote) and Sarah (Abbey Lee). Each of these female characters then comes to represent a different aspect of anti-capitalist critique.

Focusing first on Ruby, her character embodies Marx's capitalist vampires, leeching off of the lifeblood of young models to sustain her own youth and career. In her introduction, Ruby immediately reveals her envy and desire to consume Jesse, commenting that she has 'such beautiful skin' (**2016: 0:05:01–0:05:03**) while she is covered in fake blood. Of the three, Ruby is friendliest towards Jesse, offering her phone number. However, as the film develops it becomes clear that Ruby is in limbo. Alongside her career as a make-up artist, she works at a morgue, preparing corpses for wakes. Ruby's job is thus to make the lifeless look living, something she strives to accomplish with herself. That she later has intercourse with a corpse only emphasises her gruesome connection with death: she is manifestly 'dead labor'. Indeed, Mark Neocleous cements this connection by suggesting that 'only vampires (and necrophiliacs) find anything sensuous in the dead' (**2003: 682**).

Gigi, meanwhile, critiques the dehumanising aspects of the fashion and modelling industries. Echoing *Haunted*, she frequently alters her body to increase her own worth as a commodity. However, rather than self-mutilation, Gigi indulges in plastic surgery:

> *I thought I'd get more work if I went down a cup size. If I looked like a hanger, you know? But then my surgeon, Dr Andrew, he pointed out a lot of other problems with my body. So I had them shave my jaw, I had a slight eyebrow lift, new nose, cheeks, inner and outer lipo, oh, and they pinned my ears.* (**The Neon Demon, 2016: 0:58:07-0:58:27**)

If in *Haunted* the economy of the writers is sympathy, in *The Neon Demon* it becomes beauty. The unrealistic pressures for perfection placed upon those working within fashion and modelling leads to Gigi believing that she needs to change her body to increase its value. Debra Gimlin suggests that 'cosmetic surgery … has epitomised for many … the astounding lengths to

which contemporary women will go in order to obtain bodies that meet current ideals of attractiveness' (**2000: 78**). She then furthers that 'the body … becomes a commodity' (**2000: 80**).

However, once more echoing the writers in *Haunted*, Gigi's dehumanisation of herself resultantly decreases her worth. Midway through the film, the designer, Robert Sarno (Alessandro Nivola), claims, 'you can always tell when beauty is manufactured, and if you aren't born beautiful you never will be' (**2016: 1:06:31–1:06:36**). Refn positions that artificial beauty cannot surpass natural beauty, and thus Gigi's efforts to perfect herself and retain her position within the industry are ultimately moot.

Lastly, Sarah represents Refn's most explicit anti-capitalist critique, interrogating the creative industries' cultivation of competition. Much as the writers in *Haunted* pit themselves against one another, Sarah immediately sees Jesse as a threat:

> *What? Isn't that what everyone wants to know? Pretty new girl walks into a room, everyone's head turns, looks her up and down wondering… who's she fucking? Who could she fuck? And how high can she climb, and is it higher than me?* (**2016: 0:11:33-0:11:50**)

Sarah's fear of Jesse only increases as she begins to receive opportunities at her expense. When both Jesse and Sarah audition for Robert's runway show, Robert finds Jesse enrapturing whereas Sarah is quickly dismissed. Following the audition, Sarah smashes a bathroom mirror and cuts up her previous headshots, claiming, 'I'm a ghost' (**2016: 0:49:16**). Featherstone further suggests that 'Sarah represents the horror of the commodified self, endlessly on the run from the truth of essential estrangement through the construction of an over-blown imaginary ego' (**2017: 272**). However, Sarah's breakdown only comes as a result of the fashion industry pitting models against each other in a 'fierce and cruel competition' (**Poppi & Urios-Aparisi, 2018: 305**). With her ego shattered alongside the mirror, and Sarah thus seeing her diminishing position, she is driven to eventual murder.

As Jesse finds increasing success within the industry, she slowly begins to succumb to the same desire for fame that afflicted Palahniuk's writers. When Sarah asks Jesse what it is like to walk into a room and immediately be its focal point, any sign of previous innocence is lost: 'it's everything' (**2016: 0:49:48**). When she is then chosen to close Robert's runway show, the catwalk morphs into a fevered representation of the Narcissus myth. Isabella Maher suggests that Jesse is 'seduced by her own reflection, transforming from a wide-eyed innocent aware of her beauty, to a narcissist who is as completely consumed by it as the rest of the world'

(**2018: 66**). As the colours shift from blue to red, Jesse slowly succumbs to the corruption of L.A. and of the fashion industry. In the very next shot, Jesse emerges from behind a veiled curtain looking physically altered. Arnold further suggests that 'as sex [becomes] more glamorous, it also [becomes] more threatening' (**2001: 74**). With Jesse now fully established as a threat to Ruby, Gigi and Sarah, they decide that they must consume her.

Much as *Haunted* foreshadows cannibalism through the gluttonous language of food, Refn frequently foreshadows that his story will end in anthropophagy. When discussing lipsticks, for instance, Ruby asks Jesse, 'are you food… or are you sex?', to which Gigi answers, 'she's dessert' (**2016: 0:9:14–0:9:25**). Later, Sarah asks Gigi, 'who wants sour milk when you can get fresh meat?' (**2016: 0:42:18–0:42:20**). The first act of cannibalism, however, occurs in the aforementioned scene following Sarah's rejection by Robert. When Jesse accidentally cuts herself on a shard of broken glass, Sarah lunges forward and attempts to drink her blood. As the violence then escalates through nightmarish sexual abuse, rape and Jesse's eventual murder, it temporarily shatters the previously motionless world of modelling and fashion. Arnold adds that 'spiralling violence is shown as a response to exclusion, boredom and lack of opportunity that a culture predicated on the drive for more and status based on consumption and wealth generates' (**2001: 32-33**). Returning to Finkelstein's belief in cyclical stagnation, in the final act of the film the haze is shattered so that it may restore itself.

Having killed Jesse, Ruby, Sarah and Gigi each consume her and bathe in her blood. Though far less prolonged than in *Haunted*, the consequences of this anthropophagy then conclude each character's anti-capitalist critique. Further establishing Ruby's presentation as a vampire, for instance, while Sarah and Gigi shower, Ruby bathes in Jesse's blood in an image reminiscent of the 'blood countess', Elizabeth Bathory. Then, in a contentious scene which Maher suggests may be a reclamation of 'her own femininity and womanhood' (**2016: 17**), Ruby menstruates under the eye of the moon. Having absorbed Jesse's youth by consuming her, Ruby allows blood and life to flow through her once more. Where before she was associated with the dead, her consumption of the young has rejuvenated her.

For Gigi, however, the consumption of Jesse is unsuccessful. When she and Sarah are chosen for Jack's next photoshoot, Gigi begins to feel increasingly sick. Having attempted to manufacture her own artificial beauty, her body rejects the consumption of Jesse's natural beauty: she rushes out of the shot and throws up Jesse's eye, repeating, 'I need to get

Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

128

her out of me' (**2016: 1:49:07**). In an attempt to exorcise the mistake of anthropophagy, Gigi then stabs herself with a pair of scissors and dies.

Sarah, however, who saw Jesse as competition in need of consumption, devours the regurgitated eye. For Sarah, anthropophagy has restored her position at the top of the hierarchy. Having been at Jack's shoot simply to support Gigi, Jack dismisses another model, now noticing Sarah's 'natural' beauty. Maher suggests that in this scene, Sarah 'breaks out from the background to claim a place amongst the great beauties. She not only takes Jesse's place, but also Gigi's' (**2016: 77**). However, evidencing Finkelstein's belief that any suggestion of change within the fashion industry is merely a 'sleight of hand', Sarah then wanders into the desert. As Featherstone suggests, Sarah's exile into a barren landscape 'symbolizes the desertification of the self in the LA fashion world' (**2017: 284**).

'Women, empowered by the very markets that oppress … willingly consume the very products that contribute to the broader oppressive regime' (**Collins & Rothe, 2017: 171**). As with *Haunted*, Sarah and Ruby have cannibalised their competition in order to increase their value and retain their positions within a creative industry. Yet, it is that same industry that has forced them into crises of dehumanisation, commodification and anthropophagy. By thus existing within and enabling the culture industry, the role of the creative becomes a contradictory one, frequently attempting to communicate with each other and to the audience while being embroiled within a process where production is based upon competition and cannibalisation of self and other.

Maggie Kilgour suggests that, 'while cannibalism has traditionally been used to satirise members within a society who are seen as parasitical … in a capitalist society … [it attacks] those who are seen as consuming without producing' (**1998: 241**). In the two cannibal fictions considered, the creative industries at-large are those who consume without producing, forcing those who work within into a vicious cycle of anthropophagy and auto-anthropophagy. Cannibalism thus becomes a vehicle to facilitate the final extreme of dehumanisation, when those working within creative industries can no longer identify themselves or others as anything but products to be consumed. In the exploitative system of the creative industries, the workers are not cogs, but meat.

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Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

131

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Wheatley. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 115-133

133

Dejects and Cannibals: Postmodern Abjection in Ana Lily Amirpour's *The Bad Batch*

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Abstract

*Ana Lily Amirpour's 2017 film The Bad Batch is a nightmare of postmodern abjection. Set in a desert wasteland in Texas, the film depicts a quasi-futuristic society that starkly reveals the dark underside of contemporary society, here portrayed in two realms, both exhibiting the height of abjection: the cannibal town called the Bridge and the shanty town of Comfort, where a lone perverse patriarch impregnates all the women while doling out steady doses of LSD to contain the masses. Borrowing from Julia Kristeva's description of the 'deject' in her work Powers of Horror, this analysis focuses on those characters who ultimately choose neither of these options. Having confronted and internalized the abject, these characters become eternal exiles, achieving a measure of liberation by assuming and embodying their partiality and by embracing 'a weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant' (**Kristeva, J., 1982: 2**).*

Keywords: postmodernism; abjection; Amirpour; Kristeva; deject; cannibalism

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

134

In *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*, Jennifer Brown argues that 'the cannibal figure reflects and embodies fears of specific times and spaces' (**2013: 7**). Brown's work is situated in a significant body of scholarship chronicling the history of cannibalism in both its reality and its fictional portrayals, as well as the reasons for our fascination with this taboo practice. The twenty-first century no doubt has its own unique relationship to this popular 'other,' one that manifests itself in a recent film from director Ana Lily Amirpour: *The Bad Batch* (**2017**). As I will argue, the cannibals of *The Bad Batch* represent one facet of a particularly dark vision of postmodern consumer culture. As Priscilla Walton points out in *Our Cannibals, Ourselves*, '"we" have become "them" in the twenty-first century' (**2004: 154**).

Amirpour's Films

Ana Lily Amirpour's first feature film, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), was a critical success, earning accolades from *Variety*, *Salon*, *The New York Times*, and *The Hollywood Reporter*, among others. Touted as 'the first Iranian vampire Western' by Brooks Barnes of the *New York Times*, the film has been praised for its unique aesthetics and feminist themes (**Barnes, 2013**). Amirpour's second film, *The Bad Batch* (**2017**), did not garner much favour, most critics suggesting that unlike *A Girl*, *The Bad Batch's* interesting aesthetics do not make up for its lack of narrative depth. *The Bad Batch* is no doubt a difficult film to pin down in terms of its overall message and nearly impossible to place firmly in one genre, but that is precisely where its power and complexity lies. The film's patchwork quality offers a vivid picture of the chaotic, darker elements of the postmodern condition and, when looked at closely, reveals a salient critique of contemporary American society.

Like *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, *The Bad Batch* depicts a bleak reality and an unflattering portrayal of humanity. *A Girl* takes place in the fictional Bad City, a small-town mecca of drugs and prostitution, complete with a mass grave of faceless corpses. *Bad Batch* depicts a desert wasteland, a sort of internment camp for society's unwanted, who either turn to cannibalism or drug addiction. Both also include non-traditional love stories between individuals of questionable morals who would be incompatible, perhaps even enemies, if it were not for the hopeless situations in which they find themselves. The difference between the two films is not simply aesthetic. Though actually set in California, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, shot in black and white, all dialogue in Farsi, has a sort of exotic placelessness. The titular character is meant to seduce not only her prey but also the viewing audience with her innocent yet ageless fury. The film evokes a sense of the uncanny, its foreignness mixed with

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

135

familiar Western cultural iconography. The overall effect is a sort of haunting bemusement.

The supernatural component of *A Girl* – a vampire who strikes out at pimps and drug dealers – not only infuses the film with a sense of justice but also allows the couple ultimately to escape Bad City. Despite its savagery, there seems to be a purpose to *A Girl's* work; she polices, scolds, and liberates. She is both monster and fairy godmother, a supernatural Robin Hood of sorts. Her darkness is revelatory, while the unrelenting light of *Bad Batch* seems to reveal nothing. At the end of *A Girl*, the couple drives off, hopefully to a better place. In contrast, there is no escape from the Bad Batch. Perhaps even more than the fence around the desert wasteland, the ruined skeletons of cars and aeroplanes signifies the inescapability of this place, while the presence of scooters and golf carts emphasises the dysfunctional childishness of American consumer culture. Unlike the beauty of *A Girl*'s postmodern pastiche, *The Bad Batch* plunges the viewer into a horrifying indifference, revealing the darker side of the postmodern condition. The viewer, like the main character of the film, is cast into a world where one can never really get one's bearings, where all are exiles and outcasts who, rather than socialise, would prefer to eat each other, and there is neither a true patriarch nor a supernatural force to ensure that justice is served. Yet there is some sense of redemption in the end, one perhaps more realistic given the reality the film depicts.

The Bad Batch begins when the film's protagonist, Arlen (Suki Waterhouse), finds herself cast out, wandering, lost and alone in a strange land peopled by monsters who literally want to eat her alive. She learns about the harsh realities of her outcast status immediately after being abandoned in the fenced-off wasteland. She is captured by female cannibals who cut off and consume first one of her arms and then one of her legs. She escapes, only to find herself in yet another nightmare, an 'oasis' inappropriately named Comfort, ruled by a cult leader akin to Jim Jones. Calling himself 'The Dream,' this leader, played by Keanu Reeves, keeps his constituents happy by doling out regular doses of LSD like candy, while he himself keeps a harem of young, heavily-armed women, all pregnant with his children. Caught between two untenable realities, herself made a figure of abjection, unable to locate herself or form any sort of identity, Arlen must find a way to forge a future. With the law of the father literally reduced to a drug-induced hallucination and the cannibal as phallic (m)other who dismembers and consumes 'me' before 'I' even get my bearings, this is a nightmare of abjection, one that is portrayed in the film as particular to the postmodern condition.

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

136

What Kind of Story is This?

Perhaps one of the things about *The Bad Batch* that plagues critics and viewers alike is that it is difficult to locate a genre with which to associate it. In an interview with *The Verge*, Amirpour describes it as 'like *Road Warrior* meets *Pretty in Pink*' (**Tiffany, 2017**). Indeed, the film does have a post-apocalyptic feel to it, strangely combined with Amirpour's characteristic shine for 1980s American iconography. In one of the few positive reviews of the film, director Scott Derrickson describes it as 'a cannibal movie, sure, but one that has more in common with the Southern moral mazes of Flannery O'Connor's fiction or the dream-logic cinema of David Lynch than any grindhouse exploitation film' (**Derrickson, 2018**). I would agree with Derrickson's characterisation of the film as dream-like. Amirpour herself refers to it as a 'savage fairy tale,' a compelling characterisation not only because of the ferocity and violence of early fairy tales prior to their later re-scripting for genteel readers, but also because of the frequency with which their protagonists are cast out onto perilous terrains (**Tiffany, 2017**). In fact, both dreams and fairy tales have something in common in that each, through processes of reduction/condensation, translates 'real' or 'conscious' life into symbols with both manifest and latent content. C. M. Woodhouse, writing about Orwell's *Animal Farm*, expresses it beautifully:

> *The fairy-story that succeeds is in fact not a work of fiction at all; or at least no more so than, say, the opening chapters of Genesis. It is a transcription of a view of life into terms of highly simplified symbols; and when it succeeds in its literary purpose, it leaves us with a deep indefinable feeling of truth; and it succeeds also, as Orwell set out to do, in a political as well as an artistic purpose, it leaves us also with a feeling of rebelliousness against the truth revealed. It does so not by adjuring us to rebel, but by the barest economy of plain description that language can achieve; and lest it should be thought guilty of a deliberate appeal to the emotions, it uses for characters not rounded, three-dimensional human beings that develop psychologically through time but fixed stereotypes, puppets, silhouettes* (**Woodhouse, 1946: xi**).

Just as Orwell's novel was criticised for the very elements that make it an effective political fairy tale, so *The Bad Batch* has been criticised for its caricatural characters, its seeming lack of direction, resolution, or moral. And yet I think one leaves a viewing of the film feeling that something like an indefinable truth has been revealed. Like Orwell's fiction, indeed like dystopic literature in general, *The Bad Batch* 'foregrounds the oppressive society in which it is set . . . to comment in a critical way on another society, typically that of the author or audience . . . to stimulate new critical insights into real-world societies' (**Booker, 2013: 5**).

[Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152](#)

137

The dystopic situation into which the heroine of *The Bad Batch* is thrown offers a dark mirror of contemporary society. The wasteland of *The Bad Batch*, divided into two 'cultures' – the chaos of the cannibalistic Bridge and the relative order of Comfort – represents a reduction of the social strata of postmodern consumerist society similar to the one H.G. Wells performs on modern capitalist society in *The Time Machine* (1895), with vicious cannibalistic Morlocks and the worthless, feckless Eloi. And just like Wells' supposedly futuristic society, the wasteland of *The Bad Batch* is meant to comment more about our contemporary society. Its writer and director states as much in an interview with Kaitlyn Tiffany of *The Verge*:

> *all those questions about modern American society that you can get from a weird, savage fairy tale like this, one where I am very consciously taking a look at what is American, what are our behaviors, what does the system make us into and make us capable of doing to each other. That's what I'm seeing. Right now, right this minute. It's not some future dystopia* (**Tiffany, 2017**).

In a similar vein, Derrickson describes it as a 'sprawling nightmare tapestry of a film [that] dives deep into our collective American soul-sickness, into the oppression of our basic social systems and the delusion of our basic ideals' (**Derrickson, 2018**).

Amirpour's journey into the deepest, darkest secrets of the American soul passes through and entangles narrative elements of various popular genres that force us to confront those aspects of contemporary humanity we would prefer to repress, but, as its director and writer has conceived of it, the film is most notably a 'savage fairy tale.' As I will argue, the film includes a postmodern rewriting of the classic fairy tale and, in tandem with that, a vision of a culture that is no longer capable of completing the process of abjection, of warding off those threats to social and bodily cohesion. It explores the consequences of finding oneself in such a state; and the bare possibility of redemption therefrom.

As Cannibal Movie

While more dark political fairy tale than horror film, *The Bad Batch* shares certain similarities with classic American horror movies that portray cannibals, like Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). In *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*, Jennifer Brown argues for a strong link between these portrayals of cannibalism and capitalist consumerism, in which 'people have the right to live off other people' (**Brown, 2013: 123**). As Brown explains, 'The cannibal figure represents the fear that our appetite for consumption knows no end, and indeed reminds us of our own potential inhumanity' (**Ibid: 7**).

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

138

Unlike the 'colonial cannibal' - a 'them' that was culturally and geographically external to the West - the contemporary cannibal, whether in its fictional portrayals or in real life cases like serial killers Ed Gein and Jeffrey Dahmer, 'has moved to the centre' (**Ibid: 13**). So while 'it once warned us about others,' the cannibal 'now warns us about ourselves' (**Ibid: 7**).

As Brown notes, 'the cannibal has become the reviled image of overindulgence, overspending, and overexploitation of resources' (**Ibid: 214**). However, Hooper's and Craven's original films were contextually specific, focusing on the figure of the 'hillbilly,' a culturally and economically excluded class who came to represent a 'deep failure in the American economic system' (**Ibid: 113**). According to Brown, while featuring a similar cannibalistic underclass, the twenty-first century remakes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes* were aimed at a different target: George W. Bush, 'the redneck in the White House' (**Ibid: 12**). In both versions of *The Hills Have Eyes* in particular, the line between civilised and savage becomes blurry, as the civilised family in each case must become savage in order to survive.

The cannibals of *The Bad Batch* are similarly represented as primitive, uneducated, 'apathetic people living in squalor with no hope for the future' (**Ibid: 112**), and there are clear parallels between the literal cannibalism in which they engage and the overindulgence practiced in 'civilised' Comfort. Further, detractors of President Trump might see a resemblance between the reign of egomaniacal, 1970s-Las Vegas-playboy The Dream and the current state of the union. A rampant populist, The Dream distracts his people with grand vapid speeches from his pulpit, while techno-rave music blares from enormous speakers and an associate doles out doses of LSD. His name is ironic; like the cannibalistic family of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, The Dream's 'family' is 'expressive of the sense that the American dream ha[s] not only failed but "fallen apart"' (**Ibid: 120**).

As Postmodern Fairy Tale

While there are resemblances between horror movies that feature cannibals and *The Bad Batch* in terms of the socio-political critique contained within them, the plotline of *The Bad Batch* aligns more closely with classic fairy tales, many of which include cannibals. As Maria Tatar, Cristina Bacchilega, and others contend, the attribution of stock characters, plot elements, and morals to fairy tales is doomed to failure when all the variants of particular tales are taken into account. However, most agree that there are some general narrative formulae that appear across a wide spectrum of similar tales within the genre, many of which also appear in *The Bad Batch*.

Our protagonist, Arlen, has much in common with the classic fairy tale hero. She, too, embarks on a journey that involves a transformation of sorts. Tatar describes the hero's plight as follows:

> *The tale's hero is a wanderer . . . exiled from home . . . his path takes him from a lowly condition at home to a world of enchantment and finally back to a modified and elevated form of his original condition. Cast in the dual role of victim in one set of family circumstances and seeker in another, he can slip with ease from a state of abject self-pity to one of bold resourcefulness* (**Tatar, 1987, 2003: 71**).

In this regard, *The Bad Batch* is a story about a young girl who has somehow lost her way and finds herself in the gravest of dangers. There are bestial monsters and sly villains who try to trick her with promises of food and riches; there is a fairy godfather with a carriage; and yes, a prince, of sorts. In fact, all the main characters in *Bad Batch* correspond with stock fairy tale characters, according to Vladimir Propp's catalog. There is the villain: the cannibalistic Bridge People. But there is also the false hero: The Dream, who also poses as a donor or 'provider of magical agents': LSD (**Tatar, 2003: 67**). Once our heroine uses her cunning to escape from the cannibals, she employs a helper: the Hermit. Like a fairy godfather, the Hermit is an itinerate wanderer, traversing the vast wasteland alone, searching for people who need help. He never speaks, but his ageless, sun-ravaged face speaks volumes. The helper takes her to Comfort – 'a world of enchantment' – where a sorcerer reigns (**Ibid**). Like the gingerbread house of Hansel and Gretel, what seems like 'comfort' turns out to be another form of nightmare from the one she left. Sensing her own enchantment, Arlen journeys away from Comfort and out into the desert, where she meets Miami Man, an impossibly large and muscled Jason Momoa, who, like a Big Bad Wolf, approaches silently from out of the desert night, appearing to Arlen no doubt as familiar (human/grandmother) and villain (wolf) in one. While she, like Angela Carter's Wolf Girl, might be just as happy for Miami Man to eat her alive, he has other designs. Ordering her to rescue his daughter (the princess) from Comfort, he becomes the dispatcher, to whom she is 'obliged to take a redemptive journey . . . motivated by [her] violation of a prohibition' (she murdered Miami Man's wife, another cannibal, and the mother of the princess) (**Ibid**). When Arlen returns to Comfort, she is offered a false happy ending. Arlen could choose to stay in Comfort and become one of the Dream's concubines, living in a mansion in the lap of luxury. She could, in other words, choose to be a classic fairy tale heroine, who 'suffers humiliation and defeat that ends with a rapid rise in social status through marriage' (**Ibid: 95**). Instead, she chooses to complete her mission and return the princess to her father. Arlen's decision to leave the 'magic' and enchantment of Comfort and its 'father,' The Dream, in order to be with

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

140

the dangerous cannibal Miami Man aligns her with other postmodern fairy tale heroines, like Angela Carter's 'The Tiger's Bride,' in which, as Bacchilega explains, 'she can separate from him [the father] with no regrets because his appearance in the magic mirror no longer touches her. The subject of her own transformation, her own rebirth, she instead – 'white, shaking, raw' – approaches the tiger 'as if offering, in myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my execution' (**Bacchilega, 1997: 99**). This may seem an equally dangerous choice for Arlen, but it is not as if an infinite number of possibilities open up to her in this wasteland. She is a product of the society that exiled her. She can neither reject it wholesale by becoming an inhuman beast nor become a part of its obscene excrescence by living as a citizen of Comfort. The postmodern rewrite can only go so far in keeping within the patriarchal frame of the fairy tale genre. As Bacchilega explains, 'Gaining access to the construction of their own subjectivity, as the tiger's bride does, liberates women only partially within a genre which . . . is often used to constrain gender' (**Ibid: 101-2**). While Arlen has succeeded in separating herself from a tyrant king and in transforming her beast back into a prince, her victory is only partial, as is she. Her journey does not result in a successful exclusion of the abject and an attendant gain in wholeness; rather, it requires that she internalize and embrace the abject.

Postmodern Abjection

Abject characters, themes, and encounters are a mainstay of fairy tales, where we find various versions of cannibalism, incest, bodily mutilation, and infanticide, as well as perverse mother and father figures. The abjected mother appears, as in horror films, in the myriad faces of the monstrous feminine and creatures who want to 'eat you up.' Fathers appear in the guise of big bad wolves and Bluebeard figures. Like a dark fairy tale, *The Bad Batch* takes us to a primal, pre-cultural phase where we must confront the monsters we try so desperately to repress. It forces us to revert, to encounter the abject, to experience horrific and baffling encounters with all manner of material and events that, according to Julia Kristeva, 'disturb identity, system, order' (**1982: 4**). The abject is 'what does not respect borders, positions, rules' and what thus must be excluded 'so that I might live' (**Ibid: 3**). As Barbara Creed explains:

> *In general terms, Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies as a means for separating the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject. Ritual becomes a means by which societies both renew their initial contact with the abject element and then exclude that element* (**Creed, 2015: 38**).

[Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152](#)

141

The issue with the postmodern nightmare depicted in *The Bad Batch* is that the process of abjection cannot be completed. On the one hand, in their isolation from 'normal' society, the Bad Batch have regressed to a primitive, savage state, without access to the necessary rituals of defilement that would order a relation to the abject. On the other hand, they are in a sense 'beyond' modern society in that they have experienced it and been abandoned by it; they know about ritual, but it holds no meaning for them. In an essay on the film *Alien 3*, Louise Speed explicitly links the postmodern condition with Kristeva's notion of abjection, citing both as situations where meaning collapses and borders break down, particularly the borders of the 'clean and proper self,' whether that refers to the social and corporeal individual or the social body in general (**Speed, 1998: 128**). Speed ascribes the unpopularity of *Alien 3* to its failure to complete the process of abjection, leaving audiences dissatisfied, unable to expel the horror the film exhibits.

While very different from *Alien 3*, it is my contention that *The Bad Batch* suffers from a similar incompleteness, but this is precisely what makes it an important film and a salient commentary on the postmodern condition, which has hindered our ability to drum up the kind of ritualistic expulsion necessary to complete the process of abjection. But this is not because there is nothing that we fear or that horrifies us. As Jean Baudrillard contends, 'These are, indeed, the only passions we have today: hatred, disgust, allergy, aversion, rejection and disaffection' (**Baudrillard, 2002: 145**). We suffer precisely from an excess of the abject, the non-object. 'We are in a social trance: vacant, withdrawn, lacking meaning in our own eyes' (**Ibid: 143**). Everywhere boundaries collapse, and we experience 'a hatred born of accumulated indifference' (**Ibid: 146**). Baudrillard continues:

> [F]rom this point on there is something which is completely beyond social regulation. If this is not the end of History, it is certainly the end of the social. We are no longer in anomie, but in anomaly. Anomaly is not only what escapes the law but the rule. What is outside the game, "offside," no longer in a position to play (**Baudrillard, 2002: 146**).

The wasteland of *The Bad Batch* is just such an 'offside' space, devoid of the illusions of our progressive ideologies and unable to fully constitute itself through the process of abjection.

Given the emphasis on bodily wastes in Kristeva's theory of abjection, it is particularly interesting to examine not only the rampant cannibalism in the film, but also its obsession with fecal matter. In fact, the major difference between the Bridge and Comfort explicitly centers on the status of feces. After Arlen is captured, dismembered, and consumed, she manages to escape because she smears her own excrement over her body. She is already abject in two senses – one, she has been abjected from the social

order, and two, she has been abjected by the so-called human order of the Bad Batch, her double amputation a form of social and bodily castration. Not simply dehumanised, she is turned into a non-object. So Arlen exercises her only option at this point if she is not to become the ultimate non-object, the corpse - to embrace the abject, smear herself with her own shit. What is interesting in this regard is that when Arlen loses her arm, a tattoo across the fingers of her severed hand reads 'FEAR.' Through this act of castration, Arlen loses the sort of fear that can be symbolised and articulated, allowing her access to a more primal, inarticulable fear, the horror of the utter annihilation of the self. Despite being maimed, she is then able to kill the cannibals and is rescued by the Hermit – a man who exists neither with the Bridge people nor at Comfort, played by an unrecognizable Jim Carey.

Arlen then becomes a 'citizen' of Comfort, a strange oasis that seemingly offers protection from the brutality of the Bridge, but which merely enacts that brutality in a much more sinister form. Comfort is little more than a shanty town, 'full of broken TVs, giant boomboxes, AK-47s, booty shorts, crinkled July Fourth decorations, ceaseless ecstasy-fueled raves, and Statue of Liberty Halloween costumes — all the detritus of Americana' (**Tiffany, 2017**). Unlike the Bridge people, The Dream makes a point of defining his social order based on the elimination of excrement – 'your shit, it leaves . . .because of me . . . to a place where no one thinks about it and no one smells it.' Yet the Dream fails to complete the process of abjection at the level of the social, reminding his followers every night that they are in fact social waste, the shit of society. He claims on the one hand that 'It's time to wake up,' while with the other he doles out LSD like communion wafers, and a sign outside his mansion reads, 'This is not real.' He claims to offer life, while outside of Comfort there is only death. But the life he offers is one of abject poverty and drug addiction – a re-creation of the lives they likely led outside of the wasteland. Like a benign drug lord, the Dream occupies a mansion, complete with running water, opulent furnishings, and an indoor swimming pool, while his 'constituents' live largely on the street with the rest of the detritus. He offers momentary relief from their abject status through the acid-induced sublime, but it never lasts. He is in this regard a perverse version of the patriarchal 'American Dream,' or what is left of it once no one really believes in it anymore. The Dream is the epitome of the abject ruler that Kristeva describes:

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

143

> *The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them . . . it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit . . . it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss – an artist who practices his art as a 'business'* (**Kristeva 1982: 15-16**)*.*

Not only the ruler of Comfort, the Dream is also the one father. Like the father of Freud's primal horde, he is seemingly the only one who procreates in this place, suggesting that the future, if not the present, will involve incestuous relations with his own daughters.

Two perverse sub-cultures are thus at odds here – the one that necessitates cannibalism and the other incest. Yet the two taboos are not unrelated. Kristeva writes of primitive societies with no need for population control:

> *the desire to procreate . . . entails . . . the disappearance of the incest taboo and pollution rites. Such a relaxation of prohibitions . . . is accompanied by such a lack of the 'clean and proper' and hence of the 'abject' that cannibalism of the dead seems to be current practice* (**Kristeva, 1982: 78**).

Indeed, as Tatar notes, 'incest and cannibalism are habitually linked to a precultural phase marked by the inability to differentiate' and 'some languages employ the same term for incest and cannibalism' (**Tatar, 1992: 199**). The Dream's obsession with procreation thus goes hand in hand with the cannibalism practiced outside of Comfort. And in fact, though there are dozens of pregnant women in the Dream's harem, there are no babies, no children. Strangely, all the Dream seems to produce is more pregnant women, as if they never give birth, never release the infants from their wombs. They are thus no better than the bestial cannibal women who consume Arlen's limbs, both representative of the devouring mother, herself a sort of cannibal who 'eats' her young so as not to give them up. They all even wear the same shirts that read, 'the Dream is in me.' This 'branding' of the women is another indication that we are dealing with the motif of consumption; in addition to what the Dream refers to as the 'economy of Comfort' – the mass production and sale of LSD - here there is also the mass production and consumption of infants.

Most of the citizens of Comfort seem content with the illusion of society that the Dream offers. Only the madman, Bobby (Giovanni Ribisi), seems to see the truth. Like a prophet or sage, he wanders through the streets of Comfort, distraught, mumbling 'You have to remember this one thing . . . If you forget everything else but not this, you have nothing to worry about.' Arlen asks him, 'What's the thing?' He replies, 'How should I know?

Find out for yourself.' Far from the meaningless ramblings of a madman, as Derrickson contends, this is 'a deceptively significant exchange about the mystery of existence itself; about what is of utmost importance in a desert world of suffering' (**Derrickson, 2018**). Filthy and deranged, Bobby is a devotee of the abject: 'A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me' (**Kristeva, 1982: 2**).

Arlen's exchange with Bobby ultimately convinces her to leave Comfort to wander alone in the desert: 'What is this place? . . . .Leave Comfort . . . go far away.' She becomes at this point the epitome of Kristeva's deject, the one who embraces the abject:

> *Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place: 'Where am I?' instead of 'Who am I?' For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never one, nor homogeneous, nor totalizable, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a stray. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved* (**Kristeva, 1982: 8**).

Like the Hermit, Arlen incessantly wanders, shifting between the delusional identity offered by the Dream and Comfort and the total absence of identity and the threat of total annihilation in the vast desert wasteland outside. In fact, her reaction to the delusional identity that the Dream creates through his collective drug-induced techno-raves is the opposite of the rest of Comfort's citizens. On the evening she accepts the LSD with the others, her immediate reaction is to leave Comfort. Arlen's LSD-induced trip away from Comfort and out into the vast desert in the middle of the night marks her as deject. It becomes an experience of the sublime, which, according to Kristeva, is linked with the abject; 'the abject is edged with the sublime' (**Kristeva, 1982: 11**). If Arlen could express her experiences, she would likely describe them as Kristeva does: 'the starry sky . . . a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses, there are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think' (**Ibid: 12**).

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

145

In this state, Arlen meets the cannibal Miami Man. Through this encounter, Arlen is able to pronounce the fear that has literally been separated from her – 'Strange, isn't it? Here we are, in the darkest corner of this earth, and we're afraid of our own kind.' This is one of the central themes of abject literature as Kristeva describes it. Quoting Céline, she writes, 'It is of men, and of men only, that one should always be *frightened*' (**Ibid: 142**). After this assertion, Arlen lays her head against Miami Man's bare chest, a strange gesture, given that he is one of the cannibals she despises, a dangerous wolf in human clothing – 'a stifled aspiration towards another as prohibited as it is desired – abject' (**Ibid: 47**). Indeed, the abject reasserts itself boldly and violently in a harsh cut to the next scene – Arlen, lying on her back in the full light of day, no arm, no leg, abject. Miami Man has stolen her prosthetic leg and plans to use her to get his daughter back. What he doesn't know is that it was Arlen who killed his child's mother in an attempt to separate herself violently from the cannibalistic aspects of the Bridge. She then took the orphaned child to Comfort, where, in her drug-induced pilgrimage, she left her. The journey to rescue the child from the Dream and return her to her father pits Arlen, a double amputee, against the hulking cannibalistic Miami Man – each despises the other for what they are, abject. And yet they are also drawn to each other in a strange way that is different than mundane heterosexual attraction. They cannot tolerate each other – she is literally a piece of meat and he a cannibal – yet they find themselves bound together over the fate of the one child in the film. The evolution of their relationship is a perverse version of the 'girl-meets-boy, girl-hates-boy, girl-falls-for-boy' storyline, which will result in a strange deject couple.

It is Arlen who attempts to form a connection with Miami Man, to tame the beast so to speak, through their mutual abjection. Her first gesture is to show him her Bad Batch tattoo, asking him, 'what's your number?' He refuses to answer. She then begins to point out other tattoos that she has and asks him about his. It is not so much about the content of their respective body art that is important here but the notion of bodily marking and how that ties in with the theme of abjection and in particular, about gender relations in such a lawless place. In their co-edited collection titled *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment,* Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe discuss the gendered aspect of tattooing particularly with regard to the fact that woman is marked by language, 'a cultural process by which her status as female is constructed and controlled . . . the mark of gender in language and society precludes women from taking up the position of Absolute Subject, even as it constructs us as female' (**Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 1992: 153**). Citing several instances in literature and film where a man deliberately marks a woman in order to subjugate and control her, the general idea is that while bodily marking is easily seen as

a voluntary act of identity solidification for men, for women, it always risks being a reflection of the larger cultural marking that she endures as female, one that positions her as partial: 'It is only by being marked in relationship to the unmarked male that women come into being, a being that is inevitably partial' (**Ibid: 154**).

In *The Bad Batch*, the gendered nature of bodily marking is complicated by the fact that all Bad Batch are involuntarily tattooed in the process of abjecting them from society, aligning all of them with the abject feminine. Arlen is additionally marked through her literal castration – a physical, bodily mark of absence and partiality. As Speed points out with regard to *Alien 3*, 'we have gone beyond a depiction of castration *anxiety* to exploratory research of what happens after the dismemberment has actually been performed' (**Speed, 1992: 146**). What we end up with is 'an image of the female body which no longer provides reassurance against castration anxiety in the male viewer' (**Ibid: 145**). Strangely, it is ultimately this maimed female form that will allow Miami Man to be re-humanized. Earlier in the film, he watches dispassionately as another woman, who he himself had maimed similarly to Arlen, begs him to stop torturing her; she is literally a piece of meat. We watch as he breaks her neck and very efficiently butchers her body for food. Arlen represents the same type of figure, but manages to make him realise that the absence she signifies is precisely what is left, the 'one thing,' which is, of course, nothing. 'Postmodernity,' writes Baudrillard, 'is the attempt to reach a point where one can live with what is left' (**qtd. in Speed, 1998: 125**).

Once Arlen manages to rescue Honey and reunite father and daughter, Arlen and Miami Man engage in what, in another context, would seem a rather banal exchange:

> Arlen: *'What are you doin right now? You wanna hang out or somethin?'*
>
> Miami Man: *'You are confused, no?'*
>
> Arlen: *'Not really.'*
>
> Miami Man: *'Go back to Comfort. In this place is only death for you.'*
>
> Arlen: *'I'm not goin back there . . .I like it here.'*
>
> Miami Man: *'What do you like? Where is here? Look Around you. Is nothing.'* (**The Bad Batch, 2017**)

The power of this seemingly lackluster exchange lies in the status of the 'nothing' that concludes it. This is the second time that Miami Man has uttered this word in an enigmatic exchange. Earlier in the film when he himself is rescued by the Hermit, he cries out in desperation, 'I know

Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

147

nothing. I'm lost.' The Hermit wordlessly rummages through his shopping cart and pulls out an object, which he places in Miami Man's hand. It is a small plastic snow globe – a 'magic' one? A talisman? It's hard to say. It seems to be just another piece of the placeless, meaningless detritus strewn throughout Comfort, but perhaps that's the point. It is precisely representative of all the objects that have become non-objects and the people who have become un-people, the same sort of non-object that confronts the madman Bobby as an unsurpassable something, 'this one thing' that one must never forget.

For Arlen, this 'one thing' could not be found when she was still a member of society; it required her to be abandoned and even maimed. The one thing is a no-thing, symbolised by her double castration and by the loss of the fear tattoo that once donned the fingers of the hand that was removed. So when Miami Man says to Arlen, here there is nothing, he doesn't at first realise the truth he has uttered and that she has already come to accept; he has failed to incorporate and embody the loss that she presents to him and that she no longer fears:

> *If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, then it is none other than abject. The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being* (**Kristeva, 1982: 5**).

There is a certain liberation in this realisation, one that thus far Miami Man has not been able to achieve. Far from being a moment in which Arlen must depend on Miami Man for survival, a manifestation of feminine weakness and acquiescence, here she offers him access to this liberation, that of the deject. In her fearlessness, she reaches out with the one hand she has left to touch the hand of the mutilator, a profound gesture in such a situation. Not a plea, but an offering. What are we to make of this seeming reconciliation of the masculine and the feminine? Can we even call it that? He tells her to go back to Comfort. This would amount to returning to the trailer where she knows her life is shit but, per the Dream's promise, at least she doesn't see it or smell it. Where the Dream's promise will be reproduced hundreds of times in hundreds of his indoctrinated children who will carry out his legacy. She could be the mother of one or more of them.

At this point, unlike Arlen, Honey is still under the enchantment of The Dream. As Miami Man begins to understand Arlen's gesture, an invitation to join her in her deject status, Honey tears his hand from hers, demanding, in her one line of dialogue in the entire film, 'spaghetti because the other man gave me spaghetti.' She is wearing one of the t-shirts of the Dream's harem: 'The Dream is in me.' Miami Man walks away with her rabbit, his back towards her.

It is perhaps in the killing and eating of the rabbit that this deject 'family' establishes their own perverse relationship to ritual. The rabbit is in fact an important symbol in the film, one that has its own sort of evolution. The first time we see it is in a painting that Miami Man has created for his daughter. In the painting, Honey appears very much like the Madonna, and she is holding a rabbit that one might see as a Christ figure. This also projects a certain feminine innocence on Honey. We next see the rabbit when Honey and Arlen are in Comfort. Arlen buys Honey a rabbit for a pet, while moments before we had seen one unceremoniously beheaded. Honey brings her rabbit with her when she temporarily becomes part of the Dream's harem, symbolically losing her innocence as she acquiesces to this perverse patriarch in exchange for the luxuries he offers. When Arlen 'rescues' Honey from this fate, the Dream hands Honey the rabbit and says, 'take care of this rabbit.' While seemingly a kind paternal gesture, this generosity, as is always the case with the Dream, is undercut by the fact that we know that rabbits not only suffer a similar fate in Comfort as those who are cannibalised outside of Comfort, but that this particular rabbit, a symbol of Honey's innocence, has been tainted. When Arlen offers Miami Man 'her hand,' this 'ceremony' is celebrated in the sacrifice and consumption of the rabbit. To some extent, death re-assumes its meaning here; this death is not like the others.

The film ends with Miami Man, Arlen, and Honey sitting around the fire eating Honey's pet rabbit. Arlen and Miami Man smile contentedly at each other while tears stream down Honey's face. This would read as a scene of the reconstitution of the nuclear family but given the violent disarticulations of the film – disarticulations of bodies, of gender, of family relations, of the social sphere in general – such an image is no longer readable in terms of paternal law and order. And yet with a 1980s-style anthem playing in the background that sounds like it came straight out of a John Hughes film, one senses that there might be hope, even in the wasteland.

Arlen's future is radically uncertain, but in the end she seems to believe in something like providence – her own version of 'happily ever after.' As she expresses it, 'What if all these things that happened to us happened to us so the next things that are gonna happen to us can happen to us?' It is a

deject providence, symbolised by the seemingly random machinations of the Hermit. Like a new deject divinity, he says nothing but seems to see everything. And though distinctly understated, it is his machinations that ultimately propel and control the plot. Rotting and decrepit, he unceasingly trudges through the wasteland, never still, always moving, slowly, unceasingly, like the rotations of the stars. It's interesting to see him as the director in disguise, operating in a world that causes her infinite sadness, but that she cares for deeply, offering us the occasional snow globe when we seem to be lost. Don't you know? The world is contained in a little plastic bubble that someone shakes up now and then for fun. But oh, the whirling snow is awfully pretty.

In *The Bad Batch*, Amirpour offers a dark vision of contemporary society, but it is not untrue, in the same way that fairy tales are not untrue. *The Bad Batch* is a symbolic rendering of postmodern consumerism that takes us to its primal core. Confronted with what lurks there, our heroine battles monsters and sorcerers but, given the inescapable reality in which she finds herself, she cannot simply live happily ever after. Each of her options untenable, she accepts and embraces a partial identity and creates an in-between space for herself through which she will eternally wander. Criticisms of *The Bad Batch* that accuse the film of being purposeless fail to see that the journey that takes place within it, and the small measure of redemption gained, is the only way such a savage fairy tale could be told.

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Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152

150

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Jackson. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 134-152
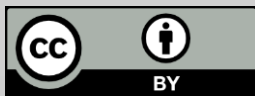
152

'Funeral Baked Meats': Cannibalism and Corpse Medicine in *Hamlet*

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Abstract

This article argues that the cannibalistic connotations in 'Hamlet' may be interpreted in the context of specific cultural anxieties relating to the popular and problematic use of corpse medicine, or mumia. I begin by exploring how Shakespeare represents corpses throughout Hamlet in ways which reference food and culinary practices. By doing so, Shakespeare not only emphasises the tragic objectification of the dead, but also links life and death inextricably to figurative and literal consumption. The essay proceeds to analyse the cannibalistic allusions in 'Hamlet' through the lens of the contemporary medical consumption of corpse medicine. While the use of corpse medicine was semantically distinguished from anthropophagy in early modern Europe, I argue that Shakespeare's depiction of man-eating in Hamlet forces his audience to confront their own unsavoury distinctions between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of cannibalism. Viewed through the lens of cannibal discourse, Hamlet's language over the course of the tragedy takes on new significance as the prince displays profane hunger that seems to simultaneously repel him and imbue him with a macabre vitality. Something is indeed 'rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.4.67), Shakespeare suggests, and the smell appears to be coming from the kitchen.

Keywords: Hamlet; cannibalism; transubstantiation; medicine; consumption; Eucharist

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

153

> *HORATIO: My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.*
>
> *HAMLET: I prithee do not mock me, fellow-student;*
>
> *I think it was to see my mother's wedding.*
>
> *HORATIO: Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.*
>
> *HAMLET: Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral baked meats*
>
> *Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.*
>
> (***Hamlet*, 1.2.175-80**)[ii]

As his bitter jest implies, Hamlet is fixated on the relationship between life, death and consumption. Over the course of the play, the language that he uses to navigate his moral dilemma is situated firmly within the realms of cannibal discourse: his mother enjoys her husband 'as if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on' (**1.2.144-5**); kings and beggars are but 'two dishes … to one table' (**4.3.24**); his thirst for vengeance presents as a yearning to 'drink hot blood' (**3.2.360**). While no character literally eats anyone else in the play, the reasons for and the effects of the undercurrent of cannibalism which runs throughout *Hamlet* have been the subject of a good deal of critical discussion in recent years. The cannibal is, to put it mildly, a complex and loaded symbol. To an early modern audience, allusions to anthropophagy (that is, man-eating) would have conjured up all kinds of ideas and associations ranging from vengeance and classical mythology, to transubstantiation and the Eucharist, to colonial discourse and the new world savages. The cannibalistic connotations of *Hamlet* also, however, seem to speak to very specific cultural anxieties relating to the popular and undeniably problematic use of what was commonly referred to as *mumia*: medicine derived from human corpses.

Throughout *Hamlet* Shakespeare represents corpses in ways that reference food and culinary practices. In doing so, he foregrounds the tragic objectification of the dead in ways that link life and death inextricably to figurative and literal bodily consumption – and also, therefore, to contemporary medical consumption of corpse medicine, a practice that was as widespread and as popular as it was problematic. As critics such as Wendy Wall and Jonathan Sugg have convincingly argued, the early modern household 'was spacious enough to embrace the work of recycling corpses; cookbooks placed the human body imaginatively in proximity to death, carnality, and orality' **(Wall, 2002: 197)**. In the kitchen, cuisine and corpse medicine went hand in hand as housewives followed recipes for good old-fashioned home remedies that included ingredients such as human skulls, urine, placenta, and blood **(Sugg, 2011: *passim*).** While the use of corpse medicine was semantically distinguished from

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

154

anthropophagy in early modern society, in *Hamlet* Shakespeare purposefully depicts man-eating in such a way as to force his audience to confront their own unsavoury distinctions between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of cannibalism.

Moreover, I argue that against this background of moral uncertainty Hamlet's own dilemma takes on new significance as the prince struggles to reconcile his own conflicting impulses. Hamlet returns repeatedly to the image of the body-as-food, alternating as he does so between distasteful observer of figurative cannibalism to eventual butcher and would-be consumer. By tying Hamlet's struggle so explicitly to cannibal discourse, Shakespeare draws our attention to the competing interests of a revenger who, like *mumia*, is 'paradoxically associated with both restorative value and violence' **(Wall, 2002: 196)**. Ultimately, it seems that Hamlet's only means to confront the profane consumption of his world is to partake in it.

Modern audiences can appreciate Hamlet's joke in the passage above: food prepared for his father's funeral has been served up for his mother's marriage in what Stephen Greenblatt calls a 'confounding of categories that has stained both social rituals in the service of thrift' **(Greenblatt, 2000: 155)**. The joke functions both as a swipe at bourgeois values – what Greenblatt terms 'an economy of calculation and equivalence' **(Greenblatt, 2000: 155)** – and as a furious comment on the speed with which Hamlet's mother remarried. As Robert Appelbaum writes, '*only* by marrying within a few days of the funeral would it have been possible to serve pies originally intended for the funeral' **(Appelbaum, 2006: 17)**. There is, however, a more subversive current of meaning at work in Hamlet's joke than may be initially apparent. Linking 'wedding', 'funeral', 'coldly', and 'baked meats', Hamlet brings into uncomfortably close proximity contrasting ideas of hot and cold, life and death. His juxtaposition of corpse and cuisine places Hamlet's dilemma firmly in the realms of cannibalistic discourse, and in this context his chosen culinary example – baked meat – takes on a grisly significance.

A 'baked meat' in early modern culinary parlance was largely similar to a pasty or meat pie, although the construction of these gastronomic treats was often a more complex process than one might imagine, as demonstrated in this recipe from London cookbook, *The Good Huswifes Jewell* (1596):

> *Take a leg of Lamb, and cut out all the flesh, and save the skin*
> *whole, then mince it fine … then put in grated bread, and some*
> *egg white and all, and some Dates and Currants, then season*
> *... temper it all together, then put it into the leg of lamb again,*

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

155

> *and let it bake a little before you put it into your pie* **(Dawson, 1596: 11-12).**

While this recipe may seem innocent – and delicious! – enough to modern eyes, there are elements to the dish which may well have been construed by Shakespeare's early modern audience as having darker significance. Firstly, the pastry shell in which the meat is cooked was commonly known as a coffin – the same kind of 'coffin' that Titus Andronicus forges with vengeful relish from the blood and bones of Chiron and Demetrius (**5.3.187**). Like *Titus*, albeit with a soupçon more subtlety, Hamlet's reference to 'funeral baked meats' plays with the idea that a 'coffin' can be either both the focal point of a funeral, a locus of loss and grief, or it can be something containing food - a wholesome site of nourishment. Compounding the macabre efficacy of Hamlet's imagery is the manner in which dishes such as that described by Dawson were traditionally served: once reconstituted, the meat is cooked as an entire joint that, as Appelbaum notes, would not have lent itself well to being portioned equally in slices like a pie. Instead, the pastry coffin 'had to be opened up … while the main ingredient was brought forward for display and then carved and parceled out' **(Appelbaum, 2006: 20)**.

Thus, a transgressive and ritualistic impression of 'embalmment, interment, and disinterment' underlays the consumption of Hamlet's baked meat **(Appelbaum, 2006: 19)**. The prince's image proves to be an apt one, and anticipates the Ghost's eventual description of Old Hamlet's murder – a death tied vividly to the body-as-food. One of the distinguishing features of the above recipe for baked lamb involves a complete reconstitution of flesh cooked inside the pastry. Deboned, minced, mixed with spices and restored into the skin, the animal transformed into something else in what Appelbaum terms a 're-presentation of the dead' **(Appelbaum, 2006: 19).** The processes by which this leg of lamb is transformed bear some similarity to Old Hamlet's description of his death by poison, the effects of which are described in unequivocally culinary terms:

> *… with a sudden vigour it doth posset*
>
> *And curd, like eager droppings into milk,*
>
> *The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine;*
>
> *And a most instant tetter barked about,*
>
> *Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,*
>
> *All my smooth body.*
>
> (**1.5.66-73**)

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

156

Old Hamlet's death takes the form of a physical transformation very similar to that found in the baked meats to which his son compares him three scenes earlier. Like the reconstituted leg of lamb in Dawson's cookbook, Old Hamlet's body is gruesomely transformed from the inside out: his blood curdles like a posset and his skin develops pastry-like crust. To Appelbaum, Old Hamlet's living flesh becomes, in essence, decaying food, akin to a mouldy cheese or a corrupt pie. Such a vividly-described transition from 'wholesome' living flesh and blood to 'loathsome crust' could conceivably be interpreted as a comment on the 'horrific objectification of killing and feeding […] and the brutality of eating meat' **(Appelbaum, 2006: 26)**. In this context, Marcellus' remark that 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.4.67) picks up extra unsavoury significance, becoming a joke on 'carnality and decay' **(Appelbaum, 2006: 15)**.

Old Hamlet's depiction of his own physical putrescence reflects more than simply common cooking practices, though. His language in the above passage brings far wider-reaching questions discourse related to bodily transformation directly into the realm of the culinary. As Peggy Reeves Sanday observes, 'Cannibalism is never just about eating but is primarily a medium for nongustatory messages' **(Sanday, 1986: 3)**. In this case, as several critics have observed,[iii] the symbolism of a body – specifically that of a king – transformed into food seems to resonate strongly with the traditional Catholic belief in transubstantiation and the real presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. Mark Sweetnam, for example, proposes that based on Hamlet's preoccupation with remembering his 'poor father's body' (**1.2.48**), Old Hamlet becomes a symbolic Eucharist of sorts to his son **(Sweetnam, 2007: 16)**. The young Prince is undoubtedly fixated on his father's body, and his recollection of the dead king is bound to palpable idiosyncrasies of, and tangible connection to, the dead king: during the course of the play he calls upon Old Hamlet's brow ('Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself'), his body and his 'grizzly' beard (**3.4.55, 4.2.25-6, 1.2.249**). Upon first meeting the Ghost, Hamlet instinctively draws on its corporeal aspects: 'thy canonized bones, hearsed in death, / [h]ave burst their cerements' (**1.4.28-9**), and although his reaction upon confronting the Ghost is one of suspicion and uncertainty as to whether he faces a 'spirit of health or a goblin damned' (**1.4.21**), his fear is supplanted by an immediate desire to 'call thee Hamlet, / King, father' (**1.4.25-6**). The prince's 'relentlessly fleshy commemoration' **(Sweetnam, 2007: 18)** of his father could thus be seen as presenting to post-Reformation London a nostalgic insurrection of Catholic imagery. Hamlet's reverence for his father's body is, Sweetnam suggests, akin to that of Catholicism for the 'incarnate Christ' **(Sweetnam, 2007: 14)** - and in this context the Ghost's final request that Hamlet '[r]emember me' (**1.5.91**) draws together

concepts of physical and spiritual remembrance by echoing Christ's command at the Last Supper: 'this do in remembrance of me' **(Luke 22.19)**.

The corrupted flesh and blood of the dead king, though, is a far cry from the spiritual sustenance and restorative properties traditionally attached to the Catholic Eucharist. Instead, Shakespeare's depiction of a transubstantiated body (one endorsing the decidedly un-Christian act of bloody vengeance, no less) seems to present a vision of unholy consumption that, as Oldham argues, draws on the idea of 'eating and drinking the transubstantiated body and blood within the Eucharist' in order to situate the tragedy within 'a new subgenre of Christianized revenge tragedy' **(Oldham, 2015: 39)**. Under these terms the circumstances of Old Hamlet's murder take on a new and subversive significance also. The fact that he died 'unhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled' (**1.5.77**) - in a state of sin and without having received the last rites of the church - serves not only as an explanation of sorts for his ghostly return in keeping with the medieval Christian belief in Purgatory, but would have struck a nerve, Zysk writes, with a Christian audience 'for whom matters of death, final judgement, and salvation were bound up fundamentally with sacramental rituals' **(Zysk, 2017: 423)**. By capitalising, therefore, on 'Reformation-era controversies over the sacraments', Shakespeare refigures them 'as part of a dark sacramental vision' **(Zysk, 2017: 424)** in which transubstantiation, bodily consumption, and sacramental ritual in a grotesque parody of papal doctrine.

And yet: even as *Hamlet*'s anthropophagic allusions strike a chord with post-Reformation debate surrounding the sacraments by seeming to critique fleshly commemoration, Old Hamlet's concern with bodily transformation and objectification draws on a more palpable and everyday form of cannibalism: the problematic commodification and consumption of human flesh in contemporary medicine. The 'sacrilegious gastronomy' of corpse medicine in early modern Europe has been well documented **(Camporesi, 1989: 20)**. Following the spread of Paracelsian medical theory which revered human bodily products as the superior cure for human ailments **(Schwyzer, 2007: 73)**, there prevailed a commonly-held and officially-sanctioned belief in the curative powers of *mumia*. 'Mummy' was obtained from a variety of different sources ranging from 'embalmed Egyptian corpses' to 'relatively recent bodies of travellers, drowned by sandstorms' and – particularly as supplies of the aforementioned sources dried out – even from fresh corpses, 'usually those of executed felons, and ideally within about three days' **(Sugg, 2011: 15)**. The most popular forms of *mumia* were sold in the form of ointments, scrapings or powder to be applied topically or sprinkled into food. As Michel de Montaigne relates matter-of-factly in his sixteenth-century essay *On Cannibals,* 'Physicians … are not afraid to use a corpse in any way

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

158

that serves our health, and will apply it either internally or externally' **(de Montaigne, 1993: 114)**. The faith placed in what Louise Noble terms 'medicinal cannibalism' appears to be constructed around the notion that by ingesting corpse materials, one gains the strength of the person consumed **(Noble, 2011: 3 and *passim*)**. Simply put, subscribers to corpse medicine sought to receive life from dead human flesh – a desire which echoes the transubstantiated holy sacraments of Catholic communion, and therefore seems ill-suited to a Protestant culture which, as Philip Schwyzer observes, 'recoiled phobically from the very aspects of medieval Christianity that might conceivably have allowed mummy-eating a comfortable niche' **(Schwyzer, 2007: 71-2)**. Despite this curious double-standard, the *taste* in Europe for 'human flesh, fat, blood or bone – usually drunk or topically applied' persisted well into the eighteenth century **(Sugg, 2006: 225)**. The popularity of the practice of eating human remains, writes Walker, indicates that, whether Catholic or Protestant, 'early modern individuals believed in the body's enduring, resolutely distinctive and affective qualities' **(Walker, 2019: 219).**

This is not to suggest that mummy consumption went uncontested (although, as Sugg notes, overt attacks on the practice were few and far between before the eighteenth century). In 1585 the French royal surgeon Ambroise Paré lamented that Europeans were 'compelled both foolishly and cruelly to devour the mangled and putrid particles of the carcasses of the basest people of Egypt, or such as are hanged' **(Paré, 1585: 145)**. Yet his abhorrence is only part of an evidently more complex attitude on Paré's part, as he reserves his most definite condemnation for opportunist substitutes rather than 'true mummy' **(Paré, 1585: 145)**. Moreover, he declares, if *mumia's* efficacy as a pharmaceutical could be proved then its advocates 'might perhaps have some pretence, for this their more than barbarous inhumanity' **(Paré, 1585: 145)**. Just as Montaigne's issue with *mumia* is related less to cannibalism and more to European hypocrisy, Paré's problem with corpse medicine is not that it involves consuming human matter, but that the consumption is the result of false advertising. He admits to having tried mummy 'an hundred times' without success, demonstrating if nothing else that his optimism frequently overcame his distaste **(Paré, 1585: 145)**. In 1566, herbalist Leonhard Fuchs launched a less equivocal attack on the 'gory matter of cadavers…sold for medicine': 'who, unless he approves of cannibalism, would not loathe this remedy?' **(Cited in Sugg, 2008: 2079)**. Fuchs, however, as proved by the vast demand for *mumia*, was very much in the minority – and even his vehement denunciation refers to mummy as a 'remedy,' suggesting some acceptance of its medical potency.

The use of pharmaceutical mummy increased over the early modern period despite the fact that the distinction between corpse medicine and cannibalism became 'almost impossible to sustain' **(Noble, 2002)**. Within decades, the demand for long-buried corpses from the distant East far outstripped supply, and even 'the corpses of executed criminals, beggars, lepers and plague-victims' were not enough to satisfy the growing market **(Sugg, 2006: 227)**. By the sixteenth century mummy was no longer dug up – it was manufactured. Below, Samuel Purchas (1617) describes the Ethiopian method of preparing mumia, and the processes involved read like a gruesome inversion of Dawson's recipe for baked meats:

> [T]hey take a captive Moore ... cut off his head in his sleep, and gashing his bodie full of wounds, put therein all the best spices ... after which they burie him in a moist place, covering the bodie with earth. Five days being passed, they take him up againe, and ... hang him up in the sunne, whereby the body resolveth and droppeth a substance like pure balme, which liquor is of great price **(Purchas, 1613: 571)**.

The end product of the Ethiopian method is a 'pure balme' bearing little resemblance to its original human form. To the general population living a safe distance from its production, the reconstitution of man into medicine helped to make *mumia* acceptable.

We see as much in these entries in Thomas Blount's 1661 dictionary, the *Glossographia*:

> Canibals. A barbarous kinde of people that eat mans flesh. **(Blount, 1661: sig.H)**

> Mumie or Mummie (Lat. Mumia. Ital. Mummia) a thing like pitch … good against all brusings, spitting of blood, and divers other diseases. [It is] digged out of the Graves, in Arabia and Syria, of those bodies that were embalmed. **(Blount, 1661: sig.Dd)**

While cannibals simply and explicitly 'eat mans flesh', *mumia* is tentatively described as a '*thing* like pitch'. Blount's entry may reveal that this substance is dug out of graves, but *mumia* is never explicitly identified as the corpse itself, and the ambiguity is compounded by references to exotic - and therefore comfortingly abstract - areas of geographical origin. Nor does the language of consumption enter Blount's entry for '*Mumie*': he chooses not to elaborate upon the methods of application or consumption, we know only that it is good for the health. To eat 'mans flesh', on the other hand, is 'barbarous'. The degree of cognitive dissonance on display here is noteworthy: in practical terms, it seems obvious that consumption of corpse medicine and the act of cannibalism

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

160

are but two sides of the same grisly coin. The cautious wording of the *Glossographia*, though, pointedly divides the cure-all from the cannibal, and in doing so mirrors the manner in which the physical manufacture of corpse medicine would result in a product aesthetically unlike a recognisable human body. Via a careful process of transformation and defamiliarisation, *mumia* is 'the human body reduced to an undifferentiated and formless mass', stripped not only of life 'but also of particularity and context', unrecognisable as human flesh **(Schwyzer, 2007: 83)**. The consumption thereof is thus aesthetically and palpably different to savage man-eating, and for early modern consumers, this appears to have been the vital distinguishing factor between the two.

This distinction was absolutely *vital* in the early modern home, a site 'spacious enough to embrace the work of recycling corpses' in a range of different forms **(Wall, 2002: 197)**. Hamlet's and the Ghost's invocation of 'funeral baked meats' may not have struck many in Shakespeare's audience as reminiscent of the Ethiopian medical preparation described above, but the connection both draw between food and corpse certainly echoes the 'licensed bloodshed' of contemporary housewifery **(Ibid.)**. Although the growing corpse economy in Europe burgeoned so due to the demand of anatomists and apothecaries **(Sawday, 1995: 54-66)**, the result of this macabre industry was that by the seventeenth-century in London it was 'truly possible for a shopper to obtain a skull' – and various other body parts, to boot – for use in medical recipes that 'placed the human body imaginatively in proximity to death, carnality, and orality' **(Wall, 2002: 197)**. In the same domestic space in which one might have prepared a baked meat, one may have used the same implements to prepare and serve up home remedies which demanded dung, breast milk and human urine, among other such delights. Wall recounts a number of different recipes which count pounded human skull and fresh man's blood in the same breath as other more familiar culinary staples **(Wall, 2002: 195-7)**. To return to Old Hamlet's self-identification as rotting meat and posset, then, his words invoke what Wall fittingly terms the 'specter of death in the kitchen' **(Wall, 2016: 177)**, and irrevocably (and uncomfortably) demystify the mummy and associated substances taking up space in one's own cupboards.

The Ghost's invocation of food items when describing the effect of poison upon his body highlights the potency of the cannibalistic paradoxes observed by Noble, Wall, and Sugg. Here, the same kind of semantic distancing demonstrated in the clinical descriptions of *mumia* above seems to emphasise that Hamlet's father is not the victim of *literal* consumption – he is instead food for thought, as it were. His language conveys the horrific manner of his death and the tragic objectification of his body as the king becomes 'a thing … Of nothing' **(4.2.22-24)**. Raymond

Rice states that in Shakespeare's works the consumption of human flesh represents 'the symbolic order's limit point' **(Rice, 2004: 298)**. The language of *Hamlet* adheres to this 'limit point' by shifting the focus away from the violence of humans eating humans and onto consumption of more *conventional* food.

However, Shakespeare's purpose in invoking the discourse of medical cannibalism goes beyond, I argue, merely confronting his audience with the proverbial (and indeed literal) skeletons in their pantries. Given the position of corpse medicine as a culturally uncertain practice seen as 'both taboo and beneficial depending on the circumstances' **(Noble, 2003: 687)**, corpse medicine is an apt motif in a revenge tragedy – a genre in which audiences are encouraged to sympathise with (if not outright condone) the protagonist's quest for personal justice even while the act of vengeful murder itself violates the most sacred of Christian tenets. Shakespeare, as Noble observes, drew 'frequently on such uneasy paradoxes' **(Noble, Ibid.)**. In this case, allusions to man-eating throughout the play correspond to Hamlet's evolving relationship to the moral corruption that permeates Elsinore. As he transitions from victim to willing participant in a violence and culture of bodily objectification that he initially abhors, so too is his distaste for the figurative consumption of his father supplanted by urges – hungers – rooted in cannibalistic discourse.

Hamlet's most explicit reference to corpse medicine occurs in his soliloquy following the performance of the Mousetrap, and in doing so represents a major turning-point in his character: 'Now could I drink hot blood / And do such bitter business as the bitter day / Would quake to look on' (**3.2.360-2**). The 'could I' in this case would appear to situate this particular cannibalistic yearning within the realms of the figurative, and thus is often treated as signalling Hamlet's newfound desire for violent retribution. G.R. Hibbard, for example, cites Ben Jonson's *Cataline* (1.491-4) when he explains the *desire* to drink blood as 'an incitement to homicide' **(Hibbard, 1987: 269 n.373)**. The ideas at play here, however, also signal, as Joan Fitzpatrick suggests, 'an escalation in Hamlet's attention to profane consumption' **(Fitzpatrick, 2007: 110)**. Not only does the adjective 'hot' seem to relate to 'a lustful attitude and a grotesquely fresh victim', but the implied cause-and-effect of these lines rather gives the impression, Oldham writes, that Hamlet 'associates the drinking of hot blood with the ability to do the terrible deeds he is about to do' **(Oldham, 2015: 46)**. Contemporary humoral theory was clear on the relationship between blood and violent impulses – a surplus of the former could lead directly to a tendency towards the latter. Indeed, bloodletting was regarded as the most direct therapy for excessive anger **(Gail Kern Paster, 1993: 97)**. The inverse, however, was also considered to be true, and excessive aggression was well-known as a side-effect of consuming blood as a medical agent.

[Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168](#)

162

Blood, writes German Paracelsian chemist Johann Schroeder, drunk 'fresh and drunk hot is said to avail against the epilepsy' but 'requires great caution, because it brings … a truculency' **(Schroeder, 1659: 48, cited in Sugg, 2011: 56)**. The effects of blood-drinking, writes Sugg, 'were sufficiently well-known for onlookers to realise that patients (and perhaps especially men) could become extremely aggressive after swallowing a concentrated shot of human energy' **(Ibid. 79)**. Through the lens of medicinal cannibalism, then, Hamlet's reference to 'hot blood' takes on a new significance: on the one hand, the action of drinking hot blood could be read as a metaphor for his renewed call to vengeance, and the lengths to which he is willing to go. On the other hand, it reads as a theoretical plan of action: Hamlet imagines that the *effect* of drinking 'hot blood' will be to instil him with the vitality necessary to enact the 'bitter business' necessary for vengeance.

After this point, many of Hamlet's engagements with other characters *en route* to avenging his father's figurative consumption are coloured by recurring allusions to profane and cannibalistic bodily objectification. The unfortunate Polonius, for example, becomes meat from the moment that the prince murders him: Hamlet refers to his still-warm body as merely 'the guts' (**3.4.186**). His corpse is then hidden away and left to be revealed 'At supper', as Hamlet puts it, 'Not where he eats, but where he is eaten' by 'politic worms' (**4.3.18; 20**). Even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become apples in the corner of an ape's jaw, 'first mouthed to be last swallowed' (**4.2.16-17**). In the words of Hamlet, his two erstwhile friends are not consumed as humans, but as fruit by an animal, thus softening the idea of man-eating by filtering it through an image both non-human and vegetarian. Through this semantic shift, Shakespeare capitalises on fears of man-eating without foregrounding them. He thus creates an effect at once markedly cannibalistic and comfortably non-human in order to symbolise the inherent corruption of *Hamlet*'s Denmark, and emphasise the severity of the 'limit points' which have been broken: the sins which have divided families and crumbled friendships. Nowhere are these corrupted relationships – and Hamlet's newfound willingness to objectify and consume – made more visually apparent than during Ophelia's funeral in Act 5. Here, Ophelia suffers an unwholesome posthumous return similar to that of Old Hamlet as the fate of her corpse mimics to some extent the culinary steps of a baked meat. In death, her body is physically altered through drowning (and 'water is a sore / decayer of your whoreson dead body,' the gravedigger reminds us (**5.1.158-9**)), and then buried. No sooner is she placed in her 'coffin', however, than she is disinterred by her grief-struck brother. Once she is placed on display, Hamlet and Laertes fight for their portion of the 'funeral baked meat' that is Ophelia's body.[iv]

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

163

With Hamlet now a willing participant in the profane consumption riddled throughout Elsinore, Shakespeare seems determined to open his audience's eyes to their own engagement in forms of 'acceptable' cannibalism. In the very next scene after Hamlet's ape and apple simile, we observe the following exchange:

> *HAMLET: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king,*
>
> > *and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.*
>
> *KING CLAUDIUS: What dost thou mean by this?*
>
> *HAMLET: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress*
>
> > *through the guts of a beggar.*

(4.3.27-31)

In Hamlet's allegory, the beggar is twice removed from the scene of his cannibalistic crime. Firstly, by the fact that the worm which initially ate the king's body is the prime consumer, and a second time by the fish which ate the worm. In the same way that one would not necessarily be considered a cannibal for eating a king transformed into a baked meat, the beggar would seem to be the least culpable member of his chain of consumption. Unavoidably, though, the same steps which put distance between the beggar and the crime of eating man's flesh also connect him to it. Hamlet is fully aware of the link he creates between corpse and beggar via fish and worm (the same kind of 'politic worms', perhaps, which feast on poor Polonius (**4.3.21**)). The fact that the body of the king ends up in the form of a fish is suggestive of the manner in which *mumia,* is unidentifiable as human – an 'undifferentiated and formless mass' **(Schwyzer, 2007: 83)**. And while the chain that Hamlet describes seems to hint at the 'shifting blame' that was, as Schwyzer notes, so pervasive in contemporary discussions about *mumia*, **(Schwyzer, 2007: 83)** and which put early modern medicine-takers at ease, Hamlet's conclusion is cuttingly free of ambiguity. When Claudius asks Hamlet to explain himself, the prince's answer is to remove the links which separate corpse from cuisine so as to evoke nothing less than pure cannibalism, in a manner which may have been most uncomfortable for his *mumia*-consuming audience: 'a king may go a progress / through the guts of a beggar'.

I will conclude by recalling Robert Stam's observation that the cannibal, in literature, so often symbolises something other than itself, serving as the 'name of the other', the ultimate marker of difference in a coded opposition of light / dark, rational / irrational, Protestant / Catholic, civilised / savage **(Stam, 1989: 125)**. *Hamlet* is no exception to this pattern,

[Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168](#)

164

undoubtedly bringing to mind the kinds of unsanctioned anthropophagy that so intrigued, horrified, and excited Shakespeare's audience. However, Shakespeare's allusions to the act of cannibalism throughout this tragedy serve also to bring the 'other' into uncomfortably close proximity to the self, in a way which indicts damningly the hypocrisy of a society that distances itself from the cannibal bogeyman even as it defends the use of pharmaceutical products derived from dead bodies. There will never be what might be considered a 'definitive' reading of the complex symbolism of *Hamlet*, but if we wish to uncover what exactly is 'rotten in the state of Denmark', we may wish to start with the food.

Acknowledgements

James is a Shakespearean researcher, former English teacher, and higher education Outreach Officer at the University of Exeter. James was awarded his PhD from Exeter in 2015. His thesis, *Playing Dead: Living Death in Early Modern Drama*, looks at occurrences of 'living death' – a liminal state that exists between life and death, and which may be approached from either side – in early modern English drama and combines a broadly historicist approach with explorations of dramaturgy, ideas of stagecraft and performance. James regularly updates his website, writusandronicus.blog, with posts about education strategies, theatre and literature.

Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

165

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Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

166

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Alsop. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 153-168

167

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Endnotes

[i] Website: https://writusandronicus.blog/

[ii] Citations from the play are all from the Norton edition, conflating Q2 and FF: Shakespeare, W., 2008. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. *In:* Greeblatt, S., ed., *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*. 2nd edn. New York: Norton, pp. 336-424; 1.2.175-80.

[iii] See especially Sweetnam, M. S., 2007.

[iv] Discussion of the thin line between gastronomic and sexual hunger throughout *Hamlet* lies outside of the scope of this essay, but for different takes on Hamlet's relationship with female flesh, see: Adelman, J., 1992. Man and His Wife is One Flesh: *Hamlet* and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body. *In:* Adelman, J., *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"*. New York: Routledge, pp. 11-37., arguing that Shakespeare sees female sexuality as giving birth to tragedy itself; Freud, S., Strachey, J., ed. and trans., 1953-74. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 24 vols.* London: Hogarth Press. 14:239-58, for the original analysis of Hamlet's Oedipal desires.

Cannibal Basques: Magic, Cannibalism and Ethnography in the Works of Pierre de Lancre

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Abstract

This article will show the importance of cannibalism in the description of the sabbath among the Basques, in the Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons, written by Pierre De Lancre. The Basques were often linked to magic and demons; however, this work constitutes surely the most completed document about such an association. In the Tableau there is a sort of ethnographic analysis of the Basques, who started to be compared to the savages of the New World. Witchcraft and cannibalism are the evidence of a demonic complot, aimed at fighting Christianity and, in some way, the central features of mankind. At any rate, such religious controversy is used also in a totally laical perspective: De Lancre is the representative of the King and his role consists in the affirmation of the French power throughout the region. The purpose of such stereotypes, applied also to other marginalized peoples in Renaissance Europe (such as the inhabitants of Southern Italy portrayed by the Jesuits missionaries), justifies implicitly the necessity to repress and integrate them within the civilization and the forthcoming capitalistic system.

Keywords: De Lancre; Basques, Renaissance; witchcraft; sorcery; witches; New World; Jesuits; ethnography; renaissance literature

Leta. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 169-181

169

The Basque Country: Borderland

Pierre de Lancre arrives in Labourd in 1609 in order to investigate the presence of the witches. The region, inhabited by the Basques, had a large autonomy from the French power, due to its peripheral position, close to the Spanish border. In the *Tableau de l'inconstance et instabilité de toutes choses* (published during his residence in Labourd) De Lancre described the Spanish people as melancholic and influenced by the presence of the Arabs, Gypsies and Jews. Indeed, they would have been respectful of the Christian faith only due to the harshness of Inquisition (**De Lancre, 1610: 406 *r***). Starting from these assumptions, De Lancre attacks the Spanish imperialistic pretensions, founded on the alleged role played by the Iberian State in the evangelization of the New World and in the spread of Christianity. It is exactly during the journey in the Basque Country, that an eminent Franciscan friar reveals to the writer that the Spanish crown is filling the American continent with miscreants. In fact, among the peoples which are more engaged in the colonization, there would be the Africans (who rarely survive during the journey) and the Moors, who, obviously, have no intention of spreading Christianity in the new lands (**De Lancre, 1610: 413 *r*-413 *v***).

Spain is a combination of different peoples, pooled only by their greed and desire of provoking civil wars. In De Lancre's opinion, the Iberian state represents an imminent danger for France, that has not to make the mistake of 'opening the doors and to lower the drawbridge for them'. A potential danger for the stability of the French kingdom is represented also by Labourd people, who are not totally submissive to God as well as to the king. So, the proximity of Spain has contaminated the Basques — especially the lower classes — making them 'indifferent to good manners, habits and affections', as De Lancre affirms in his *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons* (**De Lancre, 1612: 57**), consecrated to the description of the Basques. Such closeness enables the diffusion in the region of immoral dances, repeated also during the sabbath, which apparently weaken the moral fiber of this people:

> *Dancing is ever dirted and more depraved at the sabbath. Here we can say what Arnobius says. He seems almost to explain the immoral dance movements that are performed at these ill-conceived assemblies, these base and filthy desires, that the Devil inspires in the hearts of countless young virgins who are present there. Right before their eyes both the Devil and countless witches openly practice their diabolic couplings* (**De Lancre, 1612: 218**).

Leta. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 169-181

170

This closeness with Spain is the reason why, during the persecution, lots of the suspects seek shelter in Spain, making difficult De Lancre's work as well as that of the Inquisition on the other side of the Pyrenees (**De Lancre, 1612: 393**). The Basques, for the French writer, suffer the fragmentation of their territory, and in particular they suffer the influence of three different kingdoms (France, Spain and Navarre), of three languages (French, Spanish and Basque) and also of two dioceses (Dax and Navarre). In such a chaotic context, the devil can easily swagger and take possession of them:

> *And in order to show clearly that natural conditions are in part to blame for the presence of so many witches, it is important to note that this is a mountainous country that shares borders with three different kingdoms: France, Navarre, and Spain. The mixture of three languages — French, Basque, and Spanish — marks the enclaves of two bishoprics because the Diocese of Acqs extends well into Navarre. All this diversity affords Satan excellent opportunities for organizing his assemblies and sabbaths in this area, especially since the seacoast males the people rustic, rough and badly controlled* (**De Lancre, 1612: 51-52**).

Thus, sorcery becomes the result of the weakness of the State and it represents also a danger for all the community, either from a religious and political point of view. In such a perspective, heresy should be persecuted by both lay and clerical judges (**De Lancre, 1612: 489**). In this respect, it is no accident that De Lancre is sent in the Labourd by the King of France. Thus, sorcery becomes a problem for the State and the demonology should not be conceived simply as a part of the theological debate of that time, even if De Lancre, as we will see, deeply utilises the ideological patterns elaborated by the catholic missionaries in the New World.

The Basques as the Indians of the Old Continent

The missionaries experience in the Indies spreads Christianity all around the world. Nevertheless, this process makes aware the monastic orders of the need to convert also the Europeans, who often integrate the official religion with unorthodox rituals. In this perspective, we should interpret the attempt of the Jesuits to renovate the faith in the so-called *Indias de por acà* (Indies of down here), *id est* the regions of the New World which seemed still dripping with paganism (**De Martino, 1961: 39-59; Tacchi Venturi, 1910: 269-270**). Moreover, this denomination shows also the deep malaise of the European missionaries, who feel foreign even if they are in a land geographically closer than the New World. Pierre de Lancre seems to be influenced by this cultural pattern also because, as we know, he is strictly connected with Jesuit spirituality (**Dardano Basso, 2011: 2-5**). Thus, as the Jesuits in Southern Italy, De Lancre feels himself as a foreigner among Labourd peasants and mariners. That is the reason why the *Tableau*

de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons is the product of the dismay of a French writer who conceives Labourd as much more mysterious and indecipherable than a foreign country (**Céard, 1996**). Moreover, De Lancre represents the otherness of the Basques taking into account even the descriptions of the missionaries of the New World. According to him, the expansion of Christianity in the Indies would have provoked the retirement of the demons from those regions towards Europe, especially in the Labourd, to find new victims. Consequently, the devils have become the lords of this territory, having conquered above all the children, the women and the local clergy:

> *This makes me believe, that after the devotion and the good instruction of so many devout religious figures chased the demons and the evil angels from the Indies, Japan and other places, they were unleashed on Christendom in large numbers. And having found that both people and the terrain here are well disposed, they have made it their principal abode. And little by little they are making themselves the absolute rulers of the country, having own over the women, the children, and most of preachers and pastors. They found a way to relegate the fathers and husbands to the New World, to a place where religion is totally unknown, in order to establish the devil's reign more easily* (**De Lancre, 1612: 60**).

De Lancre portrays a sort of a demons' procession through the Ocean from the New World to Europe, where they settle in the marginal and less developed regions. This sort of emigration is provoked by the successful preaching of the missionaries. At any rate, the demons transform their new victims whom rituals and practices could be compared to the Native Americans' ones. This overlapping of Basques and Indians is clear as they both share some rituals and manners, such as using psychotropic drugs during their demonic rituals. In fact, the Indians make use of the herb Cohoba which provokes a sort of trance, an essential element in the savages' religion. On the other hand, even the Basques consume tobacco to daze themselves and please the devil:

> *And, just as the Indians in Hispaniola, who, when they smoke a certain herb called cohoba, become disturbed and, putting their hands between their knees and lowering their heads, remain for a time in a state of ecstasy, then rise, completely lost and confused, telling of the marvels of their false gods whom they call Cemis, so it is with our witches who return from the sabbath. They also use petun or tobacco, for they all have a few plants of this kind in their gardens, however small they may be. They smoke it to clear their minds, sometimes sustaining themselves against hunger. I do not know if this smoke numbs them as*

Leta. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 169-181

172

the herb does the Indians, but I do know for certain that it makes their breath and their body smell putrid (**De Lancre, 1612: 58-59**).

The assimilation between Basques and New World is facilitated also by the fact that this people used to fish in the area of Newfoundland. This isle and its environs are, for lots of cosmographers during the Renaissance, a sort of dangerous territory haunted by demons. Not surprisingly, even Newfoundland is, according to the witnesses collected by De Lancre, the place of the Sabbath for the Basques (**Lestringant, 2008: 99-125**). In fact, the sixteen years-old Jeanette d'Abadia confesses that the isle is the meeting point for all the Labourd inhabitants, who create massive storms and destroy their own ships thanks to their magic powers.

[Jeanette d'Abadia] said that she was very often carried to Newfoundland by Gratiane, the woman who customarily led her, and that it might have been six months ago or so that she transported her there through the air. […] Once there, she saw nearly all kinds of people from Labourd who stirred up storms to male ships and other vessels sink. In fact, they made this happen to a boat belonging to Maricot de Mignelcorena of Cibure, who, being a witch, himself aided in its loss (**De Lancre, 1612: 155**).

Gripped by the demons, the Basques devastate the only instruments for their survival, because they cannot practice agriculture due to the sterility of their homeland. The infertility of the Labourd would be the result of the Basques, who 'throw themselves in the inconstant activity of the sea, depreciating the constant work of the land'. In this refusal of agricultural activities, Luciano Parinetto discovers another reason for the demonization of this people. At the beginning of an epoch marked by 'the new ethic of the accumulation and the birth of the capital [...], those people, who do not understand the dignity of work and who prefer mendicancy and misery to professional engagement, must be a sorcerer people' (**Parinetto, 1997: 224-226**). De Lancre is 'obsessed by the menace of social dissolution' and the Basques represent exactly this danger. In fact, it deals with a people unwilling to work, incestuous and disrespectful of the family. In such a perspective, witchcraft is only the symptom of the menace embodied by the Basques to the political, religious and also natural order (**Jacques-Chaquin, 1982: 27-29**). This menace, as we will see, is confirmed also by their attitude to the cannibalism during their magic rituals.

Leta. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 169-181

173

The Basques and the Indians: Sorcery and Cannibalism

Jean de Léry has equated the rituals of the European witches with those of the Brazilian savages. In fact, in the third edition of the *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil*, he has analysed the behaviours of indigenous women thanks to the thesis exposed by Bodin in the *Démonomanie des sorciers*. According to Léry, the sorcerers in the Ancient and in the New World are 'possessed by the same spirit of Satan: the distance between the places and the long journey in the sea cannot avoid the demon to operate here and there on the souls assigned to him by the fair judgement of God' (**Lestringant, 1990: 50**).

The description of the Cannibals spreads in Renaissance literature and art, and a sort of equivalence between them and the European witches seems to be established thanks to the common practice of anthropophagy, as the etching *Saturn and his Children* by Crispjin Van de Passe could show (**Zika, 2007: 210-212**). In this respect the image of the indigenous without law, religion and work culture is reused by De Lancre for his ethnographic description of the Basques. This assimilation is founded on the deep connection between this people and the New World; thus, the Labourd becomes a sort of demonic enclave in Christian Europe. The refusal of Christianity is also a refusal of the natural, political and economic order; magic and cannibalism exemplify this irreconcilable anthropological diversity. Not surprisingly, the sabbath of the witches takes place in front of the churchyards in order to offend God or in places traditionally associated with bewilderment as crosses and forests:

> *Ordinarily crossroads are the preferred meeting places, as was reported by Isaac de Queyran, who testifies that he had been at the crossroads at the Gallienne Palace, close to the city of Bordeaux, or at the public squares in front of the churches […]. In addition, they normally take them to a deserted and wild place, such as in the middle of a heath, a place away from all the traffic, neighbors, houses, and people* (**De Lancre, 1612: 93**).

During this ritual, the dances are a very important element in their rituals and they annihilate men's rational skills as well as women's fertility power. In fact, according to the French writer, 'the witches' dances are different, for they cause men to become practically wild, and most often cause women to miscarry' (**De Lancre, 1612: 220**). Moreover, those ballets anticipate the sexual union between the devil and the magicians. Satan prefers sodomy because he wants to offend God and nature, dishonouring also mankind:

> *Jeannette d'Abadie, aged sixteen, said that at the sabbath she saw men and women engage in promiscuous activity. The Devil would command them to form couples and have sex, giving each of them all that nature most abhors, that is to say, the daughter to her father, the son to his mother, the sister to her brother, the goddaughter to her godfather, the penitent to her confessor, without regard to either age or social standing, or degree of kinship. […] She said that women never became pregnant from these copulations, whether they were with the master or other witches* (**De Lancre, 1612: 238**).

Promiscuity seems to be a central feature in the sabbath, because the demon incites the sorcerers to copulate without taking into account any religious or natural interdiction. However, these orgiastic rituals are barren and the infertility of sabbath could be associated directly to the infertility of the Labourd land. Thus, the pact with the demon deprives Basques of the power of fecundity; in this respect their existence is even more incompatible with the economic and natural order, forcing men to reproduce themselves and contributing to the regeneration of their sources of sustenance.

The contrast between sorcery and nature turns out also in the particular attitude of the Basques to infanticide and cannibalism, two other central features of the Sabbath. In fact, these crimes are carried out because the grease of the babies would constitute the main ingredient of the unguent that allows the witches to fly and to join the sabbath. According to De Lancre, Satan could transport them avoiding this unnecessary bloodshed; however, the infanticide is a superfluous malice imposed by the demon to his subjects:

> *Satan could very well transport these women without using a salve, but he adds this unnecessarily spiteful act to what he does in order to give the witches the will and the means to kill the children right way, persuading them that without this ointment they cannot be transported to the sabbath. And he wants the ointment to be composed of the flesh of unbaptized children, so that deprived of life by these cruel witches, these innocent little souls remain deprived of the glory of paradise. And in order better to satisfy his cruelty and attain what he desires, he makes them believe in the beginning that the novices merely have to borrow some of his salve. Then he tells them that they have to prepare it themselves. To do this, the woman must kill a child with their own hands* (**De Lancre, 1612: 135**).

Cannibalism becomes the symbol of the dehumanisation and the bestiality imposed by the devil to the witches. In fact, Satan persuades them that a potion made up with children's hearts could save their lives, avoiding them confessing their crimes to the inquisitors. In fact, 'the Devil makes the

female witches understand that it requires a certain number of children's heart to make some concoction. If they eat this substance, no torment can make them reveal the secrets of witchcraft' (**De Lancre, 1612: 144**). Thanks to the testimony of Marie de la Ralde, De Lancre states that they do a sort of pastry with black millet and the powder of children's liver in order to hide their alliance with the demon:

> *She [Marie d'Aspilcouëtte] further stated in order never to confess the secret of the school, they make a paste of black millet at the sabbath, mixed with the powder of the liver of some unbaptized child. The liver is dried and then mixed with this paste, which has the power to reduce a person to silence, so whoever eats it never confesses* (**De Lancre, 1612: 150**).

Moreover, during the sabbath, Satan shatters a human heart, giving its pieces only to his protégés among the sorcerers. In this regard, cannibalism consolidates the relation between the devil and the magicians who, thanks to the anthropophagy, are convinced that they can save their lives and that they can get on well with Satan. However, this ritual is also a sort of necessity, because only cannibal dishes are effectively present during the sabbath. In fact, as Jeannette d'Abadia confesses, the demonic meal presents a huge collection of foods; at any rate, they are only an illusion created by the devil and the only food really present on the table is the cannibal one.

She [Jeannette d'Abadia] saw tables piled with many kinds of food. But when people wanted to take some of it, they found nothing in their hands, except when children, baptized or unbaptized, were carried there. For she had very often seen both types of children served and eaten, even one whom people believed to be the son of Maître de Lasse. They are cut into quarters at the sabbath in order to have several parishes partake to them (**De Lancre, 1612: 154**).

The illusory meal reveals the illusory nature of magic. In fact, the witches believe to see every kind of good dishes, with bread, salt and wine and everything would stay on a golden tablecloth. All this abundance is only a trick, because during the sabbath the witches can only feed on toads, flesh of hanged men, cadavers just unearthed, children and animals died of illness. These dishes, as De Lancre states, are not only forbidden, but they are also a horrible offense to men, beasts and to the nature itself. The witches, according to him, 'had made themselves servants of Satan, had eaten and feasted with him; in despicable company they had eaten meats that are not only prohibited but also are loathsome to men, wild animals, and nature' (**De Lancre, 1612: 437**). In this perspective, magic arts are only vain promises of richness and deceptions excogitated by Satan in order to dehumanise those people who are both materially and morally miserable:

> *Some of our witches told us that the table at the sabbath is set, that the tablecloth appears to be gilded, and that all sorts, and that all sorts of good food are served with bread, wine, and salt. But the majority of witches who were heard most often confess that it was entirely different. They say that only toads, the flesh of people who were hanged, carrion flesh that was dug up and torn from newly dug graves, the flesh of unbaptized children, or that of dead animals whom they had killed were served. They said that no one ate anything that was not tasteless, given that nothing was ever salted. [...] These are false meats, false cooks, and false servants, and their bred is some horrible black cake made of black millet and some other drug with which they trick the children* (**De Lancre, 1612: 211**).

Diabolic magic establishes its rituals on the human flesh and, particularly, on the children's one, who becomes the central target of the witches. De Lancre does not spare the smallest detail about their cruelty, telling about the son of a witch whose cadaver has been founded in the centre of a room, without the brain and the bottom, devoured by the sorcerers. Facing this scenario, the French writer wonders if it is an illusion of the rest of a witches' banquet. In this perspective, De Lancre satirises the medical explanation about witchcraft which tried to reduce this phenomenon to a simple self-illusion made up by naïf women. In fact, according to him, even if the witches are tricked by demons, their actions are absolutely real:

> *Another witch in Bayonne had a child of her own who was given away out of charity and put to nurse at the home of an honest woman beyond reproach. Several days later the child was found in the middle of a bedroom with his brain and his buttocks eaten. Is this a fantasy? Was this anything but the remains of some sabbath flesh?* (**De Lancre, 1612: 212**).

At any rate, the macabre tales are not only utilised by De Lancre in order to show the reality of witches' sabbath. In fact, the cannibal meal has a precise role because it shows the complete dehumanisation of sorcerers made by the demon. During De Lancre's persecution, also in Spain the Inquisition cruelly repressed and executed the Basques in order to destroy all the alleged magic rituals. Thus, De Lancre inserts in his *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons* also a brief account about the sorcerers' activities on the other side of Pyrenees, focusing on their anthropophagical rituals. In fact, even during the Spanish sabbath, the Basques are sorcerers as well as cannibals, because they prepare meatballs with human legs. Moreover, the participants to the demonic meeting boil human flesh, eating all of it until puking:

Normally they serve the legs of male and female witches and of little children, chopped up. They drink the blood of the little children through their heads, their navels, and their penises. […] They serve a broth of human flesh that they find so delicious that they eat until they are so full that they vomit (**De Lancre, 1612: 402**).

Even this action could show the inhumanity and the monstrosity of the sorcerers, whose horrible meals stops the normal circuit of food's assimilation. The Renaissance culture attributes exactly to the digestion and the fecal expulsion a regenerative and fertilising power which are evidentially opposed to the witches' vomit (**Bakhtin & Robel, 1970; Fabre, 1986: 15-39**). This feature should be put in relation with the agricultural and sexual sterility of the Basques who would become a really dangerous presence for the natural order. Their cannibalism as well as their infertility represent an apocalyptic menace that can destroy both political and divine laws.

Conclusion

Basque country is a barrel and magic land where Christianity has not effectively taken root. According to De Lancre, Labourd is marvellously devoted, but only apparently. In fact, 'the area of Labourd and the entire coast of France and upper and lower Navarre is extremely religious in appearance and has churches that are as ornate and elaborate as one could see anywhere' (**De Lancre, 1612: 423**). This semblance of faith hides in the very deep of the Basque soul and land the alliance with Satan. In fact, he is called by the natives as *Monsieur de la Forêt* (Lord of the forest). The devil would appear in this way, as De Lancre discovers interrogating a young man alleged to be a werewolf. The boy shows a superficial faith that is limited only to the execution of everything the priests ask him. However, his obedience to the clergy and his obsession for the sign of the cross are only exterior appearances. In fact, the Lord of the Forest has corrupted him with the promises of richness to such an extent that the young boy confesses freely to still have the inclination to eat the human flesh and especially the girls' one:

> *He seemed a bit dazed — not that he did not understand what he heard or failed to do promptly what he heard or failed to do promptly what the good fathers asked of him. Rather he was hardly devout, and he did not seem to understand easily even simple things that only seemed commonsensical. […] He confessed to me also, in a straightforward manner, that he still wanted to eat the flesh of little children, and that he found the flesh of little girls particularly delicious. […] He also told us that the Lord of the Forest twice came to see him at the beginning of his confinement in the monastery, that he had been afraid, but that he left right away because he made the sign of the cross many times and*

> *continued to do so every day so that he would stay away, and he never came again. And as he said these words, he made the sign of the cross for us. And asked what this Lord of the Forest said to him, he told us that he offered him many riches and asked him if he did not want to return to his service, and that he said no* (**De Lancre, 1612: 329-332**).

In this region of cannibals and witches, De Lancre feels himself as a foreigner in his homeland (**Céard, 1991: 31-39; 1996: 79-100**). This sensation could be associated with the fear that a demonic and magic people could contaminate and destroy the delicate equilibrium in France, a nation bled out by religious troubles. In an epoch where complot against God and complot against king corresponded, sorcery and anthropophagy have an apocalyptic function and they are able to totally ruin mankind. De Lancre is simply scared of this and calls for the hardest severity against everyone alleged to have made a deal with the devil.

Currently I am a researcher at the Italian Institute for Philosophic Studies (Naples, Italy). I have obtained a Ph.D candidate in French and Comparative literatures at Sorbonne Université (Paris, France) with a dissertation – whose publication is expected at the end of 2020 by Les Belles Lettres – about the charlatan in the Italian and French Renaissance Literature. I am publishing several articles about the Italian Renaissance Comedy in Italian and French revues and my research interest is the relationship between the accusations of sorcery and the social marginalisation in the early modern literature.

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Leta. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 169-181

179

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'Such Violent Hands': The Theme of Cannibalism and the Implications of Authorship in the 1623 Text of *Titus Andronicus*

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Abstract

For many, 'Titus Andronicus' exemplifies the extreme visual horror which characterises the subgenre of Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Long recognised as a collaboration between William Shakespeare and George Peele, the play's notorious denouement – in which a Gothic queen is tricked into eating her slaughtered sons – has often been interpreted as a satire upon the revenge genre itself. Yet the nature of the play has recently been complicated by the claim that an additional banquet scene, only present in the 1623 Folio, may be a later addition written by a third dramatist, probably Thomas Middleton, and incorporated into the play sometime after 1616. This article will consider the implications of this probability further. It will explore how the author was not simply adding new material to 'Titus Andronicus' in order to provide a new selling point for a later revival of the work, but was constructing a new sequence designed to mirror and complement the already infamous cannibalistic conclusion of the original text. Understanding this scene as a later addition, we can now better understand how this additional scene serves as an integral turning point in the drama's narrative, and is far less 'disposable' than previous critics have been equipped to realise.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Peele; Middleton; cannibalism; text; adaptation; revision; Titus Andronicus

Introduction

'O handle not the theme, to talk of hands, / Lest we remember still that we have none' (**3.2.29-30**).[i] These lines, spoken by the titular hero of William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, underscore perfectly this notoriously gruesome drama's characteristic integration of moments of unspeakable violence with instances of equally macabre comedy. Having been vindictively tricked into permitting the severance of his own left hand on the false promise that doing so would secure the release of his imprisoned sons Martius and Quintus, at this moment Titus appears to be resorting to an unseemly degree of levity in an attempt to raise the morale both of himself and of his horribly suffering family. In other contexts, such an approach as this might be perceived as admirable, an expression of defiant contempt for even the most vindictive of his enemies. When we begin to interpret this joke within the wider context of the scene in which it occurs, however, Titus's attempts at humour might appear to be considerably more troubling.

As Jeremy Lopez has rightly noted, there are several moments in *Titus* where humour and laughter appear to be deliberately designed to come across as inappropriate, often being starkly juxtaposed with the tragedy's dark subject matter (**Lopez, 2003: 174**). Worryingly, however, the company to which Titus is delivering his jokes in 3.2 includes his horrendously mutilated daughter Lavinia, a young woman who has not only been brutally raped by the villainous brothers Chiron and Demetrius, but who has also been subjected by them to the torturous punishment of having her tongue cut out and both of her hands removed in a vicious attempt to prevent her from revealing the identities of her attackers. It is at this point that she first becomes subject to the cruel jibes of other characters, being mockingly taunted by her assailants after she has been forced to endure these deplorable acts: 'now go tell, an if thy tongue can speak…Write down thy mind…An if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe' (**2.4.1-4**). Read in this light, her father's use throughout 3.2 of witticisms constructed around the concept of the human hand seems at the very least a highly insensitive, perhaps downright callous, course of action. Titus's language has been starkly condemned by David Ellis as his 'obsessive punning on his daughter's handlessness' (**Ellis, 2001: 398**), and we might even detect parallels within it of the jibes of Chiron and Demetrius following their sickening deed, that 'An 'twere my cause, I should go hang myself', if only 'thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord' (**2.4.9-10**): this is observable in the exchange beginning with Marcus's voiced opposition to a possible act of suicide by Lavinia – 'Fie, brother, fie, teach her not thus to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life' – which encourages Titus's pedantic rejoinder 'What violent hands can she lay on her life?' (**3.2.21-5**). Surely, if there is ever an individual from whose plight

it is never permissible to attempt to derive 'edgy' comedy, it is a young woman who has just been subjected to violent rape and extreme physical mutilation.

The wordplay of 3.2 provides just one example of how *Titus Andronicus* fails in maintaining what might be considered an appropriately even tone across its tragic narrative. It is perhaps partly for this reason that, to quote from the recent analysis of Goran Stanivukovic, 'More than any other play in the Shakespeare canon, *Titus Andronicus* has provoked diametrically opposed responses from critics' (**Stanivukovic, 2019: 37**). *Titus* is a play of notable tonal extremes, in which ostensibly comedic moments sit uncomfortably within the framework of a drama which infamously culminates in a sickening and protracted cannibalistic banquet, in which the mother of Chiron and Demetrius, Tamora, is tricked into feeding upon 'two pasties' (**5.2.188**) which have been fashioned from the butchered carcasses of her sons. Yet although many present-day audiences may find the humour of 3.2 profoundly unsettling, especially coming so soon after their first glimpse of a horribly bloodied Lavinia emerging onto the stage with '*her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished*' (2.4.0.2), certain critics have nevertheless attempted to rehabilitate the play by demonstrating the importance of its distinctive moments of dark comedy to the execution of its overall dramatic integrity. Indeed, as Curtis Perry has recently observed, although 'It was not all that long ago that *Titus Andronicus* was thought to be (in Edward Ravenscroft's memorable formulation) an "indigested piece" of Shakespearean juvenilia', scholars are now more likely to find in the tragedy something which he terms a 'postmodern-seeming sophistication' (**Perry, 2019: 16**)**.** Regardless, however we might choose to assess the play today, the reluctance of historical commentators to accept Shakespearean culpability for the work's many unsettling excesses continues to cast a long shadow over critical analysis.

The issue of the authorship of *Titus Andronicus* remains an area of sustained scholarly engagement. As Brian Boyd writes, 'For a long time some readers supposed that Shakespeare's hand could not be responsible for all the severed hands and heads…Yet several recent articles…demonstrate that *Titus* has two very dissimilar strata, one that falls within Shakespearean norms, one that falls far outside them' (**Boyd, 2004: 51**). Building upon this realisation, most scholars now accept that Shakespeare's older contemporary George Peele was responsible for the writing of up to two of the play's scenes: Scene 1 (usually divided into 1.1 and 2.1 following the text presented in the First Folio (hereafter F1) of 1623), and possibly also Scene 6/4.1 (**Vickers, 2002: 148-243**). As with so much in the field of stylometric analysis, of course, debate continues regarding the exact details of the play's collaborative identity, including

Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

184

recent arguments that Shakespeare (rather than Peele) may actually have been responsible for the writing of 4.1 (**Weber, 2014; Pruitt, 2017**), and that Shakespeare's involvement in the play may have come about by him completing a tragedy which was left unfinished by Peele, an idea which may be signalled by the possibility that 1.1 shows some signs of Shakespearean revision (**Loughnane, 2017**). Recent scholarship, however, has served to further complicate the question of the play's authorship and textual integrity, particularly regarding 3.2. This short scene was included in the version of the play published in F1, but when examining the three earlier published texts of the tragedy (which were printed in cheaper quarto editions in 1594, 1600, and 1611 respectively), this scene is conspicuously absent. Of course, while a few critics have considered 3.2 to be an authentically Shakespearean passage which simply failed, for various reasons, to find its way into the earlier quartos (**Bate, 1995: 98; Metz, 1996: 114-15**), this is a scene which some (to utilise the phrasing of Alexander Leggatt) have treated as 'disposable' for present-day dramatic purposes (**Leggatt, 2000: 113**). As Charlotte Scott emphasises, 'This extraordinary scene…poses a significant problem to directors, actors and audiences of the theatre – how do you make a fly audible let alone visible?' (**Scott, 2008: 256**), while further problems are emphasised in Michael D. Friedman and Alan C. Dessen's account of *Titus* in performance, who note how 'The need for an interval/intermission, along with a potential problem in the transition between 3.2 and 4.1, therefore leads to a series of adjustments' by modern directors, in order to minimise difficulties that arise in terms of continuity at this moment (**Friedman & Dessen, 2013: 83**). It is fortunate for theatre practitioners, then, that the content of 3.2 can be interpreted as being so easily 'disposable': as Alan Hughes comments in his edition of the play for the New Cambridge Shakespeare series, 'The new scene…illustrates the madness of Titus without advancing the dramatic action' (**Hughes, 1994: 150**).

In 2017, however, Gary Taylor – one of the general editors of the New Oxford Shakespeare – published an article in collaboration with Doug Duhaime (a Digital Humanities Programmer at Yale University) which used a variety of modern digital techniques to assess the presumed Shakespearean auspices of 3.2. Using 'deep reading' alongside an analysis of the sequences of unique and rare words identifiable within the scene, they hence concluded that 3.2 was almost certainly a late addition contributed by a third author, their evidence pointing 'overwhelmingly' to Shakespeare's younger contemporary Thomas Middleton (**Taylor & Duhaime, 2017: 91**). Of course, as Jonathan Bate (a former sceptic of the play's collaborative identity) recognises in his second edition of *Titus* for the Arden Shakespeare, 'These are new results, which other scholars will have to test', but he nevertheless acknowledges that 'The possibility of

Middleton's…hand will have to be considered in future accounts of the scene'; he thus concludes by arguing that 'The date and authorship of the fly-killing scene remain open for further debate' (**Bate, 2018: 146**). It is within the context of this debate that the present article seeks to analyse the purpose of 3.2 as part of the larger framework of the play as a whole.

In this article, I am not greatly concerned with attempting to challenge Taylor and Duhaime's attribution of this scene to Middleton's authorship, nor do I wish to utilise my own stylometric or dramaturgical tests to further confirm and expand upon Taylor and Duhaime's findings. What is more important for the present analysis is the recognition that Taylor and Duhaime's work has demonstrated quite convincingly that 3.2 must be a later, non-Shakespearean addition to the existing text of the play. But Taylor and Duhaime's attribution of 3.2 to Middleton has enabled us to situate future readings of the play alongside the long-standing scholarly belief that the surviving text of *Macbeth* might also be the result of Middletonian adaptation, as might those of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Thus, an attribution of this scene to the hand of Middleton is a suggestion which cannot entirely be rejected out of hand.

With this in mind, I will undertake to argue that this issue of the play's authorship actually has a greater significance for a complete understanding of the play than is obvious from any discussion which treats such factors as purely textual. Focusing primarily on the significance of the tragedy's cannibalistic finale in relation to the added material of 3.2, it will be demonstrated how the play's layers of authorship should be a key element in how we interpret the importance of the theme of cannibalism to the play's representation of revenge.

Reading the 'Original' *Titus Andronicus*, c.1592

Titus was a very popular play among early modern audiences. Its continued popularity was even being lamented by Ben Jonson as late as 1614, in the Induction to his comedy *Bartholomew Fair*: 'He that will swear *Jeronimo* [Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*] or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at here as a man whose judgement shews it is constant, and hath stood still these five and twenty or thirty years' (**Hibbard, 2007: 11**). Furthermore, it is quite clear that Middleton himself had a degree of interest in the tragedy. In his early prose work *The Ant and the Nightingale* (published 1604), the titular Ant, returning wounded from war, compares his plight to that of Shakespeare's tragic Roman general: 'for all my lamentable action of one arm like old Titus Andronicus, I could purchase no more than one month's pay for a ten-month's pain and peril' (**946-9**).[ii] In each of the early quarto editions which arose from this apparent popularity, however, the text itself remained mostly consistent, each version containing the same twelve scenes, with only minor

[Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199](#)

186

differences between them. As we have already seen, however, F1 saw the introduction of the additional Scene 3.2, usually referred to as the 'fly-killing scene' after a memorable moment contained therein in which Titus's brother Marcus swats the aforementioned insect with the flat of his knife. Where the scene originated from has only just begun to be explored in modern scholarship, and there will undoubtedly be much further discussion to be had on the matter. But the results of the tests conducted thus far are excellently localised in the work of Taylor and Duhaime, who helpfully provide a three-point summary of some of their early conclusions:

> *1. The Fly Scene was written and added to Titus Andronicus after mid-1608, when the King's Men began performing at Blackfriars;*
>
> *2. But it is not written in Shakespeare's post-1607 style;*
>
> *3. Therefore, it was not written by Shakespeare.* (**Taylor & Duhaime, 2017: 71**)

Taylor and Duhaime's observations seem perfectly sound. Indeed, that the scene could only have been added after Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, began to occupy the Blackfriars Theatre is supported by the fact that its inclusion was apparently part of an effort to rework the play's structure to accommodate the imposition of act-divisions onto the text, a convention which Taylor has convincingly demonstrated only began to be employed by Shakespeare's company following their acquisition of the Blackfriars in 1608 (**Taylor, 1993: 30-50**). Of course, this structural revision was not without its problems. As Hughes notes, 'While the action flows smoothly from 3.1 into 4.1, the insertion of 3.2 creates an awkward transition unless the former is followed by an interval' (**Hughes, 1994: 150**). The author of 3.2, then, clearly wrote his addition with an eye to how it would function within the overall drama, but apparently failed to fully integrate it into the existing structure.

It is not worth repeating here too much of what has already been written on *Titus* in the context of its original composition, which most scholars date to c.1592, but a few key points are certainly worth reiterating. As indicated above, it is fair to say that *Titus* has rarely been admired by modern critics. Often considered narratively underdeveloped, with the story primarily being progressed through increasingly brutal spectacles of killing and maiming, the play has traditionally been viewed as something of a lesser entry in the established Shakespeare canon. Although present-day critics might attempt to take a more nuanced approach towards the play's violent excesses, however, it is important to note that the same cannot be said of the tragedy's earlier spectators. As Stanley Wells puts it,

'For centuries *Titus Andronicus* was either rejected from the Shakespeare canon as being unworthy of its author's genius, or vilified as a terrible aberration committed perhaps as a concession to the tastes of barbarous audiences' (**Wells, 1997: 206**). One of the most eloquent defences of this aspect of the tragedy's dramaturgy, however, is that which was set forth by Eugene M. Waith in the introduction to his critical edition of the play for the original Oxford Shakespeare series, in which he convincingly argued that, even in this most gruesome of Shakespearean texts,

> *Brutal violence, occasionally tinged with tragedy, serves several artistic purposes. It represents the political and moral degeneration of Rome when Saturninus becomes emperor. It also plays a major part in the presentation of the hero's metamorphosis into a cruel revenger. While no artistic device can be called inevitable, one can say with some assurance that Shakespeare's use of violence in Titus Andronicus is far from gratuitous. It is an integral part of his dramatic technique.* (**Waith, 1984: 68-9**)

One reason for the unsettling overemphasis on gore in *Titus* has much to do with its generic classification. Indeed, the play is often thought to have been influenced by earlier Elizabethan works such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and, indeed, Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, all dramas of the late 1580s which are renowned for their blood-soaked storylines. In these tragedies, tongues are ripped out, flesh is stripped from people's bones, and characters even engage in what are evocatively referred to as 'bloody banquets'. It is in this theatrical context, then, that we can best understand Titus's extreme plans for cannibalistic vengeance, which he begins to set in motion towards the end of Scene 11 (**5.2**):

> *Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,*
>
> *And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,*
>
> *And of the paste a coffin I will rear,*
>
> *And make two pasties of your shameful heads,*
>
> *And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,*
>
> *Like to the earth swallow her own increase.*
>
> *This is the feast that I have bid her to,*
>
> *And this the banquet she shall surfeit on* (**5.2.185-92**)

Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

188

That people would flock to such plays should not surprise us. Indeed, as Duncan Salkeld has recently emphasised, this was a time when people attended real-life executions as though they were a variety of theatrical performance in their own right (**Salkeld, 2018: 60-2**). Furthermore, cannibalism served a strong artistic purpose in such works, either as a means of underscoring the psychological torture of the (witting or unwitting) anthropophagite, as discussed by Taylor in his reading of Middleton and Dekker's *The Bloody Banquet* (**Taylor, 2001: 20-1**), or as a way of signalling the unwilling participation (and abuse) of the murder victim in the revenge action, as explained by Margaret E. Owens (**Owens, 2005: 102-3**). Considering this, should the original *Titus* of the 1590s continue to be viewed merely as an attempt to exploit a popular craze for particularly gruesome depictions of horror?

There is certainly an argument for this having been the case. Yet in considering this possibility we should not ignore the learned nature of the play. Indeed, there is no attempt to hide its indebtedness to the classical tradition in the construction of its cannibalistic plot, with the poet Ovid being quoted throughout, and a copy of his *Metamorphoses* even being brought directly on-stage during Scene 6 (**4.1**). Via this engagement with Ovid, the play also pointedly alludes to the tale of Philomela, a woman raped and made tongueless by her brother-in-law King Tereus of Thrace, whose sister Procne (Tereus' wife) subsequently took revenge by killing their son Itys and serving him as a meal to Tereus: we can certainly see this in Aaron's line 'His Philomel must lose her tongue today' (**2.3.43**) and in the many references by her relatives to 'the tragic tale of Philomel' (**4.1.47; cf. 2.4.38, 4.1.52, 5.2.193**). Furthermore, the final cannibalistic banquet scene copies much of its action from the conclusion to Seneca's *Thyestes*, in which the title character is tricked by his villainous brother Atreus into eating a meal consisting of the flesh and blood of his own children. As Derek Dunne remarks, 'the Thyestian treatment of Chiron and Demetrius is gruesome in the extreme, but they are themselves guilty of the rape and dismemberment of Lavinia' (**Dunne, 2016: 83**). In harking back to Seneca, Shakespeare and Peele were not simply appealing to the classical tradition as a source for the play's violence; they were evoking a classical model for revenge as a mode of justice.

The original authors of *Titus*, then, at least attempted to bring some scholarship into the tragedy's construction, but the violence on its surface has made many view it as too unsophisticated to be considered an 'essential' component of the Shakespeare canon. Few critics are against the view, however entertaining some might find it in performance, that *Titus* is an over-the-top bloodbath, with very little social or political depth to its story.

Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

189

Revising *Titus Andronicus* After 1616

How can this view be said to change when we re-consider the tragedy in its adapted form? As we have already observed, it seems quite likely that the fly-killing scene is a later, likely posthumous addition to the text. How, then, can a single scene of just 84 verse lines be said to repurpose the central cannibalistic themes of such an old tragedy for revival before new audiences during the mid- to late-1610s (or, conceivably, the early 1620s)?

The importance of 3.2 was considered by Hereward T. Price as far back as 1948, in a discussion which considers how its place in the play might lead us to consider it as what we might describe as a 'mirror-scene':

> *The scene has little or nothing to do with the plot: that is to say, if cut, it will not be missed, nor does it add much to those elements of excitement such as hope, suspense, or anxiety which are stimulated by the plot. On the other hand, it enlarges our knowledge of the problem which is at the core of the work, and in this way Titus gains in depth and perspective. It brings everything into focus. The chief issues of Titus are there, and it may be said to mirror the play…Apparently loose detachable scenes, so-called episodes, are frequent in Shakespeare. They vary in function as in technique, but certain features tend to recur. Many of them are, as in Titus, mirror-scenes, reflecting in one picture either the main theme or some important aspect of the drama.* (**Price, 1948: 102-3**)

Price's commentary on the fly-killing scene is certainly of significant worth, particularly in light of Taylor and Duhaime's recent revelation that the scene is likely to be a late addition to the play. Indeed, rather than simply being a problematic interpolation in an established play-text, 3.2 can actually be said to serve as a thematic and structural re-imagining of the original concluding scene. It is, to some extent, an adaptation or 'mirror image' of the original Scene 12 (**5.3**).

When we approach the fly-killing scene in this light, its function within the wider context of the play into which it was interpolated becomes much more clearly part of a recognisable Middletonian style. Middleton was certainly a dramatist with a fondness for the writing of banqueting scenes and depictions of feasting. As Chris Meads puts it, 'Middleton used the banquet scene to telling effect as a device with which to open the action of a play and overcome the problem of introducing a large number of important characters in a short space, without losing the audience's interest or understanding' (**Meads, 2001: 140**). In itself, Middleton's penchant for the writing of banquet scenes might seem relatively unimportant; banqueting scenes recur frequently in the drama of the

period, after all. But the structure of the two banquets of F1 *Titus Andronicus* bears a striking resemblance to the two banqueting scenes in another Shakespeare/Middleton work, the collaborative tragedy *Timon of Athens*, the second of which (**3.7**) noticeably reflects and inverts the manner and style of the first (**1.2**), with Middleton possibly reworking Shakespeare's writing of the second to better engage with his own representation of Timon's interactions with his many false friends and creditors (**Jowett, 2004: 195-6**). As Meads writes of the two banquet scenes in *Timon*, 'The two scenes are structurally a pair; the first being a statement of the accepted Athenian hierarchy and the second depicting the breaking down of that order. Without the first banquet scene, the second would lose a good deal of its dramatic impact and relevance, and without the second the first would appear a languid and lengthy self-indulgence' (**Meads, 2001: 147**). Considering this realisation, we might now be encouraged to view the pair of banqueting scenes present in F1 *Titus* in a similar light: rather than simply being a 'disposable' addition to an established text, Middleton may well have considered how the addition of 3.2 would affect the overall structure of the complete play, with a particular focus on its relation to the already existing Shakespeare-authored banquet of the concluding scene. That Middleton wrote the scene with a view to the wider play might be signalled by the fact that its central figure of the fly appears to have been adapted from lines spoken by Aaron the Moor in Act 5: 'I have done a thousand dreadful things / As willingly as one would kill a fly' (**5.1.141-2**).

This scene, unlike Scene 12, does not actually feature any cannibalism. Nevertheless, it is striking how much the stagecraft of this scene can be said to reflect that of the final bloody feast. In 3.2 Titus, Lavinia, Marcus, and Young Lucius enter to a banqueting table at their home. This, for them, would be a very normal everyday occurrence, but for the first time it has become a scene of horror. That this meal will be noticeably out of the ordinary is acknowledged by Titus in the scene's opening lines:

> *So, so, now sit, and look you eat no more*
>
> *Than will preserve just so much strength in us*
>
> *As will revenge these bitter woes of ours.* (**3.2.1-3**)

This family meal is not about pleasure or sociability, but purely about sustenance, and as the scene progresses it is clear why this is the case. Part-way through this sequence, Marcus lashes out and kills a fly with the flat of his knife. Then, with a cry of 'Out on thee, murderer!' (**3.2.54**), the usually warlike Titus begins to show the first signs that he is losing his grip on reality, railing against his brother for the abominable act:

> *How if that fly had a father, brother?*
>
> *How would he hang his slender gilded wings*
>
> *And buzz lamenting doings in the air!*
>
> *Poor harmless fly,*
>
> *That with his pretty buzzing melody*
>
> *Came here to make us merry—and thou hast killed him.* (**3.2.60-5**)

Tellingly, this is a significant departure from the cruel and martial character he has been throughout the earlier parts of the play. In the Peele-authored 1.1, after all, Titus had even slain his own son, Mutius, for defying his will regarding a marriage between Lavinia and Saturninus. On the other hand, Lavinia, the mutilated daughter, cannot even eat and drink without the assistance of her father, and, it seems, is very much unwilling to do so. Finally, Young Lucius, the innocent child, is forced to watch this horror show, a family meal which has lost all mirth. It is not even clear whether any food is so much as touched. There is some suggestion that Titus may attempt to bring some food to his daughter's mouth, although she seems to steadfastly reject receiving sustenance in such a way. Here, then, we see a physically and emotionally broken family, unable to engage in two of the most normal social practices: eating and drinking.

Taylor and Duhaime do not fail to see the link between the added scene and the bloody banquet of the concluding sequence:

> *Lavinia, of course, is not committing cannibalism, at least not in 3.2. But…Lavinia in 3.2 is the centre of a riveting tragic spectacle: a silent female victim of male violence, for whom the normal social rituals of eating and drinking have turned into a nightmare.* (**Taylor & Duhaime, 2017: 89**)

To an audience already familiar with the action of the original, pre-1616 *Titus*, the added scene appears to be a very deliberate inversion of the original, cannibalistic conclusion. The only other banquet scene in the play, after all, plays out very differently. There, two able-bodied characters sit at table. They are both paragons of contentedness. Tamora believes her revenges against Titus have been successful, bringing him to a state of insanity. As far as she is aware, both of her sons are alive and well, and in the midst of this, she is happy and willing to partake in the meal set before her. Indeed, Titus describes her eating it 'daintily' (**5.3.60**). It is only after the feast is concluded that Titus gleefully springs the truth upon her, both of her children's deaths, and of her unnatural act:

Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

192

> *Why, there they are, both bakéd in this pie,*
>
> *Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,*
>
> *Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred.* (**5.3.59-61**)

Without 3.2 to precede it, Titus's revenge is excessive in the extreme, forcing Tamora to ingest human flesh carved from her own offspring as part of the overall escalation of cruelty which has occurred across the narrative. But reading the fly-killing scene before this gory finale, the inhumanity of Titus's revenge, while certainly still excessive, now has a discernible narrative origin. Titus has already experienced a banquet where the horrors now afflicting the lives of himself and of his family members have been brought to the surface. Lavinia, in particular, has found herself unable (and unwilling) to do one of the simplest things in life: eat. Why then should Tamora, whose cruelty has seemingly known no bounds, continue to be permitted to enjoy such functions as these? Eating should be a pleasure, but Titus makes sure that for Tamora it has now become a waking nightmare.

The scene's author, then, was not simply adding material to assist the company in repurposing its structure for a post-1608 Blackfriars context. Rather, he was a writer consciously engaging with the fuller narrative of the drama, seeking to insert work which would enrich the overall execution of the revenge storyline. Whereas *Titus* has often been criticised for its poor integration of its violence into its narrative, the introduction of 3.2 in F1 actually serves to provide a more obvious tangent for the escalation of Titus's cruelty. The cannibalistic nature of Titus's revenge is no longer simply gratuitous violence solely intended to satisfy a bloodlust among its audiences, but becomes part of a much more calculated plot. It is an effort to completely degrade his enemy, obliterating her ability to fully function as a part of normal human society, just as he has found that his daughter can no longer do. Again, the focus of the tragic spectacle is upon the tragic woman. Lavinia can no longer feed, and so, Titus determines, neither will Tamora. Thus, justice, however grotesque, can be seen to have been delivered.

Coda: The Case of Arbella Stuart?

Before concluding this discussion of F1 *Titus Andronicus* and the importance of the fly-killing scene therein, there is one more avenue of research which should briefly be discussed in terms of why this kind of scene might have been considered particularly appropriate for a revival in the context of the mid- to late-1610s. There are many possibilities for what might have inspired a revival of such a sensational cannibalistic drama so soon after Shakespeare's death; but it is worth quoting at length from

Taylor and Duhaime's suggestion of the contemporaneous plight of Lady Arbella Stuart:

> *A niece of Mary, Queen of Scots, Arbella was a potential heir to the English throne and therefore a threat to King James. Without the King's consent, she married in secret William Seymour (also with a claim to the throne), and in June 1611 they attempted to flee to France together. Arbella was captured, and imprisoned in the Tower of London…Arbella remained in prison for the rest of her life…In 1613, the famous London gossip John Chamberlain described her as 'crackt in her braine'; witnesses in the Tower described 'fyttes of distemper and convulsyons', and reported that Arbella refused to eat or to speak…[S]he died on 25 September 1615* (**Taylor & Duhaime, 2017: 89**).

To Taylor and Duhaime, strong resonances of Lady Arbella's plight might be observable in the presentation of the character of Lavinia, particularly during 3.2:

> *Like Arbella, the grieving, educated noblewoman Lavinia has lost her husband. Unlike any other passage in Titus Andronicus, the Fly Scene focuses on Lavinia's rejection of food and drink. Arbella stubbornly refused to speak; Lavinia cannot speak. Some of these comparisons between Arbella and Lavinia were, of course, present in the original play; but anyone watching or adapting the play after Arbella's imprisonment might have made the connection, and completed the link by adding to Lavinia's tragic, grieving silence a refusal to eat.* (**Taylor & Duhaime, 2017: 89**)

Admittedly, Taylor and Duhaime's reading is primarily thematic and, it could be argued, somewhat esoteric. Additionally, Taylor's dating of the addition of 3.2 to 'soon after Shakespeare's death in April 1616' (**Taylor & Loughnane, 2017: 491**) is far from conclusive: indeed, in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, there is (as of yet) no entirely convincing evidence, internal or external, which testifies to any particular date of adaptation, unlike with (for example) *Measure for Measure*, which John Jowett has influentially shown was probably inspired by a news-sheet which was not published until October 1621 (**Jowett, 2001**). Nevertheless, this remains a particularly interesting suggestion, especially considering that it is specifically Middleton's involvement in the text that Taylor and Duhaime are here considering.

Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

194

Plays inspired by popular interest in the case of Lady Arbella Stuart were relatively common at this point in time, the most famous perhaps being John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, which has notably been connected to the case by Sara Jayne Steen (**Steen, 1991**). Of more immediate interest, however, is Anne Lancashire's work in connecting Middleton's *Second Maiden's Tragedy* directly to the case of Lady Arbella (**Lancashire, 1978: 279**). If Middleton had indeed chosen to reflect upon Arbella's persecution in a King's Men play of 1611, Taylor and Duhaime's argument may seem quite plausible when considering his adaptation of a King's Men play later in the same decade.

If this is the case, then the characterisation of Lavinia in this scene takes on a whole new meaning. In the original play, Lavinia, the silent (or, more specifically, silenced) woman is largely used as a plot device. A shocking, bleeding, and agonised spectacle following her rape and mutilation, she principally served as a visual image, following her father around on-stage, but doing little. As Bethany Packard writes, 'When rape forcibly removes her from the narrative of personal and Roman purity, the play uses her to necessitate recognition of its many other narratives' (**Packard, 2010: 282-3**). As a signifier of the excessive suffering of the Andronici, she is a powerful reminder of the motivations behind her father's revenge.

In the adapted text, however, the author of 3.2 repurposes the play so that she becomes much more characterful. She refuses all sustenance, herself consumed by woes; and by making her the central focus of this single interpolated scene – the author even giving her something of a voice, as relayed by her father through his interpretation of her outward signs, sounds, and expressions – she becomes a representation of real, wronged women, of whom Arbella Stuart may be the most obvious textual adherent. The dramatist communicates to us that these are not just Titus's wrongs; his daughter's suffering far outweighs his.

How, then, does this change our perception of her involvement in preparing the cannibalistic feast for her enemies? More research is required, and it remains to be seen whether future investigations into the text of *Titus* continue to support and expand upon the possible Middletonian auspices of 3.2.

Conclusion

Middleton's application of such a scene as 3.2 to the story of *Titus Andronicus* may well be yet another part of his long-recognised interest in the case of Lady Arbella Stuart at around this time in his career. Many Jacobeans sympathised with and supported the suffering and starving woman, and it thus stands to reason that this repurposing of the tragedy's cannibalistic themes may have been a way for Middleton to use a pre-

Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

195

existing Shakespearean play to exploit audience sensibilities and concerns at a much later point in time. But whether or not we accept this historical context, as proposed by Taylor and Duhaime, the evidence for the scene's status as a later, non-Shakespearean addition to the play nevertheless seems strong. In this scenario, the author was not simply adding new material to *Titus Andronicus* in order to provide a new selling point for a later revival of the work, or to make it easier for the play to be divided into five acts following the acquisition by the playing company of the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. He was constructing a new sequence designed to mirror and complement the already infamous cannibalistic denouement of the original text. Understanding 3.2 as a later addition, we can now better understand how the fly-killing scene is far less 'disposable' than previous critics have been equipped to realise.

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Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

196

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Green. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 182-199

197

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[i] All quotations from the works of Shakespeare are keyed to the edited texts included in Taylor et al, 2016.

[ii] All quotations from the works of Middleton are keyed to the edited texts included in Taylor et al, 2007.

'Monkey Meat' and Metaphor in Shohei Ooka's *Fires on the Plain*

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Abstract

In Fires on the Plain (1952) novelist Shohei Ooka critiques Japanese imperialism by depicting the collapse of the Japanese army in the Philippines during the final months of World War II. Structured as a post-war memoir written by a soldier named Private Tamura as a patient in a Tokyo mental hospital, the novel explores Tamura's psychological breakdown in response to having succumbed to cannibalism in order to survive. A complex treatment of memory, guilt, and individual agency in times of war, Fires on the Plain also underscores the ways in which the cannibalistic act may function metaphorically as a commentary on matters related to sex, religion, militarism, and cultural imperialism, as well as revealing anxieties associated with the creation of a post-war narrative of national victimhood in Japan. While Ooka presents Tamura's eating of human flesh as the culmination of his long descent into madness, the act also serves as a metaphor through which he explores the self-destructive nature of Japanese imperialism, as well as his own responsibility for his unwilling participation in it.

Keywords: wartime cannibalism; survival cannibalism; ritual cannibalism; Japanese imperialism; war crimes; Christianity

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

200

'Monkey Meat' and Metaphor in Shohei Ooka's *Fires on the Plain*

Shohei Ooka's 1952 novel *Fires on the Plain (Nobi)* recounts the collapse of the Japanese army in the Philippines towards the end of World War II. Loosely based on Ooka's experiences as a 35-year-old conscript who was separated from his unit on Mindoro and later captured and sent to an American P.O.W. camp, the novel is both a searing critique of Japanese militarism and a broader examination of the horror and insanity of war. Expelled from his platoon in order to preserve food for the others, the tubercular Private Tamura is forced to fend for himself amid the months-long chaos of battle and retreat, eventually succumbing to cannibalism in order to survive. While Ooka presents Tamura's eating of human flesh as the culmination of his long descent into madness, the act also serves as a metaphor through which he explores the self-destructive nature of Japanese imperialism, as well as his own responsibility for his unwilling participation in it. In this article, I will attempt to illuminate Ooka's depiction of cannibalism in *Fires on the Plain* first by addressing it within the context of wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army and Ooka's post-war response to them, both in the novel and his memoirs. Then, focusing on the chapter 'The Starving and the Mad', I will show how Ooka's depiction of Tamura's self-justifications and selective amnesia transgresses and disrupts categories based on binary oppositions, extending the metaphor of cannibalism to complicate issues related to imperialism, particularly through his allusion to Chinese author Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman'. Finally, through his ambivalent appeal to Christianity, I will argue that, ironically, Ooka damns Tamura in the end of the novel for his refusal to participate in the cannibalistic act; thereby creating a text that, ultimately, consumes itself.

Although cannibalism and murder with the intent to commit cannibalism were both explicitly outlawed by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II, there is overwhelming evidence for both practices, particularly in New Guinea beginning around mid-1944 and in the Philippines in the final months of the war: the period covered in Ooka's novel (**Tanaka, 1996: 128**). In its attempts to come to terms with defeat and the conduct of the army in the war, the Japanese government never acknowledged cannibalism by soldiers; nor did the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal conducted by the Allies from 1946 to 1948, which did not identify or prosecute acts of cannibalism. As part of his plan for post-war occupation–which relied in part on a concerted propaganda effort to encourage the Japanese to reject twentieth-century imperialism as an anomaly in the nation's history– General Douglas MacArthur allowed Emperor Hirohito to keep the throne, refusing to prosecute him for war crimes and casting him as having been

manipulated by military leaders such as General Hideki Tojo (**Ibid: xix–xx**). In having saved Japan from annihilation by opposing his generals, Hirohito came to be seen as a peacemaker and, more importantly, a victim of the runaway militarism that had distorted the nation's character. As many scholars have pointed out, this failure to hold the emperor responsible – along with a growing self-image formulated on the Japanese having been victims of the only atomic bombs ever used in combat – enabled Japanese society as a whole to avoid examining its own culpability in imperialist atrocities such as the Rape of Nanking. In the absence of official acknowledgment of wartime cannibalism, the primary contemporaneous accounts are memoirs by former soldiers such as Shoji Ogawa and Harumichi Nogi, who, along with Ooka, show Japanese cannibals preying almost exclusively on their fellow soldiers rather than P.O.W.s or natives in occupied territories (**Ibid: 126**). As such, Japanese soldiers, as both perpetrators and prey, can through shared dehumanisation be seen as victims of the imperial war machine.

While evidence of cannibalism was not presented before the Tokyo tribunal, Australian and American military inquests documented in graphic detail numerous cases of the bodies of Allied soldiers being butchered and eaten by Japanese soldiers in New Guinea and the Philippines. In addition to 'white pork', Japanese soldiers also fed on 'black pork' in New Guinea, a term encompassing not only natives of the island but also the large number of Indian, Pakistani, and Malaysian prisoners of war brought in as slave labour. According to accounts of survivors, prisoners who were too sick to work would be shot and eaten, and some victims were kept alive while being butchered over the course of several days in order to keep the meat from putrefying, a constant threat in the tropical climate (**Ibid: 121**). Eventually, as the already inadequate supply lines were cut completely, some Japanese soldiers turned to 'yellow pork' (**Calman, 1992: 183**). In fact, in some cases, not to commit cannibalism was seen as a breach of duty and could lead to severe consequences. In the 1987 documentary *The Naked Emperor Marches On,* for instance, filmmaker Kuzuo Hara examines a case in which two privates in New Guinea who refused to participate in cannibalistic acts with the rest of their unit were executed—having ironically been charged with cannibalism themselves—in order to provide food for officers. There is a certain perverse logic involved in the dehumanisation of the racial Other from prisoner to slave to 'human cattle' (**Tanaka, 1996: 126**). Consuming the flesh of one's own fellow soldiers, however, is an act that seems beyond the bounds of rational explanation, even in the extreme conditions of the New Guinea campaign, where Japanese forces suffered a 94% mortality rate. What is even more remarkable is that the widespread recourse to cannibalism in this case was not the result of a collapse of military cohesiveness and morale. 'To the

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

202

contrary', Toshiyuki Tanaka writes, 'cannibalism was often a systematic activity conducted by whole squads and under the command of officers. Throughout periods of starvation and cannibalism, discipline was maintained to an astonishing degree' (**1996: 127**). Rather than an aberration in the conduct of war in extreme circumstances, cannibalism in this case seems to be the manifestation of militarism in its most perfect form.

lthough Ooka does ultimately identify imperialist ideology as manifested in the military hierarchy with the figure of Yasuda and his one-man army Nagamatsu, the bulk of the novel focuses on the period after the collapse of any command structure in the Philippines, leaving the decision to eat human flesh with all its ethical consequences up to the individual actor. However, Ooka presents the story from the point of view of a character struggling with his own complicity in actions that he commits, but for which he is arguably not completely responsible; and, moreover, these actions are filtered through memories so overwhelming that they inevitably break off before they can be fully realised. Rather than offering a straightforward recounting of events, the novel instead constantly negotiates the shifting relationships among act, memory, and meaning, forcing the reader to grapple along with Private Tamura in piecing together what exactly he may have done in the Philippines and what it implies. Ooka further complicated the novel in 1953 in a short essay entitled '*Nobi* no ito', in which he claims that Tamura, 'although wanting to eat human flesh, cannot, spitting it out instead' (**qtd. in Lofgren, 2004: 403**). This assertion is clearly contradicted by the text of *Fires on the Plain,* in which Tamura eats 'monkey meat' (**220**)[i] supplied by Nagamatsu at the end of the novel multiple times—otherwise he would not have survived—and, though reluctant to admit it, he is fully aware of its origin. Furthermore, in recounting his story up to the point when he reconnects with Nagamatsu, Tamura suffers memory loss and suspends the narrative at precisely the moments he has the opportunity to feed on human flesh, which strongly implies that he is repressing other instances of cannibalism as well. Erik R. Lofgren argues that Ooka's denial of Tamura's complicity in cannibalism marks the moment when the 'mythology of Japanese war victimhood began to eclipse the discourse of war guilt operative under the American Occupation' and illustrates 'the dominance that the discourse came to have in subsequent years' (**Lofgren, 2004: 413-14**). In the 1959 film version of *Nobi,* Tamura is also unable to eat the proffered 'monkey meat', spitting it out along with a couple of teeth, seemingly solidifying the triumph of the ideology of victimhood. While Ooka's attempt to revise the meaning of the novel—he later insisted Tamura's refusal was an 'ethical choice' (**qtd. in Lofgren, 2004: 410**)—reflects this post-occupation cultural shift, the fact is that *Fires on the Plain* captures the period when Japan we still trying to

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

203

come to terms with imperialism and defeat and the wounds were too raw to be easily contained by any ideological position. Ooka may also have been attempting to deflect questions about whether or not he had succumbed to cannibalism in the Philippines back onto the novel in order to remind readers that truth is contingent on many levels and that what is important is how we negotiate its myriad meanings. As Marshall Sahlins says, 'cannibalism is always "symbolic," even when it is "real"' (**Eckholm, 1986**).

As a way of approaching *Fires on the Plain,* I will focus on the chapter entitled 'The Starving and the Mad': this chapter is positioned about two-thirds of the way through the novel. After Tamura is sent to a field hospital—into which he is denied admittance because he cannot supply his own rations—he bonds briefly with other hospital rejects before being separated from them during an American bombing raid. Once again alone, he finds a deserted cabin in the woods, which he describes as a 'paradise' (**74**), both for the safety it affords and its supply of readily available food. Following a dream in which he confronts his own corpse, he descends into a nearby village, which he also finds to be deserted, except for dogs, carrion crows, and the mutilated bodies of a group of Japanese soldiers who have apparently been ambushed and killed on the steps of the village church. He enters the church and re-enacts to some degree the dream from the night before and then decides to explore the presbytery next door. There he falls asleep on a sofa, only to be awakened by the voices of a Filipino couple who have come in the night to recover some salt that has been hidden in the kitchen. Tamura surprises the couple and asks them for a match; he then shoots the woman when she screams. The man flees and Tamura finds the salt, which serves as a type of currency when he leaves his paradise and joins a group of soldiers who are attempting to make their way to the staging area for the Japanese retreat. (Incidentally, these soldiers are veterans of the New Guinea campaign and joke with Tamura, telling him, 'If you really want to come with us, you better look sharp or we'll be eating you with our potatoes' (**125**).) Finding the way blocked by American forces, Tamura is again separated from his companions and witnesses a Filipina partisan executing a Japanese soldier trying to surrender. After this experience he claims to have no clear memories, writing 'I was certainly living. But I had no consciousness of being alive' (**172**).

At this point in the novel Tamura suspends the narrative to reflect on these events in 'The Starving and the Mad'. It is typical of Ooka's style in *Fires on the Plain* to have Tamura relate an experience as it is happening and then to revisit it, sometimes several times, usually to analyse his stated intention in the light of what he has come to recognise as an ulterior motive or to revise his interpretation of the significance of the event

through the filter of some new perspective. For instance, when Tamura first notices the 'fires of the plain' of the novel's title, he assumes that they are merely the result of Filipino farmers burning off the chaff of their fields after harvest: he wonders later if they might be signs of some sort, before finally realising that the Filipinos are actually using them to signal Japanese troop locations for American bombers. Indeed, reading the novel requires a constant reassessment of relevant facts; a process that culminates with the revelation in the final chapters that the narrative is not a straightforward account of events, but the text of an unreliable, self-serving apologia written by Tamura in a Tokyo mental hospital five years after the war.

In 'The Starving and the Mad', Tamura recalls the corpses on the church steps and his supposition that they had been the victims of an ambush. At the time he had noticed a cleaver on the steps and had assumed that it had been used as a weapon by one of the villagers. He had also noticed that a number of the soldiers were missing their buttocks, which he had assumed had been eaten by dogs and birds. However, after happening 'to notice a body that still retained some suppleness' and suddenly feeling 'a desire to eat its flesh' (**177**), he comes to the conclusion that the cleaver was not a weapon but a culinary instrument that had been used to butcher the bodies of the soldiers, the buttocks providing the most accessible and substantial cuts of meat. Although this epiphany (which may or may not reflect reality; what is important is that Tamura thinks it does) is a direct result of Tamura's own instinctual desire for self-preservation, he immediately distances himself from the thought, writing:

> *Yet I could not accept the idea that cannibalism had come to me as a natural instinct. Never, I thought, would it have occurred to me to alleviate my hunger in this way had I not heard the story of how the survivors of the* Medusa *ate each other on their raft, and later listened to reports of cannibalism on Guadalcanal and hints of the same practice from New Guinea. Anthropology has, of course, clearly established that in prehistoric times people did eat each other, just as that primitive societies practice incest; but for us who live in the shadow of a long history and deeply rooted custom it is impossible without an access of abhorrence to imagine fornicating with our mothers or eating human flesh.* (**177-78**)

In other words, cannibalism is an unnatural act, except to the degree that it was practiced in a state of nature by primitive societies; and unthinkable to civilised human beings except those, of course, from whom Tamura claims to have gotten the idea in the first place. This type of illogic is typical of Tamura's pattern of denial and self-justification, but it also illuminates Ooka's use of cannibalism to underscore the operation of imperialist

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

205

ideology in the novel. For one thing, this paragraph echoes an episode in *Before Capture*, Ooka's 1945 memoir, of which *Fires on the Plain* is largely a fictional reimagining. In *Before Capture*, Ooka recounts the story of a fellow P.O.W. named Sergeant Kurokawa, a veteran of the Japan-China war who had led a group of soldiers who had managed to evade American forces into hiding in the mountains of Mindoro. Tiring of roots and nuts and an occasional foray into a deserted village, Kurokawa, apparently in all seriousness, had 'proposed finding, killing, and eating a Filipino the next time they ventured to the coast' (**qtd. in Stahl, 2003: 78**). Horrified by Kurokawa's callousness, Ooka writes:

> *While the tragedy that occurred on the Medusa raft is beyond reproach, I cannot help but condemn the Japanese officers who dined on the flesh of prisoners of war. . . . Their criminal acts resulted from their perverted hatred of the enemy and their frontline gormandism. Kurokawa's thought of eating a Filipino was no different. He came up with the idea before his men, who were themselves hungry, because of the "by any means" convention he had internalized as a brutal soldier during the Japan-China war and based on his thinking as an oppressor that the people in the areas he occupied were subhuman.* **(qtd. in Stahl, 2003: 79)**

Ooka sees Kurokawa as a monster, but he emphasises that he is also a victim in a sense, the product of the imperialist mindset that depends on the dehumanisation of conquered peoples. In 'Before Capture', Ooka casts survival cannibalism (like that on the raft of the *Medusa*) as 'above reproach' – a tragic, but understandable, response to dire circumstances. In *Fires on the Plain,* however, Tamura implies that cannibalism for any reason is abhorrent—as unthinkable as incest—to any civilised human being. Of course, Tamura's hold on sanity requires him not to admit certain truths about himself, and his insistence on a bright line between civilisation and savagery is a way for him to maintain the illusion of psychological and moral integrity. His reference to 'incest' (**178**) is telling, though: as with cannibalism, incest violates clearly defined categories based on binary opposition (one should not be both mother and wife to the same man, just as one should not cannot be both human and meat) and is therefore taboo since it erodes exactly the type of distinctions that allow social groups to define themselves against others. Tamura is civilised, so he cannot be a savage; he is Japanese—the product of 'a long history and deeply rooted custom' (**178**)—so he cannot be a cannibal. Attempting to maintain his sanity through the compartmentalisation of uncomfortable truths only exacerbates the problem, however, as he becomes more and more dissociated from himself, eventually experiencing what he describes as being 'sundered into two half-bodies' (**191**), each of which seems to operate separately from the other. Although

not being able to control one's own body would seem to indicate a clear break with rationality, Ooka emphasises the fact that for a conscript into the imperial army like Tamura (or himself), true self-determination—control of one's body and one's actions, as well as one's words or even thoughts—is little more than an illusion to begin with.

Ooka's metaphorical use of cannibalism also serves as a commentary on the nature of imperialism through a key intertext that, like his reference to the raft of the *Medusa,* reveals the tensions between the specific historical context of the novel and its larger implications. The third chapter from the end of the novel is entitled 'A Madman's Diary', an allusion to Lu Xun's 1918 story of the same name. A seminal work in the New Culture movement in China, Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' is also a frame narrative and purports to be a selection of writings during a bout of madness by a young man who had subsequently regained his sanity (**21**)**.** Like Ooka, Lu Xun uses the metaphor of cannibalism to critique traditional society, as the young man discerns cannibalistic intent in the eyes of not only his neighbours, the peasants who work on his family's estate, and his family itself, but also in the pages of history, the subtext of every line of every work of Chinese history seeming to call out, 'Eat people!' (**24**). While there are a number of parallels between 'A Madman's Diary' and *Fires of the Plain,* the most germane in this context is the influence of incipient Japanese imperialist ideology on Lu Xun's work, the seeds of which had been sowed long before World War II.

Briefly: in the 1870s American marine biologist Edward S. Morse discovered a shell mound in Omori, near Tokyo, and excavations quickly revealed that the prehistoric inhabitants of the area had practiced cannibalism through the unearthing of a number of artefacts (including charred human bones and cooking utensils) (**Morse, 1879: 17–18**)**.** This discovery caused a sensation, even though it soon became clear that these early inhabitants were not related to the current inhabitants of the islands, having been displaced first by the Ainu, who were displaced in turn by the ancestors of the modern Japanese. As part of the larger intellectual project of reassessment and self-definition that took place during the Meiji period, Japanese scholars, intrigued by these findings, began to search archives for evidence of cannibalism in historical times but found very few references related to Japan. However, when they turned to Chinese sources, they discovered numerous records of cannibalistic acts over that culture's long history, although cannibalism was a topic of little interest in China at the time. In fact, as Xiaolu Ma argues, Lu Xun probably learned about the history of Chinese cannibalism from Japanese literary critic Haga Yaichi, whose *Ten Articles on National Character* his brother owned, and which cites a number of acts of cannibalism from *History as a Mirror,* the comprehensive Chinese chronicle (**Ma, 2014: 343**). When Lu Xun casts

feudal Chinese society as essentially cannibalistic, then, he is doing so by filtering his own history through Japanese scholarship influenced by American scientific exploration—a perfect example of the way cannibalism dissolves symbolic borders, generating multiple meanings within a single framework, even while resisting a unified explanation of a single event.

For Ooka, then, to evoke the form and title of Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' is both an acknowledgement and a conscious reversal of transcultural influence; more significantly, though, Ooka is able to appropriate Lu Xun's story as a model of self-critique, since the discovery of cannibalism in other Asian cultures contributed to Japanese nationalism and its justification of imperial expansion through appeals to racial superiority—an ideology most succinctly expressed in the phrase 'Eat people!' Ooka was horrified by accounts of cannibalism by Japanese soldiers: not because of the acts themselves but because in many cases they seemed not to have been necessitated by starvation and were instead the grotesque manifestation of what he calls 'frontline gormandism' (**qtd. in Stahl, 2003: 79**), the will to power expressed through fine dining. In Lu Xun's story, the frame is a short introduction in classical Chinese that assures the reader that what follows are the rantings in vernacular language of a madman who has since recovered, thereby safely containing any subversive ideas, should the reader wish to maintain plausible deniability. In *Fires on the Plain,* however, Ooka breaks the frame, ending the novel not with 'A Madman's Diary' but with 'A Dead Man's Writings', part confession and part fever dream, which in the present tense brings together the composition of the novel and its missing pages. These are the episodes that Tamura claims not to remember, but that emerge in real time as he writes them.

In keeping with Ooka's recursive style, we can find the germ of this final chapter by returning to 'The Starving and the Mad'. After his assertion that cannibalism and civilisation are irreconcilable, Tamura admits that his predicament may offer 'an extreme exception to the normal human condition' (**178**). What stops him from acting on the desire to consume human flesh, however, is the feeling that he is being watched, though by whom he cannot say. 'It could not be that Filipino woman', he muses. 'After all, I had not eaten her; I had only killed her . . . .' (**178**). Although Tamura has turned this episode over and over again in his mind, trying to absolve himself of her death, this is the first indication that he may have eaten her flesh, and the casual manner in which he mentions it only underscores the enormity of the repressed guilt he seems on the verge of acknowledging. Even more telling is the sentence that proceeds his assertion that he hesitated before acting on the impulse to eat her: 'I cannot tell whether or not this new desire of mine was natural; for I have forgotten what I really felt at the time—just as lovers forget the exact

feeling that they experienced at a certain moment in their intercourse' (**178**). In another context, the scene with the Filipino couple would read as an unfortunate interruption of a romantic getaway – the young lovers having escaped the cares of the world by sneaking away to a secret hideout – and Ooka manipulates this narrative expectation in order to heighten the tension of the scene, which culminates in a symbolic rape as Tamura shoots the woman with his rifle. Of course, Tamura minimises his own agency, claiming that it 'was simply by chance that the bullet entered her chest' (**118**), but this is very much in keeping with Ooka's use of language to create a paradoxical 'present absence' that functions in the same way as cannibalism does in the novel: an act that is both natural and unnatural, committed by a self that both watches and is observed, and is intensely experienced in the moment and immediately forgotten. By destabilising conceptual categories, cannibalism eventually collapses them altogether.

Climbing a hill in order to better view a beautiful crimson sunset, Tamura then finds a dying Japanese officer leaning against the trunk of the only tree at the top. In an obvious allusion to the Buddha's moment of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the officer indicates the 'burning' sunset and cries out, 'The Western Paradise! Buddha is Amida. One is one. Two is two. I join my hands in prayer' (**180**). Tamura stays with him during the night as he fades in and out of consciousness, calling out to the Buddha and the Emperor in turn. Finally, just before he dies, he tells Tamura that when he is dead, Tamura may eat his hand. Tamura immediately conflates the officer's suggestion with the Christian Eucharist and experiences a vision of Dame Kind, through which he apprehends the essential unity of all living things. A flower speaks to him, saying, 'You may eat me if you like' (**190**), but his left hand will not allow his right hand to pluck it; indeed, his left hand will not let him use his right hand to eat at all, and he recognises that, although the right side of his body is starving to death, the left side welcomes the transfiguration this represents. Renouncing eating living things in order to live, he resigns himself instead to being eaten by insects, whom, when they begin to swarm his body, his hands refuse to drive away.

One striking aspect of *Fires on the Plain* is the degree to which its religious themes are figured as explicitly Christian. While the Japanese officer who offers Tamura his flesh evokes the Buddha, Tamura interprets the act almost exclusively in terms of the Eucharist. Tamura also imagines that he sees the eyes of the Buddha watching him from the forest, but these turn out to be the eyes of a soldier who is drawing his sights down the barrel of his rifle on a potential meal. As a teenager, Ooka studied at a school run by Methodist missionaries and, having converted to the faith, considered becoming a minister for a time before eventually abandoning religion

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

209

(**Stahl, 2003: 2**). In *Fires on the Plain,* Tamura explains his spiritual journey in much the same way:

> *The cross was to me a familiar thing. In my childhood this symbol of a foreign religion had penetrated even the smallest Japanese hamlet. At first I had approached it out of curiosity; then I had become fascinated with the romantic creed that it represented. But, later, an agnostic education had separated me from what I then came to regard as childish delusions…* (**80**)

It is tempting to read Ooka's identification of Christianity as a 'foreign religion' as a commentary on Western cultural imperialism, the dark double of Japan's imperial expansion leading up to World War II. While this is true to a degree, it should also be noted that in the 1930s, as the Japanese government sought to bring all institutional religion into line with imperial goals, Japanese Christians supported expansion into Manchuria and China and saw their own missionary efforts as contributing in a positive way to the spread of empire. Christianity as a symbol of imperialism, then, functions as a double-edged sword: both a sign of Western ideological penetration into Asia and a weapon wielded by Japanese expansionists in pursuit of their own goals.

Following his epiphany regarding the interconnectness of all living things, Tamura is discovered by Nagamatsu, a young soldier whom Tamura had met among the rejects from the hospital and had observed as he formed a father-son bond with an older solider named Yasuda. Tamura initially sees a glimmer of hope in the fact that such a relationship can develop amid 'the bestial residue of a defeated army' (**53**), but when he encounters them again during the retreat, Nagamatsu complains to Tamura that Yasuda has made him 'his servant in everything but name' (**135**). Due to ulcers on his feet, Yasuda cannot walk without Nagamatsu's help and is completely dependent on the young man; however, Nagamatsu is also dependent on Yasuda, who has managed to secure a quantity of tobacco and sends Nagamatsu out to trade it for food for the both of them. Originally a critique of the way social conventions distort family bonds—Nagamatsu is the son of a maid who rejects him as a bastard when he leaves his father's house to seek her out, and Yasuda has a son by a waitress who is raised by his married brother and whom he is not allowed to acknowledge—the relationship is here transformed through the master-slave dialectic into a critique of capitalism, as Nagamatsu recognises the absurdity of a situation in which he does all the work for a boss who cannot survive without him, his only reward constant abuse and just enough sustenance to keep doing it. Nevertheless, he knows he will not break away from Yasuda and rebuffs Tamura when he suggests that

he just take the tobacco and leave, saying, 'The trouble is, I don't think I can manage by myself' (**138-39**).

When Tamura reconnects with Nagamatsu and Yasuda at the end of the novel, their relationship has evolved even further. In a grotesque parody of military leadership (perhaps even implicating the Emperor himself) the seemingly-immobilised Yasuda sends out Nagamatsu to hunt 'monkeys' and bring back the meat for them to eat for the promise of a postprandial smoke. As Tamura begins to recover his health, he becomes aware of what is happening and even asks Nagamatsu if he 'didn't by any chance mistake me for a monkey' (**200**). Of course, by using the metaphor 'monkey meat' Nagamatsu is able to obscure the truth through a double linguistic turn. However, the term also works on several other levels since human beings are monkeys, more or less: what distinguishes, or should distinguish, us is a moral consciousness, without which we are bound only by the law of the jungle; eat or be eaten. Nagamatsu uses the term as a type of psychological prophylactic in order to protect himself from the true nature of this actions, but Ooka's point may be that when human beings are forced through extreme circumstances to examine their base nature, there's not much of a distinction at all.

It also soon becomes clear that Nagamatsu has come to the conclusion that it is only a matter of time before Yasuda kills him and has saved Tamura, not out of any ethical consideration, but so that he can help him strike first. When Yasuda appropriates his hand grenade, Tamura understands the situation as well. In his memoir 'Before Capture', Ooka writes that when he was separated from his unit in the Philippines and wandered in the jungle for weeks in a malarial haze, he remained cogent enough to keep one hand grenade so that, when he became desperate enough, he would be able to commit suicide. When the time came and he pulled the pin, however, the grenade failed to explode. Ooka interpreted this failure as emblematic of the absurd position of a soldier in wartime, whose fate is accomplished regardless or despite of his intentions and is instead determined by random, external forces beyond his control or even awareness (**Stahl, 2003: 49**). In *Fires on the Plain,* though, by having Yasuda take the grenade and actively plan and execute an ambush with it, Ooka explicitly assigns guilt where it belongs: at the highest levels of military and political leadership. What may appear to the common soldier random, inexplicable events are actually the result – though unforeseeable – of conscious decisions made and executed up and down the chain of command. Yasuda's attack fails, and Nagamatsu shoots him. When Tamura sees Nagamatsu leap on Yasuda's corpse to begin butchering it, he undergoes a new transfiguration. Tamura explains:

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

211

I was seized with anger: if as a result of hunger human beings were constrained to eat each other, then this world of ours was no more than the result of God's wrath. And if I at this moment could vomit forth anger, then I, who was no longer human, must be an angel of God, an instrument of God's wrath. (**223**)

While Tamura's earlier encounter with the Japanese officer had revealed to him the interconnectedness of all life, he now realises that this fundamental unity is less peaceful coexistence and more like the Schopenhauerian Will, endlessly striving and blindly consuming, feeding on itself eternally like the uroborus without ever being filled. Tamura kills Nagamatsu and asserts unconvincingly, 'I did not eat his flesh; this I should certainly have remembered' (**224**). A Christian takes communion in order to become one with Christ; the act of ritual cannibalism is the means by which the believer participates in His divinity. Here, the consumption of human flesh—'monkey meat'—results in a much more savage transformation.

In the final, hallucinatory chapter, 'A Dead Man's Writings', Tamura recounts the moments before his capture when, having become an angel of wrath, he had gone down into the burning plain to exact vengeance and 'eat my fellow man as a means of chastisement' (**246**). Caught in the conflagration (which cannot help but evoke the atomic bombs that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki), he sees 'the people I have killed' emerge from the flames. Strangely, they are transported by 'celestial laughter' (**245**). At this moment, Tamura also experiences 'a painful joy' as he is struck in the head from behind and knocked out. Tamura interprets this as an act of grace: after denying throughout the novel that he had eaten human flesh, or at least had intended to, or at least had killed in order to, he finally accepts that he is an avenging angel who must kill and consume all who come before him as an agent of ultimate justice—only to be spared from this terrible destiny by an unseen blow. The novel then ends with a hymn of praise:

If he who struck me was that great man who on the crimson hilltop offered me his own flesh to relieve my starvation…

If this was a transfiguration of Christ Himself…

If He had indeed for my sake alone been sent down to this mountain field in the Philippines…

Then glory be to God. (**246; ellipses Ooka's**)

Though Tamura seems to praise God for sparing him, these lines are deeply ironic, as what he claims God is sparing him from is the act of cannibalism—in Christian terms communion—for Protestants the

symbolic and for Catholics the literal consumption of the body and blood of Christ. In other words, despite having previously welcomed becoming an instrument of divine wrath, Tamura here defines salvation as being denied oneness with God. Having seen how God accomplishes His will on earth—through the horrors of a war in which all standards of truth, morality, selfhood, and responsibility are stripped of meaning, leaving only corrupt flesh, which eats and is eaten—he can only save himself by refusing to implicate himself in its unfolding. He casts himself as victim and avenger of the ultimate inhuman act but not participant in it, denying himself the salvation that can only be achieved through consumption of divine human flesh and thereby sentencing himself to eternal, self-perpetuating damnation among the fires on the plain.

In this multifaceted, digressive, and self-contradictory novel, Ooka attempts to capture the historical and psychological complexities of Japanese culture during and after World War II by creating an unstable narrative that dissolves distinctions between victim and perpetrator, confession and self-evasion, animal and angel. Though acts of wartime cannibalism are part of the historical record, *Fires on the Plain* exploits the metaphorical aspects of cannibalism in order to reveal the irreconcilable tensions not only within the Japanese imperialist project but also within any individual at odds with his society. Private Tamura's inability to resolve his own double nature as subject responsible for his actions and object controlled by outside forces leads to a complete psychotic break; he can only live with himself by denying who he is and what he is done. Given Ooka's later claim that Tamura had not actually eaten human flesh, however, the larger point may be an admission that false consciousness is a type of defence mechanism through which both the individual and the society that produces him are able to deny the cannibalistic, self-consuming nature of human existence. Such denial, Ooka implies, may have been a necessary step certainly for Japanese society to move forward after World War II and possibly indispensable in order to survive with sanity intact at all.

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Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

213

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Endnotes

[i] Editor's note: References to page numbers (**xxx**) only throughout are to (**Ooka, 2001**), as per the references.

Davis. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 200-214

214

'A kiss is the beginning of cannibalism': Julia Ducournau's *Raw* and Bataillean Horror

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Abstract

In this article, I will put Julia Ducournau's 2016 coming-of-age horror film Raw in dialogue with Georges Bataille's general economic theory of transgression. The Bataillean saying 'a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism' is taken literally by Raw's protagonist Justine, as she explores her sexuality while simultaneously acquiring a taste for human flesh. I will begin by mapping the interplay between the transgressions of Raw and Bataille's general economy, moving forward to Raw's treatment of transgression as it both converges and diverges with Bataille's notion of sacrifice. While the film ultimately displays the pitfalls of transgression, I will conclude by evaluating how the role of eroticism in Raw illustrates the enduring importance of transgression for Bataille; as an immediate, sacred moment of inner experience in which the self luxuriates in its own death.

Keywords: Georges Bataille; Julia Ducournau; transgression; death drive; eroticism; cannibalism

de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

215

To say a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism is to recognise the inherent relationship between Eros and Thanatos, romance and horror, devouring and destroying. Such is the endeavour of Georges Bataille; to emphasise the centrality of death and desire to a general economy in which transgression gives way to a mode of non-productive expenditure. The sentiment 'a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism' is taken quite literally by the protagonist of Julia Ducournau's 2016 coming-of-age horror film *Raw*. Little is known about Justine except that she is going into her first year of veterinary college, an education that runs in the family. She identifies herself as average, a virgin, and above all, a vegetarian. As emphasised throughout the film, the consumption of meat is an enforced taboo in Justine's familial structure. This is the foundation for Justine's imminent transgression, taking form in not only the consumption of meat, but human flesh. Furthermore, it is a consumption intrinsically linked to the erotic. For in cannibalistic eroticism, Justine excessively consumes in such a way that extends beyond, but does not break, the institutional transgressive economy.

Current reviews of Raw praise Ducournau's portrayal of the transgressive nature of female sexuality, the subversion of the coming-of-age-narrative, and reference to the female cannibal in the history of French cinema. In one of the only academic essays on Raw at present, the book chapter 'Navigating the Mind/body Divide: The Female Cannibal in French Films Grave (Raw, 2016), Dans ma peau (**In My Skin, 2002**), and Trouble Every Day (2001),' Kath Dooley states that Justine 'disrupts the patriarchal gaze,' her cannibalism acting as 'an act of rebellion against established gender norms' (**Dooley, 2019: 63**). Another reviewer applauds how Justine 'becomes liberated from norms' (**Rapold, 2016: 8**). However, while these readings refer to radical liberation, Raw's conclusion conversely struck me as deeply fatalistic toward transgression and its role in the gendered social order. This reads as a misstep for Ducournau, as her own statement about the film rejects patriarchal determinism:

> *I wanted to get away from determinism… It was interesting to show a young woman who is not scared... This kind of representation of young girls' sexuality is too common, the idea that is it like losing something. Quite the opposite: Justine gains an identity and a unique relationship that cannot be pigeonholed, and she is triumphant* (**Selavy, 2017: 53**).

But by the end of Raw, no 'unique identity' is so. Her cannibalism as an unleashed, feminine excess that is active instead of passive is subsumed back into the nuclear family structure. The familial structure is not overturned, but rather accommodates Justine's rebellion as a product of its own design. Perhaps Ducournau's confused approach to dissent

[de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228](#)

216

testifies to just how incoherent a politics and aesthetics of transgression has become.

The conversation around transgression persistently revolves around its capacity for destroying limits and overturning systems, as if it is a tool for carving out radically new ways of being. For Bataille, transgression is powerful in that it not a tool to be utilised, but is in excess of the utilitarian order. However, as a release of excess, transgression emerges within patriarchal-capitalist structure as an extension beyond systematic prohibition, cyclically recurring as a function of the system's own organisation. In this way, transgression is not a means to the permanent eradication of the prevailing social order, but rather an ecstatic event occurring through the codes of limitation. Bataille identifies eroticism as a key mode of transgressive, non-productive expenditure that is indicative of the dominant social strata. Nevertheless, in flashing moments of erotic feeling, Bataille locates a mystical inner experience that connotes an excessive 'spirit of sacrifice' that extends beyond, but does not break, the system organised transgression. The sacred instant of sacrifice is what Bataille values in certain transgressive acts, in that it is vital to communicate beyond the self as a thing, an object in the world of work. It is the transient, spiritual annihilation of the 'self' as defined by the human ideals of individualism, productivity, and teleological narratives of progress. It is a communication with death in order to live ecstatically, if only for a moment.

As I argue in this article, Ducournau's Raw ultimately depicts the inability of transgression to exit social laws entirely, extending Bataille's notion that transgression occurs through the socio-economic codes that bring it into being. However, while Ducournau's confused resolution portrays the destructive force of transgression as something to be overcome, Bataille insists that in the instant of sacrifice we embrace a transient pleasure that extends beyond the profanity of human endeavour. Therefore, I will begin by mapping the interplay between the transgressions of Raw and Bataille's general economy, moving forward to an examination of the pitfalls of transgression in Raw. I will then examine the role of eroticism in Raw in order to illustrate the remaining importance of transgression-as-sacrifice for Bataille; as a sacred moment of inner experience wherein the self luxuriates in its own death. This will be supported by a speculative psychoanalytic reading, Sabina Spielrein's premier 1912 essay 'Destruction as a Cause for Coming into Being.' Here eroticism is an operation of the death drive; a desire to exit the accursed, repressed existence to which humankind is fated, but with no teleological coherency of its fulfillment.

de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

217

Raw, Transgression, and the General Economy

While it is often placed at the heart of his work, transgression is only a fragment of what Bataille calls the general economy. This analysis is embedded in Bataille's wider evaluation of humankind's relation to excess in *The Accursed Share* (1949). Here Bataille aims to illustrate a *general* rather than *restricted* economy, the latter of which can only isolate and explain the forces of need. A general economic theory evaluates the wider dispersal of energy at play in the materially efficacious forces of desire. As Bataille explains:

> *The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically* (**Bataille, 1988, vol 1: 21**).

Underlying human existence lies an excess of energy that is not accounted for in a life solely based on need. In this domain, dynamic life takes place and systems grow. Civilisations are built, but such civil harmony privileges a calculated precision to maintain productivity. In the modern world, enlightenment ideals make human existence synonymous with consciousness, reason, and progress. That is to say, the capitalist myth of progress wherein history is a linear continuum of improvement toward the goals of growth. Irrational drives and violent desires are in excess of such civilised calculations. So, the indulgence of excess moves toward the non-human, the irrational. As civilisation develops beyond its immediate needs, the excess that threatens the stability of human civilisation must be squandered in acts of mass frivolity. Bataille thus reads transgression, along with the taboo, as a release of excess energy in accordance with certain *organised* limits. In the case of patriarchal-capitalism, the taboo guards its two necessary foundations; productive work and the regulation of sexual promiscuity. This involves the temporal division of the world into two social realms; the *profane* and the *sacred* as they dictate the experience of work time, and that which disrupts work time respectively. In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1952) Bataille provides a revised definition of these two terms that differ from their common usage.

The *profane* dictates the law and defines what the taboo prohibits, thus allowing for work and productivity. As Bataille states; 'Taboos are there to make work possible; work is productive; during the profane period allotted to work consumption is reduced to the minimum consistent with continued production' (**Bataille, 1962: 68**). The profane, utile value of labour thus separates humanity from themselves as 'that which is,' a being

de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

218

in intimate continuity with immediate experience, into a discontinuous *thing*, a means to productive forces: 'the introduction of labour into the world replaced intimacy, the depth of desire and its free outbreaks, with rational progression, where what matters is no longer the truth of the present moment, but, rather, the subsequent result of operations' (**Bataille, 1988: 57**). The profane thus dictates a teleology of progress, wherein the immediacy of the present, filled with desire and potential, is repressed by an accumulative striving toward the future goals of the prevailing system. However, the side of the sacred contains all that is repressed by the taboo; it is the realm of intoxication, intimacy, violence, and consumption. It is the domain of non-productive expenditure (**Bataille, 1962: 68**). But as Bataille insists, the nature of the taboo is temptation; it invites its own transgression. Profane time both prohibits, and is complemented by, the sacred time of transgression. Sacred days of the festival and other such intoxicating rituals allow for the necessary squandering of excess energy outside of work time. By organising transgressions based in ritual and custom, the civil world of work is maintained through the release of excess. To quote:

> *Organised transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is. The frequency and the regularity of transgressions do not affect the intangible stability of the prohibition since they are its expected complement* (**Bataille, 1962: 65**).

In *Raw*, these ritual acts are expressed in the hazing Justine experiences as a freshman at veterinary college. The school itself is a dreary complex of brutalist architecture. The morbid occurrences that take place (surgery, slaughter) are contained within this harsh structure. On her first night, Justine is awoken by a terrorising band of masked figures who subject the freshmen to various levels of humiliation, before guiding them to a sweaty, drug-fuelled basement rave where debauchery runs rampant. In other words, it is a modern Dionysian festival. The harsh rigidity of the school environment is thus alleviated by the feasting that takes place within its subterranean depths. The next day, classes continue with discipline and rigour.

This organised, transgressive rite invites Justine's transgression of a second order; that of the familial. This takes place at the second initiate meeting. Here Justine is forced to break the most forbidden taboo according to her familial law; the eating of meat. Specifically, a raw rabbit kidney chased with a shot of tequila. The freshmen are also doused in animal blood as they chant ritualistic verses. Thus Justine transgresses the prohibition of her familial law in order to become a part of the larger, transgressive collective at play. This initiates Justine's appetite for meat

de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

219

that will eventually lead to a transgression beyond the organised ritual through the (literal) cannibalisation of its own excesses.

When speaking of organised transgression, Bataille speculates as to whether transgression beyond organised limits is possible. Moreover, what is the role of cannibalism in this order? If transgression were to emerge as a complete override of the taboo, this would be a return to violence without a limited character. It would be absolute animal violence, a character of which cannibalism is a feature (**Bataille, 1962: 35**). Bataille historically interprets this possibility in the death of the sovereign: 'if death prevails over a sovereign whose exalted position might seem to be a guarantee against it, that sense of rupture gets the upper hand and disorder knows no bounds' (**Ibid: 66**). Here Bataille references Roger Callois, a contemporary and friend, who summates the traditional role of the sovereign-as-sacred: 'When social and natural life are summed up in the sacred person of a king, the hour of his death determines the critical instant and loses ritual licence' (**Callois, 1950: 151**). However, as Callois evaluates, the transgressions that occur during this time of disorder are still acts of sacrilege; the breaking of all-too-human rules that define the nature of the transgression itself (**Ibid: 153**). While it loses its organised character, the transgression beyond organised limits still 'has nothing to do with the primary liberty of animal life':

> *It opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it* (**Bataille: 1962: 67**).

Transgression can never entirely return to a permanent, primordial stage, although it can reach the limit of its possibility when its sanctioned character is lost. Thus, as Bataille admits, when it comes to transgression as the absolute return to animal violence; 'nothing of the kind is so' (**Bataille, 1962: 35**). Let us now, then, examine the dynamic of Justine's cannibalistic transgression as it appears to breach the allowance of the organised ritual, and her own restricted humanity.

Toward the end of the film, Justine and her sister Alexia (both of whom have been exposed as cannibals) fight like animals on campus during class-time as their peers look on with horror. They have brought the sacred rite of transgression into the hours of profane work. This implies that the two have operated outside the transgressive limit at play in the institution, and the sisters walk away exhausted and bloodied, arms around each other in solidarity with their animalistic behaviour. However, while the sisters may glimpse beyond transgression's ritual character, *Raw's* final moments reveal that cannibalism is a hereditary urge inherited by the women in Justine's family. Her father has the bite marks to show for it. It is in this

de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

220

way that Justine and Alexia are returned to the organisation of a specifically *feminine* excess within the familial order. *Raw's* treatment of female transgression leaves the law of the father intact. While it is constantly threatened, it is not destroyed. It is only scarred, as if to withstand collateral damage as repressed energy is transgressively released. What once separated Justine from the familial, the consumption of meat, is in fact returned with increased force to the patriarchal condition of repressed female sexuality. From this point on, the women of Justine's family are subordinated to a higher moral order wherein their excesses resume a state of regulation. While the women cannibals of *Raw* appear to be moving toward the radically other, they are rather performing another act of organised transgression in the coming-of-age ritual.

Ducournau's praise of Justine's 'escape from determinism' is an attempt to reject the determinism of transgression itself, of impulsive destruction and indulgence. Ducournau's answer is further repression, to turn from the violence of excess and gain a stable self-identity. But this attitude ignores what is valuable for Bataille; transgression as the sacrificial desire to exit the human condition, but which is precisely *impossible*. The task of transgression is an eternal drive toward the impossible at the *limit* of what is *possible.* For Bataille, this is the impulsive *spirit of sacrifice*; of non-productive expenditure in its formless immediacy that, *for an instant,* is not reducible to the means of production and the human ideal. Therefore, a focus on Bataille's sacrifice illuminates *Raw's* extreme transgressive moments as defined by their losses, not by their gains.

The Spirit of Sacrifice and the Sacred Instant

Bataille exemplifies sacrifice as a sanctioned, transgressive form of excess expenditure in an analysis of the Aztec death cults (**Bataille, 1988: 45**). Therein, the ritual of sacrifice squanders excess resources in devotion to a shared, sacred belief. Sacrifice, wherein victim, executioner, and spectator identify as one in the presence of death, is a mode of non-productive expenditure that delivers one into a sacred continuity with the immediate experience of the collective:

> *The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals… This sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one* (**Bataille: 1962: 22**).

For Bataille, this expenditure that is also a consumption is a means by which beings *communicate* beyond the homogenous structure of

language; 'Consumption is the way in which separate beings communicate. Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite between those who consume intensely' (**Bataille, 1988: 58**). Consumption delivers beings from their profane identity in the instant of the sacred act that, while serving the persistence of the dominant structure, travels to the limit of its suspension. As Bataille describes; 'there is a specific motive behind every sacrifice: an abundant harvest… or any other logical objective; nonetheless, in one way or another every sacrifice has its cause in the quest for a sacred instant that, for an instant, puts to rest the profane time in which prohibitions guarantee the possibility of life' (**Bataille, 1955: 39**). While transgression serves the completion of systematic prohibition, it also gives way to an ecstatic temporality of the *instant*. In the sacred instant, profane ground gives way to a totality which necessarily negates the oppressive, hierarchical structure of language and the subject-object relation. The instant is a *moment* of *nothingness* that is immanently non-productive to the profane temporality of capitalist progress; pure waste beyond the utility of work. It is the instantaneous space wherein the self and other are no longer separate as things, but continuous in the shared sacred experience.

But in the modern world of work, communal sacrifice does not emerge as it once did. The interests of the slaughterhouse are concerned with the production of meat for sale, with the language of labour. The sacrificial victim is not identified with in a collective sacred experience. However, as Bataille describes in an essay on the auto-mutilation of Vincent Van Gough, while the custom of sacrifice may be in decline, its spirit remains as a 'drive revealed by inner experience' (**Bataille, 1985: 67**). For modern humanity, sacrifice is not a 'vulgar figurative sense of the word,' but rather 'the facts with which it has remained unconsciously associated' (**Ibid: 67**). The assumption that the sacred is no longer present in the modern world of work is a myth; the sacred temporality of the instant persists as that which disrupts the profane order of objectification. The slaughterhouse is of the same sacred order as the temple, but its access has been restricted. The desire for excess expenditure thus fragments into a myriad of forms as the spirit of sacrifice persists. The decline of religious sacrifice in the modern world does not decrease its practise, but rather multiplies the potential forms of its occurrence in the absence of a single, homogenous rite. In lieu of the sacrificial temple, of sacred organisation in the place where blood flows, the irrational desire toward sacrifice erupts in a variety of everyday disorders. It may spontaneously erupt in the most maddening suspensions of profane life. Bataille gives the example of Van Gough cutting off his own ear; a self-mutilation emerging from an excessive inner experience in which the ideals of human consciousness are resisted in the writhing of flesh.

Thus, a look at the violent excesses of *Raw* in the spirit of Bataille's sacrifice may illuminate some redemptive qualities of its transgression. As I will argue here, this is incarnate in Bataille's assessment of eroticism, exemplified by Justine's erotic cannibalism as a moment of sacrificial communication. This plays out in *Raw* amid Justine's simultaneous drive toward pleasure, and drive toward death. In order to illuminate this libidinal sacrifice at play in Bataille and *Raw*, the theory of the death drive requires attention. This is primarily extrapolated in psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein's 'Destruction as a Cause for Coming into Being' (1912), and Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

Sacrifice as Death Drive, Death Drive as Eroticism

In her premier essay, Spielrein defined the reproductive drive as consisting of two paradoxical but inherently entwined components: the drive toward destruction and the drive toward coming into being. Within this configuration, change cannot occur without an element of destruction- from the biological level of two cells merging, to the 'destructive component of the sexual instinct' in the intimate union of two beings (**Spielrein, 1994: 157**). To summarise, Spielrein states:

> *Self-preservation is a static drive because it must protect the existing individual from foreign influences; preservation of the species is a 'dynamic' drive that strives for change, the 'resurrection' of the individual in a new form. No change can take place without destruction of the former condition* (**Spielrein, 1994: 174**).

The recurrent observation of joy in destruction cannot be explained by the reductive evaluations of the ego as only desiring *pleasure*. That is to say, a pleasure in stability and self-preservation. Rather, beings desire to communicate beyond the individual self, to be part of the collective. This requires a dynamic in which the individual must be de-stabilised in a form of death.

This is taken up by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he names the death drive, defining it as the irrational desire to undo the personal psyche. That is to say, it is the desire to return to an earlier state of being undivided by the repressive tendencies that preserve individual stability. The death drive is the repetition toward this satisfaction that, when obstructed by repression, takes the 'backward path… though with no prospect of bringing the process to a conclusion or of being able to reach the goal' (**Freud, 1961: 36**). The drive toward that which is absent, repressed, is thus to return to an earlier state of things that endlessly demands its impossible satisfaction. This necessarily involves the death of the present form, but without any interest in completing this task once and for all. Rather, traumatic actions and events are repeated; one falls

apart and comes together endlessly. The temporal order at play is not one of progress, wherein the self is continuously perfected with a higher purpose in mind, but the perpetual resistance to this ideal. Destructive moments erupt as a chance-becoming in the ongoing drive toward death that has no rational conclusion, but irrationally desires the perpetual return of desire itself in the ongoing cycle of destruction and rebirth. It desires the possibility for more possibilities, to plunge into the creative moment between destruction and rebirth that is filled with pure potential.

It is in this way that Spielrein and Freud speculatively deduce that the reproductive drive in fact strives for the 'destruction of the former condition' in order for change to take place, but without any teleological understanding of reaching an end goal once and for all. For it is not only death that is moved toward, but resurrection. It continuously desires to undo in order to become again. How, then, may one die while still living, live in order to die, die in order to live, again, and again? Bataille responds to such a question by pointing to the simultaneously gratifying and lacerating experience of eroticism.

Eroticism is so because it is in excess of the animal act of procreation; '…eroticism is the sexual activity of man to the extent that it differs from the sexual activity of animals. Human sexual activity is not necessarily erotic but erotic it is whenever it is not rudimentary and purely animal' (**Bataille, 1962: 29**). Eroticism emerges as an excessive desire that is not only concerned with the sexual act of reproduction, but the psychological implications of human sexuality. Eroticism is thus also informed by the social matrix of taboo and transgression with all its temptations, perversions, and ecstasies. In this way, eroticism is like the death drive in that it exceeds self-preservation, instead seeking a communication that threatens the stability of the individual. For eroticism is a spiritual sacrifice, wherein self and other must sacrifice their *discontinuous* existence as separate beings, in order to come together as *continuous*:

> *We cannot imagine the transition from one state to another one basically unlike it without picturing the violence done to the being called into existence through discontinuity… The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives* (**Bataille, 1962: 17**).

The act of erotic consumption is 'violent' in that it momentarily destroys profane beings in order to communicate at the level of sacred continuity. The nature of eroticism as sacrifice thus led Bataille to declare: 'eroticism is assenting to life even in death' (**Bataille, 1962: 11**). Eroticism is one of the many ways one may travel to the limit of what is possible in the desire for the impossible: the loss of self to the point of death. In *Raw*, Justine's erotic impulses are inherently linked to an intense consumption that

de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

224

delivers her into a state of continuity. This specifically takes place in the consumption of human flesh.

After eating meat, Justine develops a full body rash. It is literally an itch she cannot scratch until she feasts upon flesh once more. Her appetite for death is insatiable; it is an ecstasy craved by the body, found in the indulgence of luxury. It becomes apparent that Justine must indulge even further, or rot as her body literally rejects the repression she is attempting to re-instate. Her first taste of human meat occurs when her sister, Alexia, insists on giving Justine a Brazilian wax in a bid to encourage sexual promiscuity. During this procedure there is a freak accident. Alexia's finger is cut off, and Justine cannot resist the urge to taste it. Here Justine indulges her most transgressive desire in the act of incestuous cannibalism. The interplay between the erotic and the eating of meat finds its climax when Justine loses her virginity. During the experience, she bites into her own flesh, overcome by the desire to consume, and be consumed. Repression is discontinuous; Justine's body withers. But sacrifice is continuous; her body is not feeble and decayed, but luxurious and delectable. Here *Raw* actualises the way in which eroticism and sacrifice are inherently intertwined, not only in the spirit of ecstatic communication, but also in the way both necessarily, as Bataille attests, 'reveal the flesh.' As he continues:

> *Sacrifice replaces the ordered life of the animal with a blind convulsion of its organs. So also with the erotic convulsion; it gives free rein to extravagant organs whose blind activity goes on beyond the considered will of the lovers. Their considered will is followed by the animal activity of these swollen organs. They are animated by a violence outside the control of reason, swollen to bursting point and suddenly the heart rejoices to yield to the breaking of the storm. The urges of the flesh pass all bounds in the absence of controlling will. Flesh is the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency* (**Bataille, 1962: 92**).

Bataille has a small passage on cannibalism in *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, speaking to its ritualisation by the 'pious cannibal' who consumes the symbol of Christ's body at mass (**Bataille, 1962: 72**). But this is a transposition of the flesh. No blood is spilled, no flesh consumed. It is the writhing of bodies, their swollen organs and viscera, that suspend the discontinuity of the individual will and travel to the limit of possible collective continuity. As Marx insisted that revolution start in the coal mines, in the 'bowels of the earth' as in the 'bowels of proletarians,' Bataille too insists on a sacrifice wherein the 'low' impulses of the body are a model for resisting the profanity of individualism, capitalist progress, and accumulation (**Bataille, 1985: 35**). For Justine, a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism because every erotic act is a sacrifice of profane self-

stability for the divine communication of the flesh. It is to become collectively continuous in the act of individual things coming apart.

Like Callois' king whose death erupts in a collective moment of transgression beyond the master's sanctioned ritual, cannibalistic eroticism is a similarly 'sovereign' experience for Justine beyond the ritual of the institution. But this moment does not last. Transgression may extend beyond the profanity of the human social order, but it does not destroy it once and for all. For transgression is inherent to the structure of human civilisation. There is no extinction of desire, no ultimate satisfaction. In the matrix of transgression, Justine perpetually drives. A few scenes later Justine is found pillaging yet another college party with the fervour of a starved Dionysian who is ultimately unsatisfied with the offerings of the buffet. The death drive is thus depicted with no knowledge of its absolute fulfilment. It is in this way, however, that existence is dynamic and asserts movement. It is the limit that makes transgression possible, that allows for the intensity of the impossible desire to be felt. For Bataille, this is what is relished in the moment of sacrificial potential: the suspension of the profane order in the sacred instant of immediate experience that will continue to threaten the prevailing system again, and again, again...

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I return to the existing evaluations of *Raw,* and indeed the proclamations of Ducournau herself. When viewed through Bataille's general economy of transgression, the claims that Justine is 'liberated from gender norms' and 'disrupts the patriarchal gaze' do not accurately explain what occurs. For in *Raw*, the institutional transgressive economy, and that of the familial order, complete the prohibition at play. Justine is not ultimately liberated from her profane existence, but rather remains stuck in a system of repression. As Bataille makes clear, transgression is complementary to the taboo; it allows for the release of excess that conserves social functioning in organised acts. However, in Justine's cannibalistic *moments*, she illustrates the importance of transgression for Bataille: that in this system of limitation an impossible, extreme desire to sacrifice the profane order indulges in its potential. For the system's very basis is a tumultuous oscillation between explosion and subservience, the taboo inviting its transgression, the excess of its own making spent 'gloriously or catastrophically.' It breeds the excess that constantly threatens the stability of profane ground. It is in this way that transgression should be understood as an irrational indulgence of an instability inherent to the system's in-built failures, not a dialectical means to eradicate social codes once and for all. For the nothingness of the sacrificial moment resists dialectical conclusions.

It is in the excessive *spirit of sacrifice* that Bataille locates the limit of what is possible for a transgression that extends beyond the sanctioned religious ritual. For sacrifice suspends the profane order of individuality and capitalist progress, giving way to the *sacred instant* of immediate experience. Regarding Duournau's rejection of the notion that sexuality is like 'losing something,' I conversely respond with affirmation. To Bataille, eroticism *is* to lose oneself. Not to be treated as an object, but to lose one's profane status *as* an object, thus predicating a sacrifice in order to communicate as a continuous being. Eroticism exemplifies the spirit of sacrifice as that which cannot be explained as static self-preservation, but rather an ecstatic self-destruction that gives way to collective communication. This is where primeval, non-human desire finds itself; not in its absolute fulfilment, but in its *drive.* In the impulse itself with no end point once and for all, but the eternal return of things coming together and falling apart. It is this recurring, sacred instant of lived experience that allows for the exuberance of death in the utmost pleasures of life.

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de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

227

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de Leeuw. Exchanges 2020 7(2), pp. 215-228

228

Haun-Maun-Khaun: A Postcolonial Reading of the Cannibals in Some Fairy Tales from Colonial Bengal

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Abstract

This paper offers a postcolonial reading of some Bengali fairy tales, including selections from Folk-Tales of Bengal (the 1883 collected edition by Reverend Lal Behari Dey); Thakurmar Jhuli (Grandmother's Bag Of Stories), a collection of Bengali fairy tales by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder (1907); and Bengal Fairy Tales, a 1920 edited volume by F. B. Bradley-Birt (a work by the British diplomat serving in India, which alludes frequently to Mitra Majumder's text). It interprets the symbols and stalk images used in these texts in terms of the relationship of coloniser versus colonised. It argues that the depictions of the cannibal demons in these fairy tales have an emblematic significance akin to the expression of the anti-colonial resistance and the postcolonial reaction to the contemporary sociocultural scenarios of colonial India.

Keywords: cannibal; postcolonial; fairy tales; Indian folk tales; subaltern identity; allegory; children's literature; nationalist movement

> *In the Land of Ire, the belief in fairies, gnomes, ogres and monsters is all but dead; in the Land of Ind it still flourishes in all the vigour of animism.* (**Jacobs, 1892: Foreword**)

Bill Ashcroft, quoting Peter Hulme says that 'cannibal' has 'originally (been) proper name of the man-eating Caribs of Antilles' (**Ashcroft, 2000: 26; Hulme, 1986: 16**). The term 'Canibales' was first found in Columbus's journal, where he writes that the local Arawaks regarded a particular island with great trepidation saying: that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called 'canibales'. Of these last, they showed great fear; and he says that when they saw that this course was being taken, they were speechless, because these people ate them and because they were very warlike. To the question as to why the term "cannibalism" was taken as synonymous to anthropophagy, Hulme finds the answer lying in the complex struggle that was going on in the European mind in order to define the identity of the new world. The struggle was the rhetorical trope of idealisation and debasement between the concepts of civilisation and savagery. In the postcolonial context of representation, cannibals had always been associated with the inferior 'others', that is unknown and unfathomable and, therefore, dangerous.

In the book *Dinner with a Cannibal*, Carole A Travis-Henikoff writes 'a few people believe their ancestors practiced cannibalism, and some scholars deny its existence altogether, but the truth is we all have cannibals in our closets' (**Travis-Henikoff, 2008: 24**). Critics have various opinions regarding the possibility and plausibility of cannibalism. Some of them have rejected the medieval accounts of cannibalism, on the grounds that travellers' tales of 'Anthropophagi' were no more reliable than their tales of 'men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders' (**Shakespeare, 1868: 15**). Geoffrey Sanborn writes in the book *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader*

> *In the early-nineteenth century, a more common way of challenging the use of cannibalism as an image of bestial lust was to suggest another motive to act: either famine, vengeance, superstition, or desire to terrorise.* (**Sanborn, 1998: xiv**)

This article aims to analyse the representation of cannibalism in Indian (namely Bengali) fairy tales of the colonial era; and, in doing so, highlights the complex symbolic significance of the usage of cannibal-human relationship as a narrative trope. My paper shows also that the ambivalence shown towards cannibalism in these fairy tales encapsulates the whole sentiment of colonial trauma and retaliation that the colonised Indians felt towards their imposed colonial realities. While the 'White Civilised' texts have taught them to believe that they are the uncivilised

barbaric cannibals to be feared and loathed, their reality points towards the other side of the narrative where the colonisers are the metaphorical cannibals who eventually devour them.

From the very beginning, human cannibalism has been practiced in different forms and they have been classified as survival cannibalism, endo-cannibalism, exo-cannibalism, medicinal cannibalism, or merely gastronomic cannibalism. There also have been examples of ritualistic cannibalism among the Aghoris, where the practitioner '(c)osmologically, sees everything as One, and therefore Aghoris[i] eat human flesh, not because they are cannibals, but because it is part of an intensified ritual' (**Kaliff, 2017: 62**). But, in the colonial context it can be seen as an essential tool, employed by the colonisers, in order to justify the domination of the unsullied Western 'self' over the barbaric Oriental 'others'. Eric Cheyfitz says that 'beginning with Columbus, the idea of cannibalism developed not as an anthropological fact but as a political fiction that the West employed to justify its exploitation of Native Americans' (**Cheyfitz, 1997: 143**). It has often been noted that, in such context, cannibalism has been a false creation based on fanciful and opportunistic imagination.

In spite of the squeamishness regarding the acceptance of cannibalism and the ghastliness associated with it, quite curiously of all places, it is in the children's literature where cannibalism appears in its most vivid and gory form. The fairy tales, almost all over the world, recognise, if not celebrate, cannibalism. In his book *Beyond the Looking Glass* Jonathon Cott says, 'cannibalism is an obsessive theme in the fairy tale... Some scholars have argued that it represents simply a vestigial memory of a time when human beings did in fact eat each other both ritually and in combat; or perhaps rather the vestiges of an attempt to exorcise that primordial hunger and the guilt it occasions...' (**Cott, 1973: xiv**)[ii]. However, fairy tale representation of cannibalism is a very interesting discourse as it is a curious blend of simultaneous acceptance and denial of the very core concept of cannibalism. In other words, it enters the dangerous trajectory of whether a human being is capable of eating another fellow human being and, if s/he can, how to place them in the cognitive reality of human civilisation. Cannibalism in fairy tales is neither conceived as a convention nor denied as an improbability; rather it is conveniently shoved off to the account of the 'others' who have been deliberately designed as the non-normative in the discourse created by the normative 'self'. By this, I mean the self that defines itself and others in terms of its own ideas of the good and the right: it justifies its actions, its beliefs about whom and what it is and should be, and it designates anything that is non-self as the 'others'[iii]. These 'others' are always beyond the periphery of the coded norm of normalcy (**Warner, 1998: 158**).

In his seminal text *Morphology of the Folktales* Vladimir Propp says that often the fairy tales contain the same action ascribed to different characters and depending on the context of the fairy tale, in terms of time, place and culture, the role of the evil force can take different shape of witches, snakes, monsters or man-eating goblins. Indian fairy tales are no exceptions (**Propp, 1968: 27-28**). In Indian fairy tales, such ominous forces are depicted through the characters of Rakshasas or man-eating ogres. These ogres exist as the pariah to be feared and, ultimately, to be killed if human beings want to survive.

In Indian fairy tales, the identity of cannibals is not very clearly defined. Whether they are some sub- or super-human creatures (or they are just ordinary human beings with the habit of eating flesh of other human beings), we never come to know for certain. In spite of the fact that there are plentiful tales of these ogres, we never actually come to know the true identity of these cannibals, for the simple fact that none of these narratives is uttered through the voice of the cannibal ogres themselves. It is always the man talking about the man eater. Thus, in the Indian context, these cannibals always have remained as the subalterns— the marginalised ones deprived of any voice to speak for their own (**Gramsci, Introduction, 1992: 1-64**).

References to cannibals are found in texts from as early as the Vedic period. In early Vedic texts, there are mentions of *Yatu*[iv] or *Rakshasa* (the cannibals). In verse VII, 104; and in X, 87, these two terms have been used interchangeably to signify the agency of physical harm to human beings. *Rig Veda X*, 61. 6 (1500-2000 BC) is replete with many such mentions (**Oldenberg, 1988: 174**). In the Indian version of *The Ramayana*, (700-400 BC) Valmiki narrates his story about the Rakshasas who come from the southern tip of India and attack at night when their powers are manifold. *The Ramayana* continues narrating the story of the victory over the Rakshasas when Ravana (the Rakshasa king) was killed in a duel by Rama, the Aryan prince from the north India. In Valmiki's Ramayana, Rakshasas transgress several codes of conduct defined by the Aryan norms. Sheldon Pollock describes these Rakshasas of Valmiki as 'creatures polluted by violence, blood and carnivorous filth, who kill and eat those they kill,' (**Pollock, 2007: 81**). Rama went to the southern part of India (Sri Lanka) to chastise and destroy these deviating creatures in the name of restoring purity and sanity.

The Ramayana depicts Rama as the Aryan prince of Ayodhya (northern India)—the definite white male 'self'. His wife Sita is forcefully abducted by the Rakshasha king, Ravana of Lanka (Sri Lanka). Sita is more of a symbolic figure than a real human being—she is the daughter of the earth and thus symbolises the land or earth itself. It is Rama's responsibility to

rescue Sita from the hand of Ravana and by doing so, Rama would be owning the right of the land that belongs to Ravana. Such imperial mission must be backed by a justifying narrative that fits the Aryan Rama as the righteous conqueror; whereas Ravana stands out as the dangerous and uncivilised 'other'.

The ancient Sanskrit texts glorify the role of Aryans, a group credited with preserving the earliest Vedic texts. Paula Richman says, 'Beginning in the late 1800s, some South Indian social critics identified Aryas as Brahmins and other high castes who colonised the South. In turn, they identified the creatures called Rakshasas in *Ram Katha* with indigenous inhabitants of the South whom they classify as 'Dravidian' (after the linguistic term). The critics and social reformers glorify Ravana as a great Dravidian monarch and depict as tragic his slaying by Rama, whom they decry as a land-hungry coloniser from the North eager to expand his kingdom by annexing the south' (**Richman, 2008: 14-15**).

Only a look at the counter narrative of *The Ramayana* would give us an altogether different picture where Ravana is either a great sagacious king of superior intellect and scientific knowledge[v] or a benevolent and a peace loving king who values the lives of his people over anything else.[vi] The Indian version, not only presents the binaristic trope of race, colour, community and the parameter of civilisation set by the high class Aryan conquerors; but also tells, perhaps, one of the earliest tales of colonisation in India. It is the narrative of the white Aryan Rama who was overriding the black Dravidians— a stronger and denser race in the South. The stereotyping of colonial discourse that Homi Bhabha or Edward Said[vii] has pointed out in twentieth century, had already been an age-old practice - at least old enough to occur during the time of *The Ramayana.*

It is often very difficult to validate the reality of cannibalism in ancient India, as there is a very few written evidences available which can authenticate such presence for certain. C. V. Vaidya, scholar of ancient Indian texts, has pointed out that though there was a possibility of cannibalistic practices among the members of the Southern part of India, they were not ogres or the Rakshasas as mentioned in the early Indian texts. Since, most of the time, the narratives of the Southern part came filtered through the Northern Aryan voice, it has been quite a challenge to discern the reality of their existence. It is presumable that the cannibalism had been merely a cultural practice that was not practiced, if ever at all, for a long time (**Vaidya, 2001: 9**). However, the belief that cannibalism was a widely practiced reality, seeped into the Indian mass culture through different legends, folklores and, most unabashedly, through children's literature such as fairy tales. Stemming out of the partial need for

terrorising children, the widely circulated notion of cannibalism was also very convincing to the adult minds.

The tradition of Indian fairy tales had been an oral one—passing on to generation after generation and being circulated orally. They have not been documented until a very recent time, as late as nineteenth century. As is in the case of many oral narratives, the exact authors and the times of their origin are uncertain. They had survived as bedtime stories told by mothers and grandmothers until they were documented in nineteenth century. In the foreword to Indian Fairy Tales, Joseph Jacobs writes in 1894:

> *Though Indian fairy tales are the earliest in existence, yet they are also from another point of view the youngest. For it is only about twenty-five years ago that Miss Frere began the modern collection of Indian folk-tales with her charming "Old Deccan Days" . Her example had been followed by many others.* (**Jacobs, 1892: preface**)

Jacob further stresses that the origin of many of the European Fairy Tales can be traced back to the Indian fairy tales. It was during nineteenth century that the keen enthusiasm for collecting and documenting Indian legends and folklores became prevalent among the British colonisers. With Western education system introduced in India, and a large number of enthusiasts in Indian native culture and travel writing such as Mary Frere (Old Deccan Day, 1868) or Fanny Parkes (The Journals of Fanny Parkes 1822-1846) blooming up, a more than ever deliberate and apparent cultural assimilation between the colonisers and colonised was taking place. While the White colonisers were busy retelling the Indian tales suiting their own colonial fantasies, the Western educated Indian class was taking it upon themselves to put the narrative straight by writing them from their own perspective.

When Miss Frere, John Murray and Joseph Jacobs were narrating the stories that they had collected from India, they were telling the tales that had fascinated them as something remote and exotic coming from the enchanted land of Orient; whereas, when the Indians were telling the same stories, these stories emerged as a part of their childhood memory and of the memories of the upbringing of the whole nation. Their fairy tale land was exotic and fantastic, but it was, nevertheless, the land of their own. The names of the princes and princesses, the landscape, the language that the characters speak—all were part of their very own experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that when the man-eating ogres appear in Frere's *Old Deccan Day* or in Jacobs' *Indian Fairy Tales*, they appear as some exotic beings, no more improbable than the Indian thugs and dacoits (which were extremely popular among the Western readers during this time) were. The acceptance of cannibals to be a part of the

Indian society was as effortless a process as it was an important tool for branding the colonial subjects as the 'others'. What N. L Whitehead tells in his essay, 'Carib Cannibalism. The Historical Evidence' about the Carib Cannibalism, holds true in the case of the easy acceptance of the existence of the man-eating ogres in the Indian context: '(T)he existence of 'cannibals' on the frontiers of 'civilization' had been accepted since classical times and the writings of Herodotus and Pliny, and with sound economic reasons to accept them' (**Whitehead, 1984: 70**).

However, as a counter narrative, when the Indian authors started documenting and making the fairy tales of India available for the posterity, it could be read as an endeavour of self-assertion that attempted to overwrite the narrative of the White Western colonisers. Such construction is, no doubt, a complex rubric of both the acceptance and the denial of the cannibalistic myth. On one hand, the Western educated enlightened Indians could not deny the trope of cannibal ogres as the symbol of dangerous 'others'; on the other hand, they could not come to terms with that identity to be their own. Hence, at the site of such ambiguity, there emerged the cannibal ogres as an icon of anything that threatened the slowly forming identity of Indian nationhood. To understand these texts, produced at the site of colonial identity formation, one might not overlook their allegorical implications. Fredric Jameson in his essay 'Third World literature in an era of multinational capitalism' argued that:

> *(A)ll third-world texts are necessarily…allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or I should say particularly when, their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation...* (**Jameson, 1986: 83**).

In spite of the argument against Jameson's endeavour of drawing a homogeneity among all the third world texts (especially as put by critics like Aijaz Ahmed[viii]) my paper argues that, if not all texts, the fairy tales mentioned in this context can be read as the allegory that is employed to express the complex colonial relationship of the time. In other words, in these texts, cannibalism becomes a complex narrative site where the colonisers and the colonised exist simultaneously; and the identity of the cannibal ogre is a fluid site of ambiguity. These fairy tales, while being read as subversive anti-colonial texts, present the cannibals as the bloodthirsty colonisers - who is eroding the health of the nation by sucking out its wealth and resources.

Perhaps, two of the most important contributions in the field of Indian fairy tales, are *Folk-Tales of Bengal* by Lal Behari Dey (**1883**) and *Thakurmar Jhuli* or 'The Granny's Bag of Tales' by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder (**1907**). Both the books are compilations of the fairy tales, circulating through oral tradition in Bengal. While Lal Behari Dey's version is written in English, Mitra Majumder's text was produced in Bengali—the language that these tales were originally orally circulated in. Mitra Majumder's text was published in 1907 and the preface to the book was written by, none other than Rabindranath Tagore. In the preface, Tagore writes in no uncertain terms that the 'foreign influence' has already ruined the aesthetic beauty of Bengali, even more, the Indian storytelling. He says:

> *In our country, what is more 'swadeshi'[ix] than the granny's bag of tales? But alas! Of late, this fascinating bag (of tales) was coming from the factory of Manchester. For the children of this generation, the 'fairy tales' of the foreign land was becoming the only available option. The (fairy tales) company of our country's grandmothers seems to be totally bankrupt...in the pen of foreign hand, there might be tales (katha) but no beauty (rup).* [x] *Mr. Mitra is a genius. He has kept the traditional language and style of Bengali fairy tales intact* (**author's translation of Tagore, 1907: 2**).

Tagore, in his preface, with his natural humour, has also advised to open a school where the nation's grandmothers must learn the art of telling original Indian fairy tales, and by doing so, help building the mind of the nation. The obvious implication of the preface is to unlearn the Western narrative that has so long been constructing Indian consciousness. It is an endeavour of redefining self, beyond the stereotypical construction by the Western 'others'. Same holds true in the case of Dey's collection of fairy tales. Dey compiled his version after being inspired by Captain R. C. Temple, who had suggested, 'how interesting it would be to get a collection of those unwritten stories which old women in India recite to little children in the evenings...' (**Jacobs, 1892: xi**) Though each of these books has been written in different language and under the influence of seemingly difference inspirations, they have one singular purpose, as quite visible in their prefaces, and that is to tell their own tales in their own voice. Both the books have overlapping stories and they often share stalk characters, episodes, and props: for example, ogress magically turning into beautiful queen; sleeping princess captive in the castle of ogres; golden and silver sticks causing one to sleep and wake; half-human-half-ogre prince; and so on. Among the many other stories, the obvious reference to Rakshasas are in *Kiranmala, Neelkamal ar Laalkamal, Dalimkumar, The Story of Rakshasas, Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi, Heap of Bones, Boy with Moon on Forehead*.[xi]

Kiranmala is a story of two brothers and one sister, Arun, Braun, Kiranmala; whereupon the two brothers go to the 'maya pahar' - or the magic mountain - to bring back the magical tree that produces diamonds and pearls for fruits and flowers. Both Arun and Braun go to the mountain, but they never return back, as they have been turned into stone by magic of the ogres. Seeing her brothers not returning for long, Kiranmala goes to the magic mountain disguised as a prince. She is attacked by the man-eating goblins who appeared as beautiful women to lure men and eat them. Seeing Kiranmala, they chant a litany that goes something like:

> *Hum ham hai*
>
> *E dake rajputra toke gili!*
>
> *E dake rajputra toke khai!*
>
> *(One calls 'prince let me eat you'; another calls, 'prince let me devour you')* (**Ibid**)

But as Kiranmala was a princess, not a prince, she was immune to the traps set by these Rakshasas. The threat of being devoured by the ogres signifies the threat of effacement that has been the fate of Kiranmala's brothers. Such threat of loss is almost synonymous to the threat of castration, as Lacan says, in the hand of the 'others': in this case, the Western 'others'. The White colonial narrative essentially presents the colonisers as the Male and the colonised as the effeminate 'others'. The discourse of colonial narrative, as Kate Teltscher rightly points out in her work, is based on such 'lack'. Teltscher elaborates further as to how the Indian males had been ridiculed, especially during the 1880-90s, because of their supposedly weak and mild dispositions, (contrary to the Western masculinity) — a lacuna that the masculine Englishman would fill. Thus, the effeminate native 'was the necessary anterior moment to the construction of the masculine Englishman' (**Teltscher, 1997, 121-2**).

Even in her disguise as a prince Kiranmala possesses the 'lack' or the lack of phallus (as Lacan would put it, the Symbolic Castration)[xii] and this 'lack' is her strength that makes her immune to the threat of castration. Finally, when Kiranmala brings the jewel-producing tree (which can be interpreted as the restoration of the lost phallus), she ascertains that there would be no further threat of loss in the hand of the cannibal ogres. In her dual gender identity as a successfully cross-dressed prince, Kiranmala represents 'a third space of enunciation' (**Bhabha, 2012: 54**) that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. In her very portrayal, she represents the cultural liminality and occupies 'the outside of the inside; the part in the whole'.

Such duality of existence is further problematised at the site of the cultural collision between the coloniser and the colonised, as is seen in the hybrid identity of the half human-half cannibal characters such as Neelkamal, Sahasra Dal and the seven brothers of Dalim Kumar. In the story *Neelkamal ar Laalkamal*, Neelkamal is a miscegenation between human and cannibal ogre. Neelkamal can be identified with the 'looking-Indian-thinking-British' hybrid race (to whom I refer as the Brown Sahib[xiii]) coming straight out of Macaulay's minute (1835). These Brown Sahibs were the privileged group of people whom the White colonisers found useful and therefore, treated, almost, as one of them; they were also revered by most of the Indians who considered them as their superior by the sheer virtue of their western education and accessibility to the White community. Nilkamal, similarly enjoys the best of the both worlds. Like ogres, he can digest iron peas and is well received both by his human and ogre relatives. Laalkamal and the rest of the human clan consider him to be their saviour. Perhaps the most significant privilege that he enjoys is that the Khokkoshes – the demi-ogres – are afraid of him. These Khokkoshes have an interesting connotation as they emerge as doubly subaltern in the discourse of the fairy tales. Khokkoshes are inferior to the Rakshasas, and therefore are doubly marginalised. The Khokkoshes can be interpreted as the *Adivasis* and the tribal communities whose struggle has been kept out of the mainstream anti-colonial discourse. Rea through Frantz Fanon's lens, Neelkamal symbolises the comprador class that would eventually don on the white mask of the colonisers and repeat the similar cycle of hegemony; where the Khokkoshes would be kept under his control and human beings will be dependent on him for their protection.[xiv] Neelkamal saves both his and his half-brother Laalkamal's life by killing the hierarchically inferior cannibals, Khokkoshes. 'The Khokkoshes die bleeding black' (**Mitra Majumder, 1907: 58**): the very mention of the colour of their blood in itself is racialised. Black represents the skin colour of the tribal people such as Santhals, Mundas, Kuis and the Dravidians of southern India.

Neelkamal ar Laalkamal, also reflects the contemporary insecurity and vulnerability in terms of loyalty to one's nation. While the British Raj was proactively propagating loyalty to the British throne, the Indian nationalist sentiments were also growing stronger in regard to the formation of India as a national identity. Published during the peak of British Raj, *Thakurmar Jhuli* is dealing with a far more delicate business of unconscious adherence to one's root than is visible on the surface level. Such a dilemma is very prominent in Neelkamal's final choice of adherence—a choice that would abolish either his human clan or his ogre clan. Both Neelkamal and Laalkamal goes for their final adventure to the land of ogres; the land of Neelkamal's ogress mother. As the two brothers enter their kingdom, the ogres chant the famous lines: 'haun maun khaun: manusher gondho paun'

(meaning haun maun Khaun, getting the delicious smell of human beings for a meal).

Neelkamal's old ogress grandmother welcomes her grandson with the usual grand-motherly affection—something that the title of the book also celebrates.[xv] Yet, tricking the grandma ogress, Neelkamal discovers the way to put an end to the lives of all the ogres. The life of the ogress queen exists within two bees: killing them would mean the destruction of the whole ogre clan, including Neelkamal's own mother, grandmother, and all his other maternal relations. In the identity of Neelkamal, the question is raised as to where the final loyalty of the newly emerging India must reside. On one hand, there is the non-dynamic Laalkamal —the race of human being who needs Neelkamal's protection in order to save themselves from getting devoured (symbolising the orthodox India that refused to adapt and evolve with the changing time) – and on the other, there is the clan of cannibals who would continue wreaking carnage if not stopped by Neelkamal (symbolising the oppressive British Raj and their exploitation of common people). Whichever side perishes, Neelkamal would metaphorically lose a part of him, but he would remain physically unharmed: the cannibals cannot eat him as human being (he represents the Western-educated elites who were aware of the true nature of the British Raj and, therefore with their weapon of knowledge, invincible), the human beings cannot kill him as cannibals. But Neelkamal's decision is governed by the promise of the final prize—the prize promised, not to any ogre, but to a human prince—the kingdom and the princess. Neelkamal destroys the ogre clan and is declared the king by the side of the human prince Laalkamal. Nevertheless, in spite of being established as a human ruler, the blood of ogres would continue to flow in Neelkamal's vein, in the same fashion as the neo-colonialism has continued to flow in the veins of the post-independence India.

Another interesting half-human-half-ogre hero, Sahasra Dal, appears in the next story, *The Story of Rakshasa*. Both the stories share certain narrative similarities; however, the latter is more complicated in terms of its projection of human-cannibal relationship. Instead of one, there are multiple man-eating ogresses, surfacing at different stages of the story. Spanning three generations, the story can be discussed as an ultimate allegory to the progress of colonisation in India. The story runs as a parallel to the history of British colonisation in India. The story begins with an ogress who befriends a human family and marrying the man, starts living with them: the early stage of British East India company's mercantile ventures. To strengthen her position among the human beings, she lures her newly found husband and his first wife with sumptuous wealth: exchanging gifts to the Indian maharajas and zamindars. The first phase of amicability turns sour as one day the human wife of the Brahmin finds out

the reality of the ogress wife: the colonial expansion and atrocities becoming grossly abject during the early and mid-nineteenth century. In spite of a long peaceful cohabitation, the ogress wife does not hesitate twice to kill and feed on the same family that has once accepted her as their own: the brutal suppression of uprisings and revolts of mid nineteenth to early twentieth century. The character of the ogress in Sahasra Dal's father-in-law's house, is particularly interesting. She is cunning and politically powerful—enough to manipulate Sahasra Dal and create a rift between the brothers. This reminds us of the 'divide and rule' British policy in the Indian subcontinent where the colonial rulers deliberately wanted to create differences among different socioeconomic communities in India.[xvi]

Champa Dal, the human brother of Sahasra Dal, has been thrown out of his own land by the cunning manoeuvre of the ogress. Champa Dal represents the rightful owner and the protector of the land who ultimately has been overthrown by the outsiders who obtained power through their guile. He loses not only his position in the court but his wife, Keshavati, whom the ogress kidnaps in order to appease Sahasra Dal's lusty appetite. Keshavati (the name literally meaning: the one with the lustrous hair signifying fertility) can be read as a symbolic representation of the fertile land. Champa Dal emblematically loses both Keshavati and his rightful ownership of the land. Champa Dal represents the doubly marginalised voice of the non-elite and non-Western-educated Indian mass—the ones who did not get their rightful space in the history of Indian National movement, until a very recent time. The marginalised narratives of the tribal and the *Adivasi* movements like Tilka Manjhi Movement, Sambalpur Revolt, Kherwar Uprising, Santhal Rebellion contributed to the major portion of the Indian independence movement, yet their stories have never got its deserved credit. According to these rebels, they are the 'children of the land' (Bhumi Putra) their culture and tradition have not been diluted by any external influences; they have been unjustly overthrown and deprived of their legitimate right; thus, they ought to be restored to their rightful places [xvii]. In his final odyssey in the quest of Keshavati, Champa Dal reaches the land of ogres where, again, we find the character of the affectionate ogre grandmother. She has kept the princess Keshavati captive and treats her as her own grandchild. Though she has not been eaten by the old ogress, Keshavati knows that she is not one of them. The strong sense of binaristic identity of 'us' versus 'they' becomes prominent in the following conversation:

> *The old Rakkhashi came where the princess was lying, and rousing her with the gold stick, said —*
>
> *" Grandchild, how is it that I smell a human being here? "*
>
> *The princess replied:*
>
> *"It may be it is I whom you smell, satisfy yourself by*
>
> *eating me up."*
>
> *The Rakkhashi said, " Nonsense, thou, the apple of my eye, must not say so"* (**Bradley-Birt, 1920: 183**).

The 'smell of a human being' is a signifier that holds different meaning for Keshavati and the old ogress. For the captive princess, it signifies the presence of Champa Dal or the promise of deliverance from the tyranny of the ogress; for the ogress, it is a threat of encroachment upon her own territory. Keshavati tries to cover up 'the smell' by owning it as her own; whereas the old ogress tries to negate it by reinscribing the identity of Keshavati to be one of their own.

The final moment of the story is a symbolically pregnant one. In the court of Sahasra Dal, Champa Dal appears as a minstrel poet and narrates the history of their old time—the history that has been wiped out from Sahasra Dal's mind by the narrative presented by the ogress. However, by recounting their past, Champa Dal can revive the feeling of fraternity and expose the reality of the ogress. Realising her imminent exposure, and as a final attempt to save her own life, the ogress discards her disguise of a beautiful woman and tries to eat everyone present in the court. The same moment of exposure happens in the story *Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi* where the prince brings the parrot which contains the ogress's life in the court. Both the oral narrative of Champa Dal's past and the parrot signify the wilful cognition that is mandatory in order to see through the facade of the colonial charades. At these points, when the ogresses attempt to eat everyone in the court, cannibalism emerges dialectically as a point of difference between the queen and the rest of the courtiers, and also as a counter-active measure against the agency of power (residing in the parrot or in the oral narrative of history) that overrides the version of history created by the colonial discourse.

The dynamics of the coloniser vs colonised relationship get even more interesting when we are presented with a proposition that it is not in the hand of the Western-Educated Indians or the culturally miscegenated "Brown Sahibs" that the deliverance of the country lies; rather, it is the youth, awakened to the nationalised sentiments, who can bring end to the colonial atrocities. In the next story, *Dalimkumar,* we see that Pashabati, the ogress disguised as a beautiful princess, devours the seven half-

human-half-ogre brothers of Dalimkumar; however, she could not harm the pure-bred human, Dalimkumar. With the Swadeshi movement prevailing all over the country (**Trivedi 2007**) there had been a strong sentiment for products made in India—be it a daily usable commodity or any cultural product; a strong notion was being grounded that only a national hero who could withstand the unjust treatment by the British Raj and emerge fortified, could salvage this near-extinct species called Indian. Dalimkumar can be read as a prototype of a similar kind of national hero as he too has undergone severe ordeals in the hand of the ogres (including a threat to his life as the pomegranate seeds containing his life almost reaches the hand of the ogress queen and he was struck blind by the monstrous snake who aimed to devour him) and emerged victorious by putting an end to the exploitation that the ogress queen and Pashabati were hurling.

The necessity of creating a nationalist icon had also been evident in the celebrated texts of Indian nationalist movement such as *Nil Darpan* (*Indigo Planting Mirror,* 1858) written by Dinabandhu Mitra or *Anandamath (The Abbey of Bliss,* 1882) written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Pather Dabi* (The Right of the Way, 1926) written by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. *Nil Darpan* was banned, instantly after its publication, by the British Government. The text constantly refers the British indigo planters and the colonial rulers as blood sucking 'giants Rahu' 'indigo giant' (**Dinabandhu Mitra, 1861: 59**), deceiving cobras who do not hesitate to bite a child considering its mother's grief (**Ibid: 7**), and 'Cobra de Capello' (**Ibid: 101**). By the side of delineating the colonial rulers as the archenemy, the texts like *Nil Darpan*, anticipates the advent of some national heroes like Torapa or Nobin Madhab who would fight the vice of empire out of their lives:

> *...with his pure blood, (our eldest babu) has extinguished the fire of tyranny of the giants, the Indigo Planters* (**Dinabandhu Mitra, 1861: 93**).

Anandamath – one of the seminal texts to fuel the Indian nationalist movement – created the icon of Mother India who is still celebrated as the incarnation of the country till date. The protagonist in *Anandamath*, Mahendra is a nationalist hero who fights against the injustice of British colonial rulers by tactfully building up his anticolonial project of helping the nationalist monks (the story is written in the backdrop of Sanyasi Rebellion of 1770s). In the similar fashion, Sabyasachi Mallick in *Pather Dabi* tricks the British government by his remarkable intelligence and physical prowess. Both Mahendra and Sabyasachi possess fascinating expertise to outwit the colonial rulers. They are erected as iconic figures who are idealised and trusted by the common mass and are almost as

fascinating as fairy tale princes are. Their singular aim has been to put to an end to the oppression and injustice of the British Raj; and their fights are, in many ways, similar to the fights of the fairy tale princes against the cannibal ogres.

The story *Dalimkumar* can also be read as an interesting parallel to the Indian colonial history. The chess match between the ogress Pashabati and her sisters and seven brothers can be read as a representation of the Battle of Buxar that formally began the rule of British East India Company in India. Pashabati puts a condition before the seven princes that, if they should win the match, Pashabati and her sisters will surrender themselves to the princes; otherwise, the princes will lose everything. Similarly, the battle guaranteed either of the two possibilities: the British East India Company losing their ground in India or the Indian ruling power being formally abolished. As Pashabati and her (apparently weak) sisters could defeat the seven able bodied princes, ten thousand British soldiers defeated the forty thousand Indian soldiers in the battle. The battle ended with the Treaty of Allahabad which offered the Diwani rights (rights of the Imperial Tax Collector) to the British East India Company (1765). This allowed the Company the right to collect tax from the eastern provinces of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa. It resulted in the amassing of a huge fortune by the Company that 'forcefully and oppressively collected tax' from the poor Indians and, by doing so, 'completely drained the economic system' of these provinces (**Prakash: 1998: 322-323**).

Another very poignant allegorical interpretation can be made of the episode of Dalimkumar's ascension to the throne. Dalimkumar has been chosen by the royal elephant to be the king of a land which has no king. Whoever sits on the throne and marries the princess of that kingdom dies that very night. Dalimkumar instantly finds out the reason behind these deaths: on the wedding night, a hidden snake used to come out of the princess's nostrils and eat the groom. The snake symbolises the deliberate hindrance in the path of any possibility of finding a ruler: in other words, the possibility of India's self-governance. Dalimkumar mutilates the metaphorical snake (the cobra de Capello like the Indigo Planters) and by doing so, he ascertains the future of the kingdom—in the same fashion as Kiranmala does by acquiring the magical tree. In fact, snake as the destroyer of human ruler has been a recurrent motif in many of these fairy tales. For example, in the story *Swet and Basanta* a similar snake occupies the body of the princess of the kingdom, and every night it creates a vacuum on the royal throne. This trope re-enacts the drama of the Indian National scenario where the British Government politically maimed the Indians by not giving them any access to the important positions in their own governance. In these tales, the restoration of lives and the kingdom by killing the cannibal snakes or ogres (symbolising restoration of identity

and one's own land), therefore, has been provided as the only desirable and possible solution to the National crisis that the country was facing during that time.

Thus, the whole paradigm of cannibal-human relationship as depicted in these tales revolves around the dynamics of the existential threat and the agency of power to destroy it. It operates on a mutually exclusive level where the both cannot exist together. Yet characters like Neelkamal, Sahasra Dal and seven brothers of Dalimkumar are the archetypal of the conviviality at which the postcolonial world order was gradually aiming. They signify the possible coexistence of terms which are not only binary, but mutually exclusive: the food and the eater. Their body is the site of such impossible cohabitation that would generate a unique identity. They, too, speak of the possibility of the third space that Kiranmala occupies in her un-gendered self. In this newly ascribed third space, cannibalism is no more a compulsion of anthropophagy, rather it is the catalyst that unifies these two otherwise-polarised existences of 'food' and 'eater'; and by subtracting man-eating from 'cannibalism' it mutates into the reclamation of one's own space and agency of power. Nevertheless, to conclude we can look into the fairy tale poem 'Ruptarashi', (from *Thakurmar Jhuli*) that ends with a promise of deliverance from the tyranny of the Rakshasas from the far off 'unknown land'. It gives us a glimpse of the hope that had been cherished by each colonised Indian. What appears as a harmless prattle for children, might be actually allegorising the Indian nationalist sentiment that had gradually been manifested, in a greater form, in the Indian independence movement.

The poem goes:

> *Haun maun khaun! I hear the call of the Rakshasa!*
>
> *Who knows which unknown land they are from!*
>
> *Who knows how far their land is!*
>
> *But one thing is certain! Their clan will be destroyed*
>
> *In the hand of the prince of our land,*
>
> *Such is the prophecy written in the letter of Ruptarashi!* (**Mitra Majumder, 1907**)

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[i] Aghoris are the practitioners of the extreme form of Tantra

[ii] See Perrault, Charles. (1993) *Complete Fairy tales of Charles Perrault*. New York: Clarion. pp. 1-165; Afanasyev, Alexander Nikolaevich. (1855) *Russian Fairy Tales*, New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, (2013) pp-1-672; Hearn, Lafcadio. James, Grace. Chamberlain, Basil Hall. (1918) *Japanese Fairy Tales, Ne*w York: Boni and Liveright. pp. 1-160

[iii] See Bauhn, Per. (2000) *Normative Identity*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International, pp 1-176.

[iv] In Atharva-Veda Yatu Vidya is considered as an occult practice that is associated with tantric practices. However, in *Rig Veda*, it has been considered to be a devilish practice. **(Singh, 2010: 24)**

[v] See: Premachandra, Asoka. (2015) *Ravana , The Story of The Most Distinguished Lankan Monarch,* Mulleriyawa, Sri Lanka : Asoka Publishers

[vi] See: Pattanaik, Devdutt. (2017) *Bhil Ramayana : Ram Sita ni Varta, Hanuman in Lanka* (Penguin Petit) Penguin Random House India Private Limited

[vii] See: Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (1978) New York: Pantheon Books

See: Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*, (1994) London and New York: Routledge

viii See: (**Ahmed: 1987: 3-25**)

ix Officially proclaimed in 1905, Swadeshi is the Indian nationalist movement that professed using things made in India and discarding anything imported from outside

x In Bengali, fairy tales are known as *Rupkatha*, *Rup* meaning beauty, *katha* meaning tales.

xi Some of the stories are found in both the books with slightly altered characters and details; for the convenience of analysis, I omit the tales that overlap each other and mainly analyse the texts which have significant symbolic representation of cannibalism.

xii See: (**Sullivan, 1982: 6-20**)

xiii Term used by Varindra Tarzie Vittachie in the book *The Brown Sahib,* originality published in 1962

xiv See: Fanon, Franz (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press

xv Thakurma means the grandmother who is shown telling her bedtime stories to her grandchildren while they go to sleep.

xvi The essential concept is to create internal strife among the native Indians in order to draw advantages, see Stewart, Neil. (Winter, 1951) *Divide and Rule: British Policy in Indian History. Science & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 49-57

xvii See: Calman J, Leslie, (2019) *Protest in Democratic India: Authority's Response to Challenge*, New York: Routledge