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Editor's Preface

*Editorial Board

On behalf of our contributors, reviewers, editorial board, and editorial team– we warmly welcome you to the sixth issue of *Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies*. *Essence & Critique* publishes academic articles and book reviews written by leading academics, early career researchers and independent scholars who specialize in cultural studies and/or have a background in performance, theatre and drama studies. The work published is intended to be accessible to everyone and at the same time reflect upon key issues and emerging trends in literature and literary criticism while extending existing conversation. Each work that is filtered from the theoretical and practical knowledge of the authors and passed through the filter of field expert referees and editors will be included in the scope of this journal, which aims to close a gap in the world of literature and drama studies.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the issue writers, our associate editors, our book review editors, our international advisory board and especially our editorial assistants for their contribution in delivering this issue. This issue consists of an intellectually dynamic range of materials, discussing works of writing that are not widely represented within our received canon. We are excited about the breadth of illuminating scholarship in this issue and we would like to invite new writers to join us as we offer a platform for them to present their groundbreaking academic work.

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The Identification of the Black Middle Class in Condoleezza Rice's *Extraordinary, Ordinary People*

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on theories by W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Gilroy, and Bernard Bell, the article analyzes the nuanced identification process of the black middle class in contemporary American society through the close reading of Condoleezza Rice's *Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family*. The article argues that the contemporary black American elite possess an ambiguous relationship with the dominant white group and the major subordinate black Americans, and their identification with either group is largely driven by the interests of their own. Moreover, in the post 9/11 era, race, gender, and class differences are appropriated by these black elite to secure their own interests in the power struggle in American society.

KEYWORDS

black middle class, USA, Condoleezza Rice, *Extraordinary, Ordinary People*.

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Introduction

The recent decades have witnessed the rise of powerful black women around the world: Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the President in Liberia, Nonkululeko Nyembezi-Heita, the Chairperson at Standard Bank of South Africa, Ursula Burns, the CEO in Xerox, Oprah Winfrey, the U.S. media celebrity, and Condoleezza Rice, the 20th U.S. National Security Advisor (2001-2005) and the 66th U.S. Secretary of State (2005-2009). The achievements of these black women owe debt to Women's Liberation Movements as well as Racial and Ethnic Minority Rights Movements which have challenged the existent power structure. At the same time, these women's success also poses several important questions for women's studies, race and ethnicity studies, as well as postcolonial studies: how do these prominent black women view their own identities? Which factors influence their identification process? Which group or groups do they represent in an era of global capitalism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism?

Drawing on theories by W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Gilroy, and Bernard Bell, the article analyzes the nuanced identification process of the black middle class in contemporary American society through the close reading of Condoleezza Rice's *Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family*. The article argues that the contemporary black American elite possess an ambiguous relationship with the dominant white group and the major subordinate black Americans, and their identification with either group is largely driven by the interests of their own. Moreover, in the post 9/11 era, race, gender, and class differences are appropriated by these black elite to secure their own interests in the power struggle in American society.

The Racial Discourses in Contemporary American Society

In 1897, W. E. B. Du Bois coined the famous terms "double-consciousness" which described the ambivalent sociopsychological condition of black Americans as a sense of "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Bell 12). Du Boisian double-consciousness highlights the influence of white racist stereotypes on the life and thoughts of black Americans, and foregrounds the constant inner conflict of the person who is simultaneously black and American.

But the racial discourses in the U.S. from late twentieth century to early twenty-first century have undergone great transformation due to two historical events: the civil rights movement from 1950s to 1970s and the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The former has greatly transformed the racial relationships in the U.S.: the social statues of racial minorities have been greatly improved, and the direct control of racial minorities has been changed to implicit discipline. The 9/11 event again transforms the racial paradigms in the U.S. and creates the division among elite members in the racial minority groups.

In the post 9/11 era, a large number of black politicians, entrepreneurs, artists, and

popular stars have emerged in USA during this period. In the post 9/11 era, there are mainly two types of identification for the elite: the first type of elite identify themselves with the ordinary disadvantageous racial minorities and participate in various activities to improve the life of the members in the racial group. The identification of second type of elite is more complex. An apt example is the contemporary elite black American—— Condoleezza Rice.

Among the powerful black women, Condoleezza Rice is the only one who has been an influential figure in education, politics, and commerce since the 1980s. Rice was the assistant professor of political science (1981-1987), the associate professor of political science (1987-1993), the professor of political science (1993-1999) at the Stanford University. She also served as the 10th Provost (1993-1999) and the 8th Director of the Hoover Institution (2020-) at the Stanford University. Since 1986, Rice has been actively engaged in the nuclear strategy in the US government due to her expertise in political science. From 2001 to 2005, she served as the 19th US Security Advisor, and from 2005 to 2009, she took office as the 66th US Secretary of State. Apart from actively participated in education and politics, Rice has closely engaged in the field of commerce. She has served on the board of directors for many famous companies, such as the Carnegie Corporation, the Chevron Corporation, Hewlett-Packard, and the Rand Corporation.

Interestingly, Rice has received polarized evaluations from American public. Some have praised her highly for her many charming features. For instance, the former Stanford University President Gerhard Casper was "greatly impressed by her academic values, her intellectual range, her eloquence" as well as "her judgment and persuasiveness" (Shepard, para. 7) the first time he met Rice as the president candidate when Rice served on Stanford's presidential search committee in 1992. After he became Stanford University President, Casper selected Rice to serve as the university's provost, the chief academic and budget officer. Rice's predecessor Gerald Lieberman also believed that Rice "will make a great provost" because "[s]he has tremendous ability and intelligence, and the maturity of someone far beyond her age" (Shepard, para. 3).

Outside Stanford, Rice is also highly regarded in other universities. For instance, Rice is warmly received during her visit to Chapman University. Professor Lori Cox Han, the director of the presidential studies program at Chapman remarks that, "Dr. Rice is a consequential American policymaker, not only for the time she served in the White House but for breaking important barriers as a woman of color..." (Dumoski, para. 3). Meanwhile, Professor Luke Nichter, the James H. Cavanaugh Endowed Chair in Presidential Studies at Chapman states that, "Secretary Rice is an extraordinary American " (Dumoski, para. 8). Besides the verbal praise of Rice, Chapman University President Daniele Struppa and the trustee Mark Chapin Johnson invited Rice to unveil a bust in her honor to join the Chapman University Collection of Historical

Figures after Rice's discussion with the students, the faculty, and the board members of the university (Dumoski, para. 7).

Diverging from those who highly regarded Rice's talents, some have criticized Rice's ethical standards and betrayal of the interests of black Americans. For instance, Chuck Lewis, the head of the Washington-based Center for Public Integrity criticizes Rice's close ties with Chevron when the company named a tanker after Rice (Marinucci, para. 6) and meanwhile engaged in the violation of human rights in Nigeria (Marinucci, para. 9). In the article "'Con-di-fi -cation': Black Women, Leadership, and Political Power," Carole Boyce Davies analyzes Condoleezza Rice's role in the Bush administration's post 9/11 domestic and international policies. Davies charges Rice of being the spokesperson for U.S. imperialism and neglecting the interests of black community. She incisively remarks that the relationship between Rice and the Bush family reflects Zora Neale Hurston's formulation of the "pet negro system" which describes "a certain mutual benefit to dominating white society as to the co-opted black intellectual or creative figure" (Davies 397). Furthermore, Davies coins the term "condification" to criticize the black elite such as Condoleezza Rice who works publicly "against the larger interests of the groups to which s/he belongs" (Davies 395).

Davies is right in pointing out Rice's complicity in U.S. imperialism oversea and the Bush administration's disappointing response in Hurricane Katrina but her analysis of Rice's identification is simplified. The problem of Davies's analysis is that it assumes that a member from a subordinate group will always identify with that group, which neglects the distinction between collective identity and individual identity as well as the complex interaction between the two.

In *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*, Paul Gilroy distinguishes collective identity from individual identity. He states that the former is closely related to "primordial feelings and mythic varieties of kinship" whereas the latter is "increasingly shaped in the marketplace, modified by the cultural industries, and managed and orchestrated in localized institutions and settings like schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces" (Gilroy 106). Moreover, he points out that the identification process is a procedure during which one is constantly negotiated between chosen connections and given particularities. In the case of Condoleezza Rice, her individual identity is not only influenced by her collective identity as the black American but also by other factors such as her communal, professional, and political affiliations.

Apart from Davies and Gilroy, Bernard Bell's analysis of Afro-American novels also shed light on contemporary American racial discourses. In *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, Bernard Bell conducts a comprehensive sociocultural study of Afro-American novels.

Through the investigation of the major thematic, stylistic, and structural characteristics of Afro-American novels, Bell argues that the Afro-American novel is "a hybrid narrative whose distinctive tradition and vitality are derived basically from the sedimented indigenous roots of black American folklore and literary genres of the Western world" (intro. xii). Moreover, the sociopsychological roots of the Afro-American novel are double-consciousness (the biracial and bicultural identities of Afro-Americans), socialized ambivalence (the shifting identification between the values of the dominant white and the subordinate black cultural systems) and double vision (the ambiguous laughing-to-keep-from-crying perspective towards life) (intro. xvi).

Though Bell's research mainly covers Afro-American novels from 1853 to 1983, his argument is helpful for the study of the contemporary African American writings, such as Condoleezza Rice's *Extraordinary, Ordinary People.* The identification of the contemporary black elite both resembles and challenges Bell's notion of socialized ambivalence and the Du Boisian double-consciousness. On the one hand, these black elite identify themselves with the dominant white group to secure their own privileged social status, and on the other hand, they do not totally break from the black community: they view themselves as the role model for other blacks and will help improve the living conditions of the black on the condition that such actions will not harm their own interests. Furthermore, their privileged social status allows them to participate in the policy making in the existent power structure, thus their identity accords with and contests the Du Boisian double-consciousness.

The contemporary black American elite may still view himself/herself as both black and American, but differs from the black American in Du Bois's time, the contemporary black American elite does not need to feel that "black" and "American" are two contradictory entities because the black can represent the American citizen and the U.S. nation-state in the post 9/11 era, which is almost impossible in Du Bois's time. The nuanced identification processes of the black middle class in Rice's *Extraordinary, Ordinary People* well demonstrate this point.

The Complex Identification Processes of the Black Middle Class in Rice's *Extraordinary, Ordinary People*

Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family was a memoir written by Condoleezza Rice in 2010. The book begins with a brief introduction to the stories of Rice's parents John and Angelena Rice, grandparents Mattie and Albert Ray, and John and Theresa Rice, especially on how the Rices and the Rays made great efforts to make the best of their limited resources to become the respectable middle black class in the segregated American South. And the book ends with the death of Rice's father about one week before Rice took office as the new national security advisor in 2001.

Interestingly, the book received many negative criticism from the critics. For instance, McWhorter writes that "Rice's public self-presentation is distinctly impersonal. Unethnic, for one, but shading into outright ineffability" (McWhorter, para. 3). Drogin criticizes Rice because she "never displayed any doubt or admitted any errors in the White House decisions that led to war in Iraq" (Drogin, para. 1). And Drogin calls the memoir "disappointing" because "Rice seems similarly immune to introspection or self-criticism" (Drogin, para. 3). The two critics correctly point out that Rice does not show self-criticism about her involvement in America's invasion of Iraq but Rice's public self-presentation is not "impersonal". Instead, Rice knows clearly how to make best use of her race, gender, and class characteristics in American society in her public presentation of herself as well as her family members, as is exemplified in the memoir.

In *Extraordinary, Ordinary People*, the members in the Rice family demonstrate complex identification in American society during different periods. Classism finds its best representative in Condoleezza Rice's mother Angelena Ray Rice. Born as the daughter into a black landowner family, Angelena Ray learns about her own privileged social status since her childhood. She is a fierce defender of her personal possessions and shows little concern for the need of other black members in the community. After she marries John Wesley Rice Jr., the couple lives at the back of the church which John Rice Jr. works. She tries to end the Sunday gathering of the church members in the living room. When her attempt fails, she covers her sofa in plastic so that the church members cannot sit on it. On the account of the event, Condoleezza Rice remarks that "[i]n retrospect, I'm glad that she was so protective of her possessions because I am now fortunate enough to own those beautifully maintained pieces" (Rice 27). Ironically, the apartment in which the couple lives is the collective property of all church members and the donators. The church members have little interest in Angelena's nice sofa and all they want is the Sunday gathering which they used to have before the couple's occupation of the living room. Thus, it is the mother who violates the collective property of the church members, not the vice versa. But unfortunately, neither the mother nor the daughter realizes the mistake, and instead they defend themselves in the name of protecting personal possessions. As a middle class black, Angelena endeavors to maintain her privileged social status in many ways. Inspired by the Italian word "con dolcezza", meaning "with sweetness", she names her daughter Condoleezza to honor her family's European heritage. She infuses Condoleezza with knowledge of Western classical music, opera and piano. Moreover, she teaches Condoleezza about the class division at an early age. She often takes her daughter to the fancy stores to buy expensive clothes and shoes, and forbids her daughter to visit her classmates from poor black communities. For Angelena, she is proud of her privileged social status and endeavors to maintain the boundary between her family members and the major working class black.

Condoleezza's father John Wesley Rice Jr. is a more complex middle class black figure than her mother Angelena. As a black who has experienced the Civil Rights movement, John Rice Jr. is a representative of those middle class black who hold different views from black activists such as Martin Luther King on racial relationship and power struggle in the U.S. in Civil Rights movement era. John Rice Jr. is a devoted Presbyterian minister who believes in education evangelism and helps black youth especially the poor black to get education opportunities. When he works in the University of Denver as the assistant director for admissions and assistant dean of arts and sciences, John Rice Jr. makes efforts to diversify the student body. He increases the number of black students in the university, establishes a seminar named "The Black Experience in America" and invites various celebrities to provide their perspectives on the state of the black America. The seminar is well received in the university, and it provides a great opportunity for both students and faculty to familiarize with experiences and state of black Americans.

According to Condoleezza's account, many of her father's students change their fates and become successful. Apart from devoting himself to education and church work, John Rice Jr. is a kind loving supportive father and husband, and a strong-willed diligent man who earns college degrees with his own efforts. In a word, John Rice Jr. is portrayed as a black hero throughout the book. But how does this black hero view his own status in the society? Does he consider himself a member of the black majority in the U.S.?

A close examination of the book will uncover this black hero's ambiguous identification. There are two telling examples in the book. The first is John Rice Jr.'s response to the Civil Rights activities in Birmingham in 1963. The Rice family supports the black's boycott in 1962 whereas they refuse to march with Martin Luther King and Fred Shuttlesworth. As Bob Drogin incisively points out in *Los Angeles Times*, "Rice's parents, by her account, largely watched from the sidelines as 'Bombingham' exploded in violence, marches and mass arrests. Nearly all their energies, it appears, were focused on their only child" (Drogin, paras. 6-7). Though the comment understates John Rice Jr.'s involvement in the Civil Rights activities (he visits the arrested protesting students), Drogin's remark reflects the position of some middle class black as the bystander, such as the Rice family in the Civil Rights activities.

Condoleezza Rice offers two excuses for his father's response. First, she criticizes Martin Luther King's strategy of "the Children's Crusade". The use of children in the protest is highly controversial. Facing the suppression and the wane of the movement, the black activists used the risky strategy of "the Children's Crusade" to arrest the media attention nationwide and thus to boost the Civil Rights Movement. While it is hard to give an unbiased evaluation of such a strategy, it is clear that Condoleezza Rice tries to use this controversy as a pretense for her father's refusal to participate in the protest. His father can dispute this strategy but he can also

contribute to the movement in an active positive way. Second, Condoleezza Rice states that it is impossible for the black to escape the violence or hide during the turbulence in Birmingham in 1963, and her father does not believe in being nonviolent in face of violence. Facing the white racist extremist's threat, John Rice Jr. and other communal middle class black men form a watch to defend their family and community. Interestingly, at the same time John Rice Jr. teaches his students that "they should fight racism with their minds not their bodies" (Rice 95) when the students want to join the protest on the street. The contradiction between John Rice Jr.'s words and deeds reveal the black middle class's ambivalent position in the Civil Rights Movements.

Though racism and segregation exert negative influence on their life, the black middle class do not suffer as much as the majority poor black due to their class privilege. Thus, when Civil Rights Movements arise, the black middle class fall into divided groups. Some, such as Martin Luther King, actively participate in the movements to challenge the existent power structure whereas others, such as the Rice family, only take actions and join the movement when their own interests are harmed. Seen from this perspective, it is easy to understand the discrepancy between John Rice Jr.'s words and deeds. Teaching the students to fight racism with their minds instead of their bodies, he tries to persuade the students to obey the prohibition on participation in the protest, which will avoid troubles for himself and the students. But when the life and property of his family are threatened by the white racist's violence, he has to use violence to defend himself and his family. In this sense, his fighting against white racism is quite passive.

The complicated identification of the black middle class is further demonstrated in Condoleezza Rice's account of her father's remarks of slavery and American nationhood. She writes,

> Daddy would sometimes ridicule those who suggested that blacks find succor and support in a closer association with Africa. "America is our home," he'd say. "Africa does not belong to us or us to it." And he'd sometimes say to my horror that the tragedy of slavery had given us the chance to live in the freest and most prosperous country on earth. He loved the United States of America and was vocal in his appreciation for the good fortune of being American. Yet he clearly admired the willingness of radicals to confront America's racism with strength and pride rather than with humbleness and supplication. Daddy was remarkably adept at navigating and charting a course for success in the white man's world. But there was, I know, a deep reservoir of anger in him regarding the circumstances of being a black man in America. (Rice 137)

The paragraph uncovers John Rice Jr.'s complex feelings as a middle class black man in

the U.S.. Though he actively engages in education evangelism and makes great effort to draw public attention (mainly the white's attention) to the state of black America, in the depth of his heart, John Rice Jr. has little interest in Africa and denies his connection to it. He identifies himself only with the U.S., and he is proud to be the citizen of the United States, "the freest and most prosperous country on earth". More compellingly, he even thinks that it is worthwhile to pay for such freedom and prosperity at the price of the legitimization of the inhumane slavery. Obviously, his knowledge of transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and racism in America does not create a bond between himself, a middle class black man and the majority poor black who suffer from racial discrimination and exploitation and cannot enjoy freedom and prosperity.

For John Rice Jr., his blackness is a heavy burden, and thus he possesses "a deep reservoir of anger" which cannot be articulated directly. As a middle class black, a renowned Presbyterian minister and a successful educator, John Rice Jr. enjoys superiority to the majority of the working class black but at the same time, he feels his inferiority compared with his white counterpart. Since he cannot change his race, the best thing for him to do is to make good use of his racial difference in American society which is eager to prove its "integration" and "equal opportunity" in the post-Civil Rights era. Even before the integration, he uses his personal network to cross the racial line and brings his wife to see white doctors. The family members enjoy the same reception as the white. In a similar way, he sends his daughter Condoleezza to the famous expensive private high school St. Mary's Academy, most of whose students are white. Using his racial difference, John Rice Jr. is "remarkably adept at navigating and charting a course for success in the white man's world". His network and resources bring great convenience for his family and pave the way to success for his daughter Condoleezza Rice.

Unlike John Rice Jr. who is still confined by his blackness and struggles for recognition in the white man's world, Condoleezza Rice utilizes her blackness and middle class privilege to rise to the key position in American empire. Having benefited from her parents' social network and investment, Condoleezza Rice receives good education since her childhood. She familiarizes herself with European culture and American middle class culture. Moreover, she builds on and extends her parents' social network in her college years. Making use of her post-doctorate fellowship at Stanford, she successfully gets the job offer from the university, which becomes the stepping stone for her access to the leadership position in the White House in the subsequent years. It is important to note that the job offer for Condoleezza Rice has much to do with the university's effort to increase the diversity of the faculty. In other words, Condoleezza Rice's blackness and her gender as a woman are valuable assets on her road to success.

More compellingly, Rice's racial and sexual identities are used by her to consolidate the existent hierarchical racial and sexual systems. Two telling examples in the book can

demonstrate this point: Condoleezza Rice's views on slavery and racism in the U.S. and her attitude towards affirmative action when she serves as the provost of Stanford. Rice's views on slavery and racism in America resemble those of her father. While John Rice Jr. remarks that "the tragedy of slavery had given us [the black] the chance to live in the freest and most prosperous country on earth" (Rice 137), Condoleezza Rice states that slavery and racism are America's birth defects: one cannot overcome them but one can learn to live with them. Such statement downplays the cruelty of slavery and malignancy of racism, and eulogizes the dominant group's racist policies. It also reflects the stance of some of the middle class black who come of age in Post-Civil Rights era. As the beneficiary of the Civil Rights Movement, these black elite neither participate in the struggle nor identify themselves with the majority working class black. In most cases, they cross the color line and form class alliance with the dominant white upper class. Thus, the black elite such as Condoleezza Rice co-opt with the dominant white group and become supporters of the suppressive system.

Condoleezza Rice's identification with the dominant white group is more effectively demonstrated by her attitudes towards affirmative action during her service in Stanford as the provost. During the budget crisis in Stanford, Condoleezza Rice makes the cut and the ethnic centers are the most offended. Rice meets the angry students in a town-hall-style meeting. Hearing the students' feelings about their marginalization in the university, Rice thinks that "marginalization [is] a peculiar term for students who'd been given the chance at Stanford" (Rice 295). When a young Native American woman accuses Rice of not caring about minorities, Rice responds that "you don't have the standing to question my commitment to minorities. I've been black all of my life, and that is far longer than you are" (Rice 295). It might be true that the minority students at Stanford are more advantageous than other members in their groups but they are still situated in a disadvantageous position compared with their white peers. Rice replies to students that she will also cut the budget of the Physics department but such an action eludes the great discrepancy between the Physics department and the ethnic center. The former is the fundamental traditional discipline in nature sciences and enjoys abundant resources in the university whereas the latter is a new discipline that has been newly founded as the product of Civil Rights Movement and has limited resources. Thus, the cut will exert great different impact on the two disciplines.

Moreover, Rice's response to the young Native American woman is compelling. Rather than try to help the ethnic minorities or admit the budget cut's significant detrimental effects on them, Rice defends her decision, and furthermore, she uses her own blackness to muzzle the criticism from minorities. Later, the Chicano students set up a tent city in front of her office and four young women start a hunger strike to protest Rice's decision to remove a senior Latino

administrator Cecilia Burciaga who has contributed greatly to the university and involved in Rice's recruitment. When several faculty members sympathize with the students and ask Rice whether she feels bad that the students sleep on the quad and do not eat, Rice replies coldly "I am sleeping and eating just fine…They can stay out there until hell freezes over. My decisions stand" (Rice 296). Reading this, one cannot help but feel that Rice acts in a ruthless manner just like she deals with America's enemy Soviet Union during the Cold War era. The sufferance and sacrifice of the minority students cannot touch Rice since she sides herself firmly with the university authority, in this case, the white elite.

Facing the criticism of her negative attitudes on affirmative action, Condoleezza Rice tries to defend herself. She admits that "years of racial prejudice produced underrepresentation of minorities and women in all aspects of American life" but she emphasizes that "how to remedy that situation is a delicate one" (Rice 300). She believes that there are plenty of qualified minorities but the existent process of selection, pools, and networks are insular and often deny these qualified minorities the access to success. Thus, she remarks that "[t]he answer lies in looking outside established networks and patterns of hiring" (Rice 300). This statement avoids any criticism of the existent system that puts the minorities at a disadvantageous position. It is also vague about how to look outside "established networks and patterns of hiring". Obviously, not every member of the minorities groups has the opportunity and ability to find alternative way for upward social mobility. If the existent power structure cannot be changed, the minority groups will remain in the subordinate position.

Being asked about her opinion on the meager number of minorities in the student body and faculty in the university, Condoleezza Rice replies that she cannot "create assistant professors out of whole cloth" (Rice 301) and the minority students should consider go to graduate schools to gain the opportunity to become professors. She also does not understand why minorities continue to score lower on standardized tests such as the SAT, LSAT, or GRE. Rice's words reflect her logic of blaming the victim for their own disadvantage. The scarcity of minority faculty and students is first and foremost the direct result of the unbalanced relationship between the white and other racial minorities. Historically, most minorities are deprived of the opportunity and resources of education and representation, and they are not granted full citizenship until the Civil Rights Movement. Although they have the right to receive education, they are still put in an unfavorable position culturally and economically. In order to go to the famous private university such as Stanford, these minority students need to be competent in the standardized tests such as SAT, LSAT, or GRE. But it is worthy of note that the logic of these "standardized" tests is not universal but Euro-American-centric. For those who are unfamiliar with the dominant white culture, they will not only do poor in the tests but also find themselves

marginalized in the university.

Moreover, these students also need to have the financial ability to enroll in the expensive private university such as Stanford. In this sense, one's favorable financial status or class status is always closely associated with one's proximity with the dominant white culture in America. Such is the case of the Rice family. John Rice Sr., the paternal grandfather of Condoleezza Rice, makes a deal with the white culture to change his fate: he earns his college education on the condition of becoming a Presbyterian minister. Making full use of his education, intelligence, diligence and the religious resources, John Rice Sr. builds wide social network and becomes a successful black minister and educator. His descendants, especially John Rice Jr. and Condoleezza Rice benefit from and extend the family's social network, increase their proximity with the dominant white culture, and enhance their privileged middle class status. Condoleezza Rice's maternal grandparents are also self-made middle class black.

Grown up in this environment, Condoleezza Rice has little contact with the majority working class. Endowed with class privilege, intelligence, and broad social network, Condoleezza Rice enjoys more access to various sources compared with the major working class black. In her adulthood, her service in the White House further reinforces her identification with the dominant white culture. Seen from this light, Condoleezza Rice's action during the budget cut issue in Stanford is easy to understand. Identifying with the dominant white culture, Condoleezza Rice acts as the spokesperson for the authority and uses her identity as a model minority woman to muzzle the opponents' criticism on the university's biased budget policies.

Such identification is further illustrated in her investment in American imperialism and neo-colonialism. As the U.S. National Security Advisor (2001-2005) and the U.S. Secretary of State (2005-2009) for the Bush administration, Condoleezza Rice is largely responsible for U.S.'s military policies in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the public's views on the war in Afghanistan diversify, it is widely believed that the war on Iraq is an invasion, but Rice never shows any regret for the decision to invade Iraq. In an interview, Henry Louis Gates Jr. asks Rice why the Americans should send their children to be sacrificed in the war, and Rice endeavors to legitimize U.S. imperialist war as the liberation of the local people from the "barbaric" government (Gates 11). The answer avoids a serious consideration of the devastating effects on the two countries as well as on the life of ordinary Americans, especially the soldiers and their family members.

When Gates asks about President George W. Bush's policies on race and his reaction during Hurricane Katrina, Rice makes efforts to find pretenses for Bush. She explains that the President is misunderstood by the black community and this is largely derived from the stereotype about Republican's policy on race. She also uses the War on Terror as an excuse for

Bush's disappointing domestic racial policies. But when she is asked about the relationship between the leader and the people, Rice responds that a leader should always keep distance from the people s/he leads, and it is better for a leader to be respected than to be loved since love requires understanding and close relationship (Gates 6). These responses show that Rice is a faithful supporter of the existent power structure in American society and an ardent advocate of U.S. imperialism.

Conclusion

As a woman of color, Condoleezza Rice appropriates her racial and gender identities to play the role of a model minority and prove the truth of "equal opportunity" for the minority groups, and as the representative and spokesperson of the Bush administration, she actively alleviates the internal tension and rigorously advances U.S. imperialism and neo-colonialism worldwide.

As what have been argued earlier, there always exists discrepancy between a person's individual identity and collective identity, and one's identification process is influenced by various factors such as race, gender, community, religion, and political affiliation. The example of John Rice Jr. reflects the divide among the black middle class on Civil Rights Movement and the case of Condoleezza Rice highlights the contemporary black elite's complicity in the suppression of the internal social problems and the expansion of U.S. imperialism worldwide. It also suggests that in the post 9/11 era, racial difference can be used in a more subtle way to consolidate the existent power structure when a successful member from a minority group is willing to play the role of model minority and prove the possibility to cross boundaries to all other disadvantageous members.

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The Ambiguity of Iago's Fabricated Dream of Cassio in *Othello*

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare, influenced by the Medieval dream sequence seen in Chaucer, uses dreams as "a dramatic device" in his history plays, tragedies, romances and even comedies. In *Richard III,* Clarence's dream foreshadows his death by being stabbed and drowned in the butt of Malmsey wine and has a prophetic quality, and also in *Julius Caesar* Calphurnia's dream before Caesar's assassination at the Capitol in Rome by the conspirators possesses the same tendency. Hermia's dream in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reflects her fear of loss of virginity as well as the betrayal of Lysander. In Shakespeare's romance, *Pericles* at the last act Pericles hears the music of the spheres and falls asleep. In his dream, Diana asks him to come to her temple in Ephesus which will later bring out the reunion of his family. In *Othello,* Iago's fabricated dream of Cassio has the purpose to provoke the anger and to intensify the jealousy of Othello but this invented dream also sheds light upon the inner psyche and the subconscious mind of Iago. Coleridge mentions Iago's passionless character and points to his evil nature without any target at all. Both Wangh and Adelman regard Iago as suffering from repressed homosexuality. This article will deal with the ambiguity of Iago's fabricated dream of Cassio and explore the hidden reality in Iago's subconscious mind concerning his sexuality while examining the symbols and use of language in psychoanalytical terms and taking into account Jacques Derrida's concept of language as "pharmakon" having both the power of cure and poison.

KEYWORDS
Othello, dreams, subconscious, pharmakon, latent homosexuality.

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Introduction

'To sleep, perchance to dream'
Hamlet, Shakespeare

Shakespeare makes use of dreams as a "dramatic device" to reveal prophecies foreshadowing the future events or murders, and to convey symbols and images flowing in the subconscious mind of his characters, reflecting their desires or fears and also juxtaposing the confusion between illusion and reality of life in his plays. Dreams possess an extended metaphorical meaning and function as a transformative power in the Shakespearean canon. Marjorie Garber states that dream in Shakespeare's early plays as a device of plot seen in Clarence's and Mercutio's dreams gains a new dimension and begins to enter the subconscious mind of the dreamer in the later tragedies (Garber, 46). Garber mentions that the crucial boundary between dreams as Freudian wish-fulfillments and the actual facts concerning the working of the guilty conscience are dissolved in *Macbeth* (Garber, 109). Shakespeare becomes more interested in the inner depths of the human psyche and the workings of the subconscious mind as well as the damage caused by the gnawing of conscience in the imagination of his characters. Dreams in Shakespeare are related to the imaginative faculty of the mind where human imagination transfers the concerns of the real world into images to the dream world, creating ambiguity between illusion and reality. Dreams during sleep or invented dreams as in the case of Iago in the tragedy *Othello* could originate within the individual consciousness while revealing what was hidden in the subconscious mind. Samuel Taylor Coleridge indicates "the passionless character" of Iago, possessing "motive-hunting of motiveless malignity" (Coleridge, 44), whereas Martin Wangh in his article entitled "*Othello*: The Tragedy of Iago" points to "the paranoiac personality" in Iago's character suffering from "repressed homosexuality" (Wangh, 205). Gordon Ross Smith develops Wangh's approach and explains the symbols and gestures expressed in Iago's 'fabricated' dream' in psychoanalytical terms. Janet Adelman underlines the difference of race and the importance of whiteness in *Othello* (Adelman, 129-130) and indicates the evaluation of Melanie Klein on Iago's imagination of his interior world which is projected to the entire landscape of the play (qtd. in Adelman, 140). Adelman regards Iago as 'an alter ego' of Othello, considering Othello and Iago to be doubles and points to the fact that Iago's devotion to the Moor is the outcome of unconscious lust for Othello. My paper will deal with Iago's invented dream of Cassio in *Othello* and explore the hidden reality in Iago's subconscious mind concerning the sexual conflict and examine the symbols and use of language in psychoanalytical terms. In this analysis, I also take into account Jacques Derrida's concept of language as "*pharmakon*" having both the power of cure and poison.

Pre-Freudian dream analysis

The pre-Freudian dream analysis in *Oneirocritica* by Artemidorus of Daldis who lived in Ephesus in the second century A.D. during the Roman empire was the most popular book translated in the age of Shakespeare. As an interpreter of dreams, Artemidorus concentrated upon the ambiguity of the symbols in dreams. Artemidorus regards dreams as personal and unique to the individual and tries to interpret the images which the dreamer remembers in his account. He classifies dreams as "personal dreams" which relate to the dreamer (Artemidorus, 8) and as "predictive dreams" (*oneroi*) which foretell what will happen in the future (Artemidorus, 10). Concerning these dreams, Michel Foucault points to the distinction Artemidorus draws between these nocturnal visions, calling them as the *enypnia*, the dreams expressing the present affects of the individual and as the *oneiroi*, the dream experiences which tell what will be real in the unfolding of time (Foucault, 10). Foucault regards *enypnion* and *oneiros* as two terms being in opposition with each other as the first one concerns the individual and the states of the body and the mind, while the second one relates to the events in the world concentrating upon the unwinding of the events in the temporal chain (Foucault, 10). In Book 4 of *Oneirocritica* Artemidorus gives the example of the dream of Alexander of Macedonia during the besiege of the city of Tyre. Great Alexander saw in his dream that a satyr (satyros) was playing about upon his shield. Aristander interpreted his dream as 'sa Tyros' which means 'Tyre is yours' (Artemidorus, 183). This evaluation of Aristander encouraged Alexander and brought his victory upon Tyre. Freud regarded Alexander's satyr dream as the most beautiful dream of antiquity which reflects the concealed wish fulfillment of the emperor. In his decipherment of these dreams Artemidorus uses the analogies and the juxtaposition of similarities. As Garber states, Artemidorus based his method of dream interpretation upon the principle of association which is the basic principle in Freud's dream analysis (Garber, 6). Artemidorus also mentions "anxiety-dreams" which "people have about what worries them or arises from some state of irrational impulse or desire" (Artemidorus, 172). He indicates "solicited-dreams" when "people ask a god for some dream-vision relevant for their immediate concerns" (Artemidorus, 172). In his interpretation of dreams Artemidorus takes into consideration dreams in which parts of the human body are involved, dreams depending upon human activities, such as bathing or fighting and sexual affairs, and cosmic dreams where visions of gods or goddesses appear by dividing the interference of deities as the celestial, the terrestial, the marine, the fluvial and the chthonic deities that are related to death. The sexual dreams Artemidorus analyses in his interpretations take into account two basic features; the dreamer is either present in his own dream or the dreamer appears as a spectator in his dream. In his approach, Foucault points to Artemidorus' treatment of sexual acts and pleasures, stating that Artemidorus almost always has them figure on

the side of the "signifiers," but almost never on the side of the "signified" (Foucault, 26).

The tragedy of Othello and its background

Shakespeare's *Othello*, *The Moor of Venice* written between 1602 and 1604 deals with the political situation in the Mediterranean at the time concerning the conquest of Cyprus by the Ottoman empire in 1571 from its former sovereign, the Republic of Venice. Shakespeare moves his play from Venice to Cyprus where there is the political anxiety concerning the possibility of the siege of the Ottomans on the island of Cyprus. Cyprus at the time was an important military base as well as a trading center at the Mediterranean. It was also the island where the Western and the Eastern cultures and religions met and the empires clashed for power. In Greek mythology, Cyprus was the birthplace of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, harmony and beauty. She was associated with the foams of the sea as her name indicated. Shakespeare's source for the play is taken from the tales written by the Italian novella writer Giraldo Cinthio in *Hecatommithi* in which Othello, the Moor falls in love with Disdemona and marries her but suspects that his wife loves Cassio and out of jealousy murders his beloved wife and then commits suicide. In Cinthio's tale Iago is Cinthio's villain but Shakespeare rejected the simple motivation of Cinthio's villain and made Iago direct his hatred not against Desdemona, but against the Moor. Stanley Edgar Hyman in his article states that it is indeed Iago "who unconsciously loves both Othello and Cassio, and that love is repressed and, by the defense mechanism called 'reaction formation,' turned into hate" (Hyman, 369). Hyman points to certain "ingredients in Iago's strong latent homosexuality" which are reflected in his use of language with bestial imagery and his deep contempt for woman shown in his treatment of Emilia and his provocative descriptions of sexual love into the ears of Othello in order to influence Othello's imaginative mind by transferring Iago's own suspicious and paranoaic mind (Hyman, 370). Iago regards life with suspicious eyes and mind, he even suspects that his wife Emilia might have slept with Othello.

Iago's use of language

At the very beginning of the play, Iago while hiding himself below the window in the darkness of the night, and not revealing his identity, shouts at Brabantio, Desdemona's father, announcing Desdemona's elopement with Othello, telling him that "an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe" (*Othello*, I, i, 89- 90) and later adding that his "daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs". (*Othello*, I, i, 116-118). Iago employs certain words, such as ram and ewe, which create a kind of vulgarity when he describes the love relation between the Moor and Desdemona. At the beginning of the play, Iago also uses animal words such as ram, ass, beast, and Barbary horse for Othello. In Act I scene iii, Iago in his soliloquy expresses his

hate for Othello and says that he suspects that Othello has slept with his wife Emilia: "I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets/ He's done my office." (*Othello*, I, iii, 380 - 382) In the First Folio, it writes "She's done my office." If ever Emilia has done her office between the sheets, the question comes whether in Iago's subconscious mind Iago was mentioning that Emilia in his "office" meaning in his place, in Iago's place, was making love to Othello. If it is so, it also points to the repressed desire of Iago's latent homosexuality, his repressed desire for the Moor. Iago's hatred for Othello appears to be just a pretext to conceal his attraction for the Moor who is appreciated and respected by the Senators of the Republique of Venice because of his bravery, integrity and honesty, who is loved and adored by Desdemona because of his sincerity in his deep love towards her. Most probably the physical appearance of Othello which might be quite attractive, handsome and strong when compared with Iago's simple and unattractive physical appearance causes Iago to feel himself uneasy and inferior. As a defence mechanism Iago despises and looks down on him. He also recognizes his weakness when he is with Cassio who is a handsome and elegant Florentine. Iago's despise of women can be seen in his remarks to Desdemona about female gender on their arrival to Cyprus before Othello's arrival. Iago says: "You are pictures out of doors, bells in your parlours, wild-cats in your kitchens, saints in your injuries, devils being offended, players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds" (*Othello*, II, i, 108- 111).

In Iago there is also a kind of uneasiness concerning his physical appearance which is indicated in Act V. He says that "If Cassio do remain/ He hath a daily beauty in his life/ That makes me ugly:" (*Othello*, V, i, 18-20). Cassio is a handsome Florentine who acts with courtesy and gentleness, and he takes the attention of the people's gaze whenever he enters a society. But as opposed to Cassio, Iago's physical appearance and manners as well as his use of language never show a high quality of presence. I also think the same concerning the Moor; Othello by his physical appearance is most remarkable in his bodily stature and goodness of character which was also a reason for Desdemona to fall in love with him. When Othello describes at the Senate of Venice their marriage and mutual love, there is a physical attraction as well as the union of souls in their innocent love. Othello says: " She loved me for the dangers I had passed,/ And I loved her, that she did pity them./ This only is the witchcraft I have used." (*Othello*, I, iii, 66-68). The Venetian Senate shows great respect and trust in Othello's qualities. Desdemona defends her love for the Moor saying:

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
...
... My heart's subdued

Even to the very quality of my lord.
I saw Othello's visage in his mind
And to his honours and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
(*Othello*, I, iii, 245-251).

Iago's manipulations

In the hands of Shakespeare Iago becomes an evil artist of villainy playing with Othello's naive and innocent mind and destroying his deep love for Desdemona and turning these emotions of tenderness into destructive jealousy which leads to the victimization of the innocent and chaste Desdemona. Very much like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Iago, with his deliberate intention, manages to cause Othello smother and murder his only beloved wife. Iago is a very skillful manipulator much like a stage director, he turns everything to his own benefit whenever any profitable situation occurs. The handkerchief of Desdemona with the figure of strawberries on it, is found by Emilia who gives it to Iago. In the hands of Iago, this little handkerchief is used in order to trigger Othello's jealousy and to increase his suspicion in the scene where Cassio gives it to the prostitute Bianca. Iago also provokes Othello's jealousy by saying an invented lie that he has seen this little piece of cloth, Desdemona's handkerchief, in Cassio's hands when Cassio was wiping his beard with it. The precious object for Othello which was his first gift to Desdemona has become valueless with this act of Cassio.However, these are Iago's lies and his play with appearance and reality in order to make Othello believe in what he is shown to see as reality and what he imagines in his mind by Iago's abusive language. Splitter states that "feeding him [Othello] the lies, doubts and suspicions that will infect him with morbid jealousy as if it were an almost physical disease, Iago will 'pour this pestilence into his ear' (II, iii, 356)" (Splitter, 23). Martin Wangh in his article interpreted Iago's impulses and defenses like Ernest Jones by emphasizing Iago's aching tooth as a phallic symbol and Wangh identified the handkerchief of Desdemona with strawberries as a symbol of breast standing for innocence and purity. Whereas Gordon Ross Smith extended Wangh's interpretation to a further level, including Iago's repressed desire for Cassio and Othello, stating that the strawberries on the handkerchief of Desdemona were symbols for "the glans penis" (qtd. in Hyman, 383). This approach is too far -fetched.

As Othello insists upon a concrete proof of Desdemona's adultery with Cassio, Iago invents and produces a fabricated dream of Cassio which is Iago's quick scheming and improvisation to persuade Othello of the secret affair between Desdemona and Cassio. He describes Cassio's dream as if he has experienced and witnessed it as Cassio and Iago slept

together:

IAGO- I lay with Cassio lately
And being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleepe. There are a kinde of men,
So loose of Soule, that in their sleepes will mutter
Their affayres: one of this kinde is Cassio:
In sleepe I heard him say, 'Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our Loves',
And then, sir, would be gripe, and wring my hand:
Cry 'oh sweet Creature': then kisse me hard,
As if he pluckt up kisses by the rootes,
That grew upon my lippes- laid his Leg
Over my Thigh- and sigh'd, and kiss'd, and then
Cried 'Cursed Fate, that gave thee to the Moore!'

(*Othello*, III, iii, 417- 430)

This fabricated dream of Cassio which was created and improvised by Iago has become a field of interest for the psychoanalysts. The non-existent dream points to a certain kind of subconscious impulse as well as repressed desire in Iago. Iago's laying down with Cassio at night, the aching of his tooth, the murmuring of Cassio in his sleep, his erotical acts such as his caressing Iago's hand, his kissing Iago's lips as if they are taken from their roots, showing the intensity of eroticism as well as putting his leg upon Iago's thigh create certain questions about Iago's own character, his sexuality, his repressed desires and the working of his own subconscious mind with the symbols used in this fabricated dream. This invented dream is a lie uttered by Iago who wants to give Othello a proof of Desdemona's adultery with Cassio but this erotic lie appears to be a proof of his innate desires which are directed towards Cassio as a man and repressed in his psyche.

Freud's psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams

Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* regarded dreams as representations of a repressed desire in a disguised fulfillment. Freud's point of departure was that the incoherence of dreams should not be dismissed as the random firing of unruly neurones. Both in classical antiquity and medieval period people evaluated dreams as prophetic, having a relation with the divine. Freud appreciated Aristotle's naturalistic approach to dreams and sleep. Aristotle regarded dreams as a

mental activity of someone who is asleep. Much like a prism, dreams reflect the nature of reality in images and symbols. Aristotle in his two works, *De Somno et vigilia* (Sleep and Sleeplessness) and *De insomniis* (On Dreams), claims that the dream is not a supernatural revelation, but is subject to the laws of human spirit. The dream is defined as the psychic activity of the dreamer. As Freud argues, Aristotle knew that a dream converts the slight sensations perceived in sleep into intense sensations (Freud, 6). But Freud who considered hysterical symptoms as a body-language or a somatic metaphor which reflected an underlying conflict, or a product of suppressed emotion and inhibited desire, saw dreams as symptom-equivalents susceptible to the same mode of deconstruction (Wilson, ix). Wilson in his introduction stated that "Freud reasoned that any pattern it [the dream] revealed must be a reflection of the unconscious mind" which "functioned according to the 'pleasure principle'" (ix). This concealed narrative or 'latent content' which consisted of thoughts underlying the 'manifest content' of the dream could be inferred. The reason why the 'latent content' was concealed was its being unacceptable to the conscious mind, which usually functioned in accordance with the 'reality principle'. The 'manifest content' might appear as symbols in mere disguise. Freud stated that "dreaming is not a psychic activity at all, but a somatic process which makes itself known to the psychic apparatus by means of symbols" (Freud, 10). In the case of Iago's fabricated dream of Cassio, the language Iago uses with its erotic connotations as well as the strong intensity of passion described in the act of kissing, caressing and putting the feet upon the thigh, shows the latent homosexual desire of Iago for the handsome Cassio and the strongly-built and attractive Moor in the play. Adelman states that:

> Iago's hoarding, his sadism, his references to purgatives and clyster-pipes can be read through the language of classical psychoanalysis as evidence of an anal fixation… Iago's obsessive suspicion that Othello has leaped into his seat, along with his heavily eroticized account of Cassio's dream, similarly lend themselves to a classically psychoanalytic reading of Iago as repressed homosexual. (Adelman, 134)

Marvin Rosenberg in *The Masks of Othello* regarded that the clue to the play was not Iago's hatred for Othello, but his deep affection for him (Rosenberg, 205). According to Rosenberg, Iago himself possessed a subconscious affection for the Moor. After the fabricated dream of Cassio, Othello becomes much more furious and jealous and decides to put an end to Desdemona's life. Iago advises him not to use poison but to strangle or smother her. Iago's advice to smother Desdemona is evaluated by Hyman in his article as an example of psychoanalytic "displacement upward," shutting off an inoffensive orifice for the lower orifice

which is seen as evil (Hyman, 380). After Iago's promise to help the Moor to take his vengeance upon the adulterous wife, Shakespeare uses a very interesting scene in which both Othello and Iago kneel down together and swear for revenge but from the point of view on stage they appear to be vowing a union of marriage, and this scene, of course, takes the attention of the psychoanalysts in their interpretation of the latent homosexuality in Iago. Randolph Splitter in his essay states that "after kneeling together with Othello to seal the 'sacred vow,' he pretends to swear loyalty to him in words that suggest amorous devotion more than military duty: 'I am your own forever' (III, iii, 458,476)" (Splitter, 18).

Ambiguity of binarisms

Iago's dialogue with Othello can be evaluated in Derridean terms as destructive with respect to Othello's relationship with his wife but at the same time life-sustaining for Iago's subconscious prospective affair with the Moor. In "*La Pharmacie de Platon*" Jacques Derrida deals with the conception of language in Plato's *Phaedrus* in which Socrates compares and contrasts language seen in writing and heard in speech. He regards the function of language as 'pharmakon', a drug, medicine or magic potion which can be both poisonous and life-sustaining. The term, then, carries a double meaning. Splitter claims that "Iago's poisonous (verbal) images of sexual violence, in which the fetishictic pharmakon is lost and destroyed, are, in effect, substitute pharmaka which replace what one has lost but also break down the integrity of the self" (Splitter, 23). Unfortunately with the poisoning speech of Iago, Othello is unable to think and evaluate the reality. As his mind and imagination are poisoned, his self is no longer his own, he has become the shadow of Iago in a way in Jungian terms. Janet Adelman in her essay regards Iago in different terms, stating that "Marking himself as opposite to light through his demonic "I am not what I am," Iago calls forth a world, ... in which he can see his own darkness localized and reflected in Othello's darkness. (Adelman, 127).

Even though Shakespeare's play seems to rest on binary oppositions such as dark versus white, good versus evil, love versus hatred, naivety versus cunning, honesty versus dishonesty, reality versus illusion, vulgarity versus tenderness, Iago's manipulations destroys these binarisms and creates ambiguity in the understanding of the play. In her analysis Janet Adelman compares and contrasts the two main characters; Iago and Othello as follows:

> Iago's "I" beats through the dialogue with obsessive insistence, claiming both self-sufficiency ("I follow myself" [1. 58]) and self-division, defining itself by what it is not ("Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago" [1. 57]), in fact simultaneously proclaiming its existence and nonexistence: "I am not what I am" (1. 65). I, I, I: Iago's name unfolds from

> the Italian io, Latin ego; and the injured "I" is his signature, the ground of his being and … Othello -- and particularly in relation to Desdemona -- becomes Iago's primary target in part because Othello has the presence, the fullness of being, that lago lacks. Othello is everywhere associated with the kind of interior solidity and wholeness that stands as a reproach to lago's interior emptiness and fragmentation: if lago takes Janus as his patron saint (1.2.33) and repeatedly announces his affiliation with nothingness ("I am not what I am"; "I am nothing, if not critical" [2.1.119]), Othello is initially "all in all sufficient" (4.1.261), a "full soldier" (2.1.36), whose "solid virtue" (4.1.262) and "perfect soul" (1.2.31) allow him to achieve the "full fortune" (1.1.66) of possessing Desdemona … the extent to which Othello's fullness and solidity are the object of lago's envy can be gauged by the extent to which he works to replicate his own self-division in Othello. Split himself, lago is a master at splitting others: his seduction of Othello works by inscribing in Othello the sense of dangerous interior spaces-thoughts that cannot be known, monsters in the mind. (Adelman, 127-128)

Iago's emptiness of self and his desire of splitting other characters' selves appear to be an interesting element of the workings of his psyche. He seems to gain a temporary sense of self as he plays the roles projected to him. Othello calls him "honest Iago" just as Desdemona does in the play. He can exist for a moment in the projection of the other, whereas this emptiness and temporary existence of Iago's self can be regarded as the absence of the self, which is an ambiguity. Much like a bukalemon, Iago is ever-changing in his acting of different roles projected on him. Iago is most skillful like an artist in creating illusions about himself. He pretends that he is loyal and helpful to Roderigo who is in love with Desdemona but he spoils him by taking Roderigo's gifts for Desdemona and his money. He also acts as if he were helping Desdemona when she is in difficulty. He creates the illusion that he is honest and loyal to Othello while he is pouring the poison of suspicion and jealousy into Othello's soul. Knowing Cassio's inclination to alcoholic drinks, he lets Cassio drink a lot and causes him to become quarrelsome and injure Montano with his sword. When Cassio loses his military position because of this quarrel and fight, Iago advises him to ask help from Desdemona in order to let them appear together in close and sincere relationship in front of the eyes of the Moor. Iago deliberately creates an illusion about himself as an honest man impressing people as if he were a man of integrity. He is playing with appearance and reality as well as seeming and being as if he were an actor dissimulating and ever-changing in accordance with profitable situations. Iago also appears to be a skillful metteur en scène and an artistic designer as he profits every situation on his behalf by manipulating his victims into the web of their destruction. Robert Heilman

identifies the Satanic aspect of Iago with Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost (Heilman, 42). Iago uses the supremacy of his evil upon the lives of the innocent and naive ones. Iago who swears "By Janus" which is most proper for his villainy as a double-faced man, has the design from the very beginning of the play to destroy the harmony created in the soul of Othello because of his profound love for Desdemona. Iago expresses his desire for Othello's destruction by declaring his purpose to untune Othello's music in his aside; "O, you are well tuned now: but I'll set down/ The pegs that make this music, as honest/ As I am" (*Othello*, II, i, 197-199). Iago is like a destructive force of discord or disharmony which is the eternal enemy of human love and harmony.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in Shakespeare's tragedy of *Othello*, Iago with his cunning method and with his lies and fabricated dream of Cassio achieves to shatter the sense of self or the illusion of Othello's fullness, complete personality and presence. Othello's erotic power, deep love for Desdemona as well as his self-confidence are all shattered into pieces by Iago, which brings out his separation and alienation from Desdemona. This is what Iago aims at in his villainy. Shakespeare in this play displays a latent homosexuality of Iago who creates the improvised dream as well as the steps of a villain to achieve the destruction of the tender love between Desdemona and Othello who utters in his last lines before committing suicide the desire to be remembered as someone who "loved not wisely, but too well, (V, ii, 340) and he stabs himself. As spectators we are left with the sense of the waste of goodness as well as innocence at the very end of this tragedy. The darkness of the soul of Iago, the white man destroys with the poison of his language the dark Moor's pure happiness and innocence of his beloved, Desdemona but sustains his own existence.

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The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: Sexuality, Irresponsibility, and Political Economics in Niall McNeil and Marcus Youssef's *Peter Panties*

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ABSTRACT

Niall McNeil and Marcus Youssef's play *Peter Panties* (2011) adapts J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (both the 1904 play and the 1911 novel), but unlike Barrie's almost asexual Peter, McNeil and Youssef create a sexually obsessive, if immature, version of the boy who refuses to grow up. Both Peters are narcissistic and capriciously demand that his/their own needs and desires be met while shirking any responsibility to others—exemplifying what psychoanalyst Dan Kiley termed Peter Pan Syndrome. McNeil and Youssef shift from Barrie's Edwardian industrial capitalist context to a twenty-first century neoliberal capitalist context, and this shift is deeply tied to Peter's distinct psychology in *Peter Panties*. This adaptation critiques late capitalism's culture of enjoyment and the negative consequences, both social and psychological, that come with the inability to renounce or delay gratification of desire in an economy dependent on continual consumption.

KEYWORDS
Niall McNeil, Marcus Youssef, *Peter Panties*, J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*, neoliberalism, psychoanalysis, sexuality.

Introduction

Peter Pan tells Wendy Darling, "Let's take off our green pants and skirts" (McNeil and Youssef 111) before symbolically impregnating her. The pregnancy is played out by inflating a balloon at Wendy's belly until it pops and a baby comes from between Wendy's legs (112 -113). Peter Pan is now a father. If this scene doesn't sound familiar from J.M. Barrie's 1904 play or 1911 novel, don't worry. This scene comes from Niall McNeil and Marcus Youssef's 2011 *Peter Panties*, an absurdist, postmodern, and deeply intertextual adaptation that draws out issues of Peter's sexuality and the family politics introduced by Barrie's versions and re-conceptualizes those issues for the cultural politics of late capitalism. Like Barrie's rendering of Peter, McNeil and Youssef create a narcissistic protagonist who capriciously demands that his own needs and desires be met—though unlike Barrie's almost asexual Peter, McNeil and Youssef create a sexually obsessive, if immature, version of the boy who refuses to grow up. The later play also shifts from Barrie's Edwardian industrial capitalist context to a twenty-first century neoliberal context, and this shift is deeply tied to Peter's distinct psychology in *Peter Panties*. This adaptation critiques late capitalism's culture of enjoyment and the negative consequences that come with the inability to renounce or delay gratification of desire.

Before getting to the main argument, this paper briefly addresses *Peter Panties* as a work of disability theatre. While this essay focuses more on political economics, psychology, and the cultural politics of late capitalism, McNeil is an important figure in the Canadian disability arts movement. Recognizing the importance of disability in McNeil and Youssef's creative process illuminates some of the choices made in *Peter Panties*. Further, many disability advocates argue for the importance of acknowledging the creativity and productivity of artists with disabilities—though another line of advocacy work asserts that the art of creators with disabilities should be approached as art in its own right, rather than ghettoized as "disability art" exclusively. This essay falls more into the latter category by focusing on McNeil and Youssef's play as a work of art with significant cultural commentary, which happens to have been collaboratively created by an artist with Down syndrome.

Following that brief discussion, the argument shifts to a focus on Peter's sexual desires, comparing and contrasting Barrie's sexually naïve Peter with McNeil and Youssef's sexually obsessive Peter. These different characterizations reflect the ethos of their different cultural contexts: Barrie's industrial capitalist society that demanded the renunciation of enjoyment for the sake of duty, in contrast to the contemporary neoliberal context—this became the dominant political economic force in Canada and much of the west in the 1970s—that exhorts subjects to consume as much and continually as possible. As the essay subsequently demonstrates, these differences shape Peter's individual psychology and the politics of family life, which play out

around questions of marriage, sexual fidelity, parenthood, and interpersonal relationships generally. The essay concludes by tying all of these elements together to show that McNeil and Youssef's Peter reflects a distillation of the cultural politics of enjoyment under late capitalism.

Disability Theatre

As an artist with Down syndrome, McNeil has been very active in Canada's disability arts and theatre scenes. According to Canadian disability theatre scholar Kristy Johnston, disability theatre is "a specific kind of artistic practice connected to the disability arts and culture movement. As such, it involves artists with disabilities who pursue an activist perspective, dismantling stereotypes, challenging stigma, and re-imaging disability as a valued human condition" (*Stage Turns* 5).[1] However, Johnston does distinguish between *disability artists* and *artists with disabilities*—a division largely based on how focused the artistic work is on disability rights, activism, and/or concerns (*Stage Turns* 5). These categories are obviously not mutually exclusive, with many artists with disabilities producing both disability art and art not focused on disability advocacy. For instance, in their 2017 adaptation *King Arthur's Night*, McNeil and Youssef promote opportunities for artists with disabilities more actively than they do in *Peter Panties*.[2]

King Arthur's Night foregrounds disability advocacy both through its content and through the casting of the original production run, which cast in prominent roles four actors whose lives include Down syndrome. During the performance at Toronto's Berkeley Street Theatre, McNeil played King Arthur, Tiffany King played Guinevere, Matthew Tom-Wing played Magwitch, and Andrew Gordon played Saxon—all central roles performed by actors affected by Down syndrome. This casting challenges common assumptions about the relative abilities of the characters, and it undermines links between the characters' perceived abilities and the actor's body. Indeed, apart from one line in which Arthur warns Lancelot, "She [Guinevere] has Down syndrome. Keep your lips off of her!" the play draws no overt attention to distinctions between neurotypical performers and actors with disabilities (21). Casting artists with disabilities for non-disabled characters is a form of disability theatre advocacy which normalizes seeing *people* who happen to have disabilities, rather than seeing disability as a person's defining characteristic.

In addition to the casting, the play subtly but importantly emphasizes the creativity that McNeil, as an artist with Down syndrome, brought to the creation of the show. Both *Peter Panties* and *King Arthur's Night* were written collaboratively, with many of the ideas being

[1] For more on disability theatre, see, for instance, Johnston's *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama* or *Stage Turns*, or Petra Kuppers' *Theatre & Disability*.
[2] For more on McNeil's disability advocacy, see, for instance, "Niall McNeill Discusses Deaf and Disability Arts" or "Writing Across Difference at Canadian Association for Theatre Research 2018—Wed 30 May 2018."

developed by McNeil, while Youssef wrote them down and helped polish the plays into their final forms.[3] Merlin, played by Youssef in the original run, alludes to this process in the Prologue, when he explains:

> this "kingdom" may be somewhat different than is natural for you to expect. It is guided by different rules. It demands somewhat unorthodox methods. (*referring to someone offstage*) Because the king is powerful. He offers us access to worlds we can't normally perceive. Or perhaps choose not to. I ask only that you pay attention. That you slow down…But here I am talking again. (*gesturing offstage*) Chatterbox, that's what the king calls me. And these are my words. In this kingdom, my words – very little consequence. The story of this kingdom is written almost entirely from his words. The king's words. My job, well my job is mostly to transcribe and translate, to negotiate and mitigate – (7-8)

This section—drawn from two speeches in the Prologue—is revelatory, both in terms of the power it assigns to McNeil as world builder and imaginative creator, and in how direct it is about the collaborative process that went into creating *King Arthur's Night*. In the early portion, prior to the ellipses, Merlin asserts the unique and creative powers of Arthur—this , of course, is Youssef telling the audience that they are about to experience McNeil's take on the Arthurian legend. And in the latter portion, when Merlin talks about the relative power of their words, Youssef essentially describes the process through which he and McNeil wrote both *King Arthur's Night* and *Peter Panties*, with McNeil generating the original material and Youssef refining it. This Prologue, in other words, draws audience members' attention directly to the generative role that McNeil played in the show, foregrounding his artistic abilities.

Whereas *King Arthur's Night* foregrounds disability advocacy, *Peter Panties* has at best minor references to disability concerns. The one-handed Captain James Hook is obviously a disabled character from Barrie's original play and novel, and he shows up in McNeil and Youssef's play, though his conflict with Peter seems more incidental here, rather than a driving force of the plot. There is one minor incident in which Hook's status as a disabled character is made overt: in Chapter Six—both of McNeil and Youssef's plays are divided by *chapters* rather than *scenes*—Hook accidentally hits himself in the face with his sword and puts on an eye patch, pointing up how disability shapes Hook's life (104). The other instance when disability concerns are made overt is during Chapter Three, when Mrs. Darling asks Peter how to tell when one is getting old. Peter replies, "Well, for one, a cane. Or a wheelchair. You can't fly. *You can't fly with those handicaps*" (98, emphasis added). That one can't fly/succeed/imagine with handicaps

[3] "For more about this process, see Youssef's "Writing Together" in which he describes how their collaboration worked.

is almost certainly an idea McNeil has been exposed to throughout his life, both personally and professionally. However, as disability theatre theorists like Johnston and Petra Kuppers would point out, the very fact that McNeil has become a successful playwright, director, and actor is itself evidence that people with disabilities can function in the theatre (and outside it).

Another characteristic of disability theatre at work in *Peter Panties* (and *King Arthur's Night*) is the Brechtian alienation meant to disrupt any illusions the audience might harbor about the identification between the actor's body and the character's body. Kupperswrites, "one of the ways that creative imaginations can appear in disability land: connections, appreciations, mixed languages, remembered fragments, new constellations. Culture works through remixing and hybridization" (75). *Peter Panties*—which is already an adaptation from Barrie—certainly shows extensive evidence of theatrical and multimedia hybridity, drawing from different plays and TV shows, and incorporating live music, video, and audio technology into the production. The Prologue begins with the actors processing onto the stage singing the song "Desperate Prayer" with a live band playing (85), then there are audio recordings and video projected from McNeil and Youssef's sessions drafting the play (86-88).[4] The rest of the play features several intertextual elements. Wendy refers to Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (93), then later Mrs. Darling reads a passage from that play (119). When Wendy first arrives in Neverland, the Lost Boys are watching *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (95-96), and later Gil Grissom and Catherine Willows—the main characters from *CSI*—arrive to investigate Wendy's murder (122-127). In Chapter Eight, Hook and Smee perform a scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with Hook taking the lead role and Smee performing as Lady Macbeth (114-115). All of these intertextual and multimedia tools disrupt the audience's potential suspension of disbelief by breaking apart the play's narrative.[5] This kind of disruption is common in disability theatre, though it is obviously not exclusive to disability performances. In fact, many adapters use these kinds of hybrid or multimedia approaches to signal difference from the adapted work, especially when working within the same medium as the original.

Peter's Sexual Desires

In McNeil and Youssef's play, Peter Pan is sexually aware in a way that he simply isn't in Barrie's versions, though the later Peter is not yet sexually mature. Mrs. Darling asks Wendy whether Peter has ever had sex before, and Wendy admits that he has not, prompting Mrs. Darling to reflect, "This is the naive side. This is before. Something naive. I just realized that.

[4] The audio/visual elements of the Prologue are visible on Newold Theatre's *YouTube* video "Peter Panties."
[5] There is much more that could be said about these specific intertextual choices, but that exceeds the scope of this essay's argument.

This is new territory. It's unknown" (106). Mrs. Darling recognizes Peter's sexual immaturity, his naïvety characteristic of young people changing from childhood to adulthood, with all the accompanying awkwardness of that transition. And indeed, most of Peter's sexual gestures are childish and selfish, even sexually violent at times, as will be discussed more below. At times Peter's sexuality is casual, and at times capricious. He opens Chapter Three with an almost infantile statement of desire to Mrs. Darling "I want to have sex and have kids" (97). And he ends the scene by threatening, "When I grow up, I'll marry your daughter" (99). In neither of these instances does Peter express what we might call an adult approach to sexuality—that is, a romantic attraction to another person that conceptualizes them as an independent subject with their own desires and needs. Peter expresses his own wishes, without ever considering Wendy's feelings—indeed, when Peter later tells Wendy he wants to have a baby with her, she tells him "Sure thing, Peter. It's totally up to you" (111). Peter is also arbitrary in his refusal to allow Mrs. Darling to come to Neverland: "you can't go to Neverland *because I don't want you to*" (98, emphasis added). Throughout the scene, and indeed throughout the play, Peter shows little regard for anyone else's needs or desires.

These specific elements of sexual immaturity are characteristic of what psychoanalyst Dan Kiley termed Peter Pan Syndrome (PPS), which is characterized by an adult man's childish inability to develop a full adult identity; PPS is generally characterized by irresponsibility, anxiety, mood swings, narcissism, and a compromised sexual identity. The most prominent characteristics of the PPS sufferer's sexuality are chauvinism that often manifests by demanding that a partner conform to the man's ideal, sexual exploitation or violence, and treating a romantic partner as a substitute mother from whom the PPS victim can get love and approval (Kiley 12-13, 32, 77-78). *Peter Panties* most obviously demonstrates the sexual violence, or what Kiley characterizes as "rape talk." For instance, Peter suggests that he and the Lost Boys can play "little sexual games" and grope one another, including touching Wendy's breasts, though he doesn't ask her consent (96-97). And when Wendy confronts one of the mermaids, Peter tells them to strip to their underwear and "have a crotch-kicking show" (108).[6] In other words, Peter's sexual desires are tied in with violence and a narcissistic requirement for his own pleasure regardless of how it impacts others. Early in the play, sex and violence are explicitly linked

[6] Even the Lost Boys recognize that Peter is toxic, and when Peter goes into the tent where mermaids are performing a striptease, the Lost Boys try to warn Wendy away from pursuing a relationship with him:

> LOST BOY. Wendy, you can't go out with Peter.
> TOOTLES. Peter actually is an enemy.
> WENDY. He's not an enemy.
> TOOTLES. Yes he is, Wendy.
> LOST BOY. You know how Peter be like that [*sic*].
> TOOTLES. Sometimes he's ignoring [*sic*].
> WENDY. Yeah. Sad but true. (108)

when Peter comes to the Darlings' home and talks with Mrs. Darling:

> MRS. DARLING. I keep seeing aggression, and I keep seeing sex.
>
> PETER. Yeah there's sex.
>
> MRS. DARLING. Yeah and there's aggression.
>
> PETER. And kissing. Fighting. People falling in love. What do you think about that, Mrs. Darling? That I want to have kids, sex-wise? You're the mother. (98)

Although Peter claims to be twenty-eight (98), his sexual identity is stunted. His desires are linked to aggression and tied up with a desire to please the mother figure—in this case Mrs. Darling.

In Barrie's play and novel, Peter seeks a mother—a role taken on primarily by Wendy—whereas Wendy tries to develop a romantic partnership with Peter. This is a central theme. When Peter returns to Neverland with Wendy, John, and Michael —although the preposition *with* is used liberally here, because Peter actually flies away and largely leaves Wendy and her brothers to make their own way to the island—he announces, "Great news, boys, I have at last brought a mother for us all" (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not* 2.1.223- 224). And after the Lost Boys build Wendy a house, they enjoin her to be their mother, telling her that it doesn't matter if she has no experience as a parent because "What we need is just a nice motherly person" (2.1.345-346). And so, Wendy becomes the Boys' mother figure and Peter takes on the honorific of father—these fictions shape their life in the underground house for much of the play and/or novel. However, it is also clear that this domestic arrangement is not without tension, driven at least in part from Wendy's desire for a romantic relationship with Peter, and his inability to even conceptualize what she wants:[7]

> WENDY. (*knowing she ought not to probe but driven to it by something within*) What are your exact feelings for me, Peter?
>
> PETER. (*in the class-room*) Those of a devoted son, Wendy.
>
> WENDY. (*turning away*) I thought so.
>
> PETER. You are so puzzling. Tiger Lily is just the same; there is something or other she wants to be to me, but she says it is not my mother.
>
> WENDY. (*with spirit*) No, indeed it isn't.
>
> PETER. Then what is it?
>
> WENDY. It isn't for a lady to tell. (4.1.120-129)

The sexual desire of McNeil and Youssef's Peter is in stark contrast to the innocence of Barrie's protagonist. McNeil and Youssef also downplay the longing for a mother figure that

[7] As Ann Wilson argues, Wendy herself seem unable to fully conceptualize what she wants from Peter, instead being constricted by middle class Edwardian sexual mores that saw women as (ideally) passive objects to be possessed by men (603-604).

characterizes the earlier versions, although at the end of their play Peter does reflect, "I don't have a mother," and the rehabilitated Hook replies, "Okay, fine, I'll share my mother with you" (127). Perhaps, though, it's more accurate to say that McNeil and Youssef transform the theme of motherhood by making Wendy actually bear Peter a child, as we saw at the beginning of this article.

Peter and Wendy's child exposes other aspects of PPS—namely, Peter's irresponsibility and narcissism. He repeatedly expresses the desire to have a child with Wendy (97, 111-113), but once the child is born, according to the stage directions, "*PETER leaves*" (113). After Peter leaves her with the baby, Wendy says, "I don't want to have any more kids" (113). This is essentially the last we see of the baby. This signifiesthat Peter has now gratified his desire for a child, but shows no interest in the responsibilities of fatherhood, even having Niall McNeil come on stage as himself at the end of the play to marry Wendy (126-131)—presumably also to be a substitute father to the baby, although this is never explicitly brought up.

Peter's resistance to being answerable for others is also grounded in Barrie's play:

PETER. (*scared*) It is only pretend, isn't it, that I am their father?

WENDY. (*drooping*) Oh yes.

(*His sigh of relief is without consideration for her feelings*)

But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine.

PETER. (*determined to get at facts, the only things that puzzle him*) But not really?

WENDY. Not if you don't wish it.

PETER. I don't. (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not*4.1.113-119)

Of course, the major difference between Peter's refusal of paternity in Barrie's play and his abandonment of his child in McNeil and Youssef's play is that Peter is actually the biological father of Wendy's baby in the latter instance. In both versions, Peter is irresponsible and unwilling to embrace the role of father, but in Barrie's drama Pater never expresses the desire to have a child (or any awareness of sex as such). Nell Boulton claims, "For [Peter], natural sexual curiosity is impossible. Indeed, Peter's lack of curiosity does not merely relate to sexuality, but extends to an inability to understand the points of view of other people. Whether commanding the lost boys or asking Wendy to mother him, he seems to treat everyone in Neverland as narcissistic extensions of his own needs" (310). In *Peter Panties*, Peter is equally narcissistic, though he does indulge his sexual impulses. However, he does so without accepting any claim the child might have upon him. The pattern demonstrated by Peter here—fulfilling his desires without willingness to accept accountability for his actions—is the governing logic of late capitalist consumption. This ownership mentality is central to McNeil and Youssef's Peter, while Barrie's protagonist seems to have little desire to possess things or people—he is primarily

driven by the desire to have fun, though he is as capable of doing so in complete solitude and with no material possessions as he is when surrounded by people and objects.

Late Capitalism's Economy of Desire

In his book *The End of Dissatisfaction?*, Todd McGowan argues that the *nomos* of late capitalism is desire, and that desire both drives capitalist production and reshapes the human psyche. As McGowan puts it, "Rather than demanding that its members give up their individual enjoyment for the sake of the whole, the society of enjoyment commands their enjoyment—private enjoyment becomes of paramount importance" (3). Individual gratification is tied to the capitalist mode of production growth because the demands of enjoyment are played out as demands for consumption of goods and services, with a corresponding demand for continual production. McGowan explains, "Global capitalism functions by submitting all cultural life to the process of commodification, and this process can only be sustained if everyone is engaged in the endless pursuit of enjoyment" (50). Similarly, SamoTomšič writes, "the unconscious production of *jouissance* and the social production of value follow the same logic and display the same structural contradictions, tensions and deadlocks: not repression of productive potentials of sexuality, drives and desires but the insatiable demand for production" (49). In other words, both capitalism and the psychology of the late capitalist subject function under the same demand for continual expansion—there can never be *enough* goods produced, *enough* profit, or *enough* enjoyment.

However, living under the governing logic of enjoyment, rather than the industrial capitalist logic of renunciation , has reshaped the psychology of the modern subject into what McGowan terms *pathological narcissism* (34). The pathological narcissist has a psychological need not only for success, but for that success to be socially acknowledged—it is not sufficient to have financial or romantic accomplishments, but the Other must acknowledge the pathological narcissist's accomplishments. This is related to what Oliver James calls *affluenza*, which he characterizes as "placing a high value on acquiring money and possessions, looking good in the eyes of others and wanting to be famous" (vii). Narcissism is one of the central building blocks of Peter Pan Syndrome. The intense focus on the self, and particularly the pursuit of perfection, is a coping mechanism for the feelings of anxiety, insufficiency, and loneliness that constantly threaten the PPS sufferer's self-image. As Kiley puts it, "The victim of the Peter Pan Syndrome is obsessed with the pursuit of perfection. The greater his insecurities, the more vivid the critical reflections and the stronger the need to project perfection. The attack of the projected insecurities is exacerbated by the absence of close friends and confidantes. Years of anxiety and loneliness have cut him off from seeking refuge in people who really care about him" (130). In other

words, narcissism is tied in to both the PPS victim's poor self-esteem—which is hidden by an excessive and phantasmatic over-compensation—and to the victim's poor social skills or relationships. And these two elements reenforce one another: because the victim determines that he's the only one who matters, this further weakens relationships with others who become merely mirrors for reflecting back to him his own perfection.

This reflective role of others is apparent in Barrie's play and novel, and to a lesser extent in McNeil and Youssef's adaptation. In Barrie's work, Peter's narcissism is evident throughout in ways that prefigure the pathological narcissism that would become a defining psychological condition of late capitalism—apart from the constituitive desire to own things and people. When Wendy finds Peter trying to stick his shadow back on with soap, she offers to sew it on, and once she has done so, Peter exclaims:

PETER. Wendy, look, look; oh the cleverness of me!

WENDY. You conceit; of course I did nothing!

PETER. You did a little. (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not*1.1.375-377)

Not only does Peter take the lion's share of the credit for an achievement he had nothing to do with, but this exchange shows his need not only to "accomplish" but to be acknowledged in accomplishing. When he exclaims, "Wendy, look, look" Peter is directly drawing her attention to his cleverness—or, more accurately, to force her to acknowledge his perfection, even when the actual event shows his inability to stick his shadow back on. This need to be seen and acknowledged also causes Peter and Wendy trouble, particularly in the scene where Peter taunts the pirates on Marooner's Rock. After imitating Hook's voice, the pirates play a kind of twenty questions game with Peter, and he almost gives away his identity when Hook asks if he's a wonderful boy and, to Wendy's chagrin, Peter answers yes (3.1.130-131). Following this exchange, Peter reveals his identity to mock the pirates who were unable to guess, and in the following fight he is wounded and both he and Wendy nearly drown in the rising waters.

Things are never quite so drastic or dangerous in *Peter Panties*, but McNeil and Youssef's Peter delights in external validations of his perfection, especially by Wendy. Peter seems to revel in her compliments, while rarely returning them. During the birth scene in Chapter Seven, Wendy says, "I love you. You're very sexy, Peter" and he replies, "I love *it*" (112, emphasis added). The context doesn't allow us to determine exactly what Peter means by *it* in this scene. It's possible that he means he loves that she's having his baby, or that he loves that she's in love with him, but given Peter Pan's narcissism, the most logical assumption might be that he loves the compliment. He loves the affirmation of his own perceived perfection. Noticeably, Peter does not respond, "I love *you*," so this is clearly not a declaration of affection

for Wendy as a life partner.[8] This reading is bolstered in Chapter Eleven, when Peter solicits a compliment from Wendy, asking why she would want to pick him (an ironic question, considering that by this time Wendy is in the process of marrying McNeil), and she responds "Cause you're very sexy man [*sic*]" (128).As we saw in Barrie's play, Wendy is here a mirror for reflecting back what Peter wants to see—she's an object to support his narcissism.

Both affluenza and pathological narcissism are tied to an ownership mentality, where gratification of desires is viewed almost exclusively as a matter of consuming objects—including other people, who are treated as objects. Erich Fromm diagnoses the effects of a "having mentality" on romantic relationships, writing that when partners see one another as objects instead of subjects, "the error that one can *have* love has led them to cease loving. Now, instead of loving each other, they settle for owning together what they have: money, social standing, a home, children" (34). For Fromm, this proprietary attitude toward marriage is rooted in a capitalist society that trains subjects to think always in terms of accumulating possessions (35). To be clear, though, this kind of proprietary attitude toward others is not exclusive to marriage, nor does it characterize all marriages.

Affluenza and pathological narcissism also result from this obsession with wealth, as conspicuous consumption requires a degree of financial stability and freedom. Kiley links Peter Pan Syndrome to middle- or upper-class social status because money allows the individual the freedom not to worry about problems like food or shelter, and to focus instead on building an identity through the consumption of products (28-30). PPS is, therefore, a fellow traveler with conditions like affluenza and pathological narcissism—psychological problems in which the victim is driven primarily by a need to gratify their own desires and gain the approval of others. Late capitalism has also had profound effects on the structure of and attitudes toward the family, attempting to impose an exclusively economic model on family life.

Late Capitalism and the Family

One of the defining characteristics of late capitalism has been the attempt since the 1970s to extend the logic of the market through all spheres of society, including to socio-cultural spaces previously thought inappropriate for economic logic. As Wendy Brown puts it, "neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities—even where money is not at issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*," or the economic human (31, original emphasis).[9] This reconceptualizing extends to the family. Neoliberal thinkers attempt to erase

[8] During the marriage scene, Peter does actually state that he loves Wendy, but the stage directions describe them as "*flirty*" (128), so it's possibly that this is not a serious declaration, and Peter only says this after Wendy agrees to marry McNeill, thereby releasing Peter from any responsibility for a declaration of love.

[9] For more on late capitalism's pervasive reach, see Lisa Duggan, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, or Phillip Zapkin.

any non-economic perspectives or functions of the family, reducing it purely to a set of market transactions. Milton Friedman, probably the most influential theorist of neoliberal economics and cultural politics, explained the parent child relationship: "*children are at one and the same time consumer goods* and potentially responsible members of society. The freedom of individuals to use their economic resources as they want includes the freedom to use them to have children—*to buy, as it were, the services of children as a particular form of consumption*" (33, emphasis added). In other words, children are seen as consumable goods, which are expected to provide a return on the parental investment—though Friedman also acknowledges that once children are born, they become rights-bearing subjects in themselves.

Gary Becker goes further than Friedman in his analysis of the economized family, trying to show market logic at work in family life. Becker's book *A Treatise on the Family* presents theoretical arguments for the thesis that individuals naturally congregate in heterosexual and patriarchal nuclear family structures due to the logic of maximizing social utility—the book doesn't really address the counterargument that for most of human history the contemporary, atomized American-style nuclear family has not been the default social organization. He writes, "I also assume that [family] members do not need to be supervised because *they willingly allocate their time and other resources to maximize the commodity output of their household*" (Becker 16, emphasis added). In other words, Becker's view of the family—which has been quite influential among late capitalist social commentators, especially those who favor cutting social safety nets —is that families organize because individuals seek maximum profit within a competitive system, rather than according to forces like love/affection, arranged marriages, patriarchal ownership of women, shotgun weddings, religious custom, etc.[10]

At this point, one might reasonably object that these theories operate largely outside McNeil and Youssef's play. Peter's narcissism, objectification of Wendy, and even his abandonment of their baby is not sufficient grounds for arguing that *Peter Panties* provides a commentary on late capitalism as such. However, the critique of capitalism becomes more apparent when we contrast Peter's pursuit of enjoyment with Mr. Darling's Edwardian style renunciation. In Chapter Nine, shortly after the birth of her baby, Wendy arrives at the bank where Mr. Darling works (McNeil and Youssef, *Peter Panties*115). Wendy tries to interact with her father on an interpersonal level, at one point telling him, "I don't want you to be upset, dad," to which he responds with a professional and detached, "How much money do you want to take out?" (116). The banker, Mr. Darling, turns away the familial connection, instead embracing fully his professional role. The renunciation of the personal is even more apparent when Wendy

[10] The limitations of Becker's theory have been noted directly by Melinda Cooper in her book *Family Values*. Authors like Brown, Duggan, and Zapkin have also challenged the neoliberal logic of the family as a naturally self-organizing and non-coercive economic space.

asks if she can hug him, and Mr. Darling replies, "This is a public place" (117). The refusal of the hug—a symbol of interpersonal intimacy—because they are in a public and professional space signifies Mr. Darling's renunciation of interpersonal relationships, a form of psychological enjoyment. Instead,this refusal aligns him with the tradition of industrial capitalism, which required subjects sacrifice their enjoyment for the good of society/the economy. Mr. Darling's professionalism is perhaps more evident with the customer who comes before Wendy—played by Tinker Bell. Tinker Bell makes several transactions, which Mr. Darling processes quickly and efficiently (115-116). Strangely, however, these financial exchanges end with Tinker Bell saying, "I love you" and Mr. Darling replying, "I love you back" (116). While this perhaps breaks the illusion of his professionalism, it also seems like an unexpectedly causal parting, functioning with no more apparent affect than if they had said goodbye. Immediately after this exchange, Tinker Bell leaves and there is no apparent interaction between the two. Mr. Darling's bourgeois detachment is a stark contrast to Peter's childish desire simply to enjoy, without an apparent willingness to take responsibility for the results of his enjoyment (i.e., Wendy's baby). Peter also wants to continue enjoying, even when that enjoyment becomes socially inappropriate, as when he continues flirting with Wendy even as she's marrying McNeill at the end of the play (128).

In Barrie's play and novel, we never see Mr. Darling at work, though we learn he is a clerk, and we see him approach family/children as a financial problem to be reasoned out. Mr. Darling—for as much as he himself seems to be a childish adult who plays juvenile games with Michael (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not*1.1.203-260) and complains that no one coddles him (1.1.276-277)—is described as a man with a head for finance. While this might sound reminiscent of Becker's economic family, it's worth noting that Barrie creates Mr. Darling to satirize bourgeois penny-pinchers; here Becker's ideal is presented as a buffoonish figure of fun. In the novel, Barrie describes Mr. Darling as "one of those deep ones who knows about stocks and shares. Of course no one really knows, but he quite seemed to know, and he often said stocks were up and shares were down in a way that would have made any woman respect him" (Barrie, *Peter Pan2*).[11] In the play, Mr. Darling's financial projections about whether they could afford a baby are mentioned in stage directions, meaning it would be accessible to readers but not to

[11] Interestingly, this description is taken almost directly from the play *When Wendy Grew Up*, a one-act play Barrie wrote in 1908—three years before the 1911 publication of the novel. However, in *When Wendy Grew Up* the description is applied not to Mr. Darling, but to Wendy's unnamed husband. In talking to her daughter Jane, Wendy says, "Papa is very clever, and knows all about Stocks and Shares. Of course he doesn't really know about them, nobody really knows, but in the morning when he wakes up fresh he says 'Stocks are up and Shares are down' in a way that makes Mummy very, very proud of him" (Barrie, *When Wendy* 1.1.123-127). We know that the term *Papa* here refers to Wendy's husband and not her father, because in the line before she notes that they bought the house from Jane's grandfather, Wendy's father (1.1.122-123). That Barrie shifted this description from Wendy's husband to her father—despite the novel's final chapter also being entitled "When Wendy Grew Up"—raises further interesting questions about Barrie's frequent conflation of parental figures and romantic desires.

audiences seeing the performance.[12] The stage directions explain that Mr. Darling was concerned about whether or not the family could afford to have Wendy, let alone any other children (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not* 1.1.117).[13] In the novel—which seems to me like Barrie's more natural medium, considering the amount of unstageable information he provides in the play script—these calculations are presented in more detail, and Barrie assures us it was a close shave. When Mrs. Darling gets pregnant, "Mr. Darling was frightfully proud of her, but he was very honourable, and he sat on the edge of Mrs. Darling's bed, holding her hand and calculating expenses, while she looked at him imploringly. She wanted to risk it, come what might, but that was not his way; his way was with a pencil and a piece of paper" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 2-3). Following this passage, Barrie takes us through Mr. Darling's calculations, as he mentally moves money from place to place and takes stock of what they could do without to meet the expenses of a new baby (3).

The other financial facet of Mr. Darling is the threat of economic ruin for the family, which appears in Barrie's play and novel as well as in *Peter Panties*. Ann Wilson even goes so far as to claim that "*Peter Pan* is a fable of modernity, anxiously negotiating industrial technologies that produced a middle class predicated on instability and which encoded impossible roles for men and women" (608). In her reading, middle class Edwardian anxieties about changing work roles, social roles, and gender roles under industrial capitalism are the central tension underlying Barrie's work. As the sole breadwinner for his family, Mr. Darling's employment is critical to the family's survival, both socially and physically in terms of food and shelter. This critical role within the family unit does give Mr. Darling a great deal of coercive power to enforce his will in the home through the threat of dire consequences if his wishes aren't met. Wilson notes that Mr. Darling's ostensible power in the home is the inverse of his relative powerlessness and anonymity within the industrial capitalist structure, even though the public sphere of business is ostensibly the male world (598-599). Barrie gives us a scene in which Mr. Darling threatens to quit work if Mrs. Darling does not tie his tie for him: "I warn you, Mary, that unless this tie is around my neck we don't go out to dinner to-night, and if I don't go out to dinner to-night I never go to the office again, and if I don't go to the office again you and I starve, and our children will be thrown into the streets" (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not*1.1.129-133). While this threat may be a comic one meant as a jest for the benefit of the children, we also see Mr. Darling later commit to an absurd penance when, at the end of the play and novel, he pledges to remain in Nana's dog kennel until the children return (Barrie, *Boy Who Would Not*

[12] While the play premiered in 1904, it wasn't published until 1928, so these stage directions weren't accessible to most audience members for the first twenty-four years.
[13] Though, ironically, at the end of the play and novel, the Darlings have not only their three biological children, but they adopt the six Lost Boys whom Wendy, John, and Michael bring back. This raises questions about Mr. Darling's math skills.

5.2.19-50; Barrie, *Peter Pan* 170-171). Clearly Mr. Darling is willing to go to extremes. In McNeil and Youssef's play, Mr. Darling's employment hinges more on his job performance, rather than a temper tantrum over his tie, but the threat of unemployment and the negative consequences thereof do show up in the song "I Work at a Bank":

I work at a bank
I have a meeting with the owner
If I come out of my office
Our children will starve to the streets (x2)
I do not see more
I have a meeting with the owner
If I come out of my office
Our children will starve to the streets (x2) (McNeil and Youssef, *Peter Panties* 94 , emphasis added).

The threat of starvation here is not tied to the necktie, but it nonetheless signifies that Mr. Darling's employment remains a matter of life or death for the children and Mrs. Darling. The play contrasts Mr. Darling—with his employment, responsibilities, and renunciation of enjoyment—against Peter Pan, who rejects responsibility for a family but demands enjoyment.

McNeil and Youssef's Peter wants continually to possess people, especially Wendy, but he is unwilling to allow any responsibilities to attach to him. Peter demands enjoyment, but refuses the responsibilities linked to Mr. Darling's acceptance of tedious employment—in some sense the ultimate renunciation of enjoyment. The most overt example of this attitude is Peter's treatment of their baby, as we've already seen. However, Peter's desire to continue enjoying remains evident through the marriage scene as he continues flirting with Wendy even as she marries Niall. By refusing to marry her, Peter rejects any claim she might make on him as the father of her child. But, simultaneously, by continuing to flirt with her and mandate that she compliment him, Peter continues to demand her focus on him, continues to demand a form of ownership. By rejecting marriage, Peter refuses the industrial capitalist model what would require he subordinate his desires to the needs of his family. This paradoxical attitude of wanting to enjoy Wendy as a lover without being bound to her also contrasts Barrie's Peter, whose ephemerality and flightiness prevents him from developing any long-term interest in another person. McNeil and Youssef's protagonist wants to possess Wendy without her possessing him in any sense; Barrie's protagonist barely remembers figures who had played a central role in his life, like Tinker Bell or Captain Hook (Barrie, *When Wendy* 74; 176-181).

Conclusion

In *Peter Panties*, Peter Pan is a posterchild for the late capitalist culture of enjoyment,

with its psychological demand for pleasure without accountability. He is sexually exploitative of Wendy and the mermaids—who at one point striptease in silhouette in a tent (McNeil and Youssef, *Peter Panties* 106)—and repeatedly states that he wants to have a baby with Wendy, but then shows no interest in raising the child or even being present. Peter's sexuality, for all that it's more overt than in Barrie's play or novel, is still adolescent. This is demonstrated in a conversation with Mrs. Darling:

> PETER. I want to have sex and have kids.
>
> MRS. DARLING. Having sex is growing up, isn't it?
>
> PETER. So?
>
> MRS. DARLING. That's not what a child wants. (97-98)

Like a child trying to gratify a desire, Peter's sexuality remains entirely about his own enjoyment—his attitude is childish even as he enters the ostensibly adult world of sexuality. We may, therefore, think of Peter as the boy who refuses to grow up, not in the sense of not experiencing or desiring sexual pleasure, but in the sense of rejecting any responsibility to others. Peter refuses to grow into a reliable adult, even as he enters into sexual maturity. For him, Wendy exists as an object to fulfill his sexual impulses, not as a subject in her own right, to whom he might have responsibilities. In this sense, McNeil and Youssef's Peter Pan reflects both the childishness of Peter Pan Syndrome and the pathological narcissism of the late capitalist society of enjoyment.

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Laboring Toward Liberation: Literature as a Tool of Resistance

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ABSTRACT

Creative works are often framed as a 'labor of love.' Literature, however, is produced by a person through many hours of work. Not only is creative writing a labor—it is a labor that can serve communities; the creation of literature can challenge readers to work toward liberation. This paper examines liberation and coalition building in fiction, with *A Minor Chorus* by Billy-Ray Belcourt, *The Once and Future Witches* by Alix E. Harrow, and *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* by Larry Mitchell serving as particular examples for analysis.

KEYWORDS
queer literature, LGBTQ, liberation, labor, coalitions, creative writing, radical imagination, fiction.

> "Nothing exists in a vacuum. A text—like a letter, a poem, a story, a piece of art—exists in a historical, social, and political context. All you have to do is look at when it was created and ask yourself, *What else was happening then?*"
>
> Maggie Smith, *We Could Make This Place Beautiful*

Radical Imagination & Community

Often, society is quick to dismiss stories as mere entertainment, a way to distract ourselves for a few hours and nothing more. In part, this comes from capitalist constructs that frame money as *the* signifier of value; art and literature are often circulated with little to no monetary profit for the artist/writer, especially in digital spaces.[1] Because of these cultural contexts, literature is frequently not linked to labor. Politics scholar Frederick Harry Pitts writes that "'social products' like creative services 'resist calculation' because they inhabit a 'commons' of knowledge unenclosable within the confines of private property, and beyond capital's capacity to manage and quantify. Value production 'no longer takes place primarily within the walls of the factory' but 'across the entire social terrain', immeasurable through conventional means" (par. 3). Because art is so closely linked with our social and cultural lives—both in its production and in its distribution—traditional confines of production (like a lab, a factory, or a retail store) do not apply in the same way. Even how literature is composed is not quantifiable, a combination of past experiences, years of expertise, and the ever-elusive quality of 'inspiration.'[2]

At best, creative works are framed as a 'labor of love.' Literature, however, is produced by a person through many hours of work. One would not likely say that a marine biologist should not be paid, even if they have a passion for the work. And people tend to place more value on the time of those in the sciences or technology fields. They are more likely to see funding to get the work itself to get from Point A to Point B (i.e. a capitalist, money-based demonstration of value).

But we can take this a step further, too. Not only is creative writing a labor—it is a labor that can serve communities. Novelist Daniel Heath Justice, writing from a queer and Indigenous

[1] Publishing search tool ChillSubs lists 3,067 literary magazines as of January 2024. Filtering these magazines by only those that pay writers narrows this list down to 863 magazines, and it's not uncommon for them to only pay $10, $15, or $20 per piece. Further filtering to magazines that pay and do not charge a reading fee narrows this list down to 677 literary magazines. In other words, only 22% of the thousands of literary magazines listed pay writers and don't charge a reading fee.

[2] It bears questioning whether part of the tech-realm interest in AI-as-creative comes from discomfort with these realities, as what artificial intellgience does can ostensibly be more reliably traced in terms of how output is achieved. Even this is an oversimplification, if for no other reason than AI programs have to 'learn' to write, and this 'expertise' is often not counted toward the overall value.

perspective, argues that "story makes meaning of the relationships that define who we are and what our place is in the world; it reminds us of our duties, our rights and responsibilities, and the consequences and transformative possibilities of our actions. It also highlights what we lose when those relationships are broken or denied to us, and what we might gain from even partial remembrance" (75). Literature, as a part of the humanities, is one way to study what it means to be human—as Justice puts it, "our duties, our rights and responsibilities" and our relationships. But he keys into this idea of the "consequences and transformative possibilities of our actions," which begins to make connections between fiction and the real world. This positions literature as something which can cause change, even if only insofar as it demonstrates a different world in its fiction that we can work toward in our own reality. The literary texts analyzed here—*A Minor Chorus* by Billy-Ray Belcourt, *The Once and Future Witches* by Alix E. Harrow, and *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* by Larry Mitchell—will provide three examples of how liberation and coalition building can be incorporated into fiction. Ultimately, this study will examine how fiction holds the potential not only for personal, local-level change (i.e. subversion), or even for systemic single-axis change (i.e. reform or revolution), but also for offering perspectives on what more inclusive and intersectional liberation could look like.

In *A Minor Chorus,* Billy-Ray Belcourt's narrator wonders if "rather than change the world,"

> the writing of a novel… enabled one to practice a way of life that negated the brutalities of race, gender, hetero- and homonormativity, capital, and property… a novel could index a longing for something else, for a different arrangement of bodies, feelings, and environments, one in which human flourishing wasn't inhibited for the marginalized, which seemed as urgent an act of rebellion as any. (25)

While Belcourt's narrator focuses on the novel form, this "act of rebellion" can be expanded more broadly to other forms, like the essay, poetry, or hybrid work. For example, creative writers Margot Singer and Nicole Walker's *Bending Genres* includes chapters that link the essay with "a longing for something else" (Belcourt 25), as well as hybrid forms. Gender and Sexuality Studies scholar Kristin LaFollette claims that "Poetry confronts dominant social structures like patriarchy and uses language to question and break down ideologies that have oppressed women throughout history. In doing so, poetry acts as a 'blueprint' for social action and change; women can articulate the issues, push back against the oppression, and create space for activist movements" (179).

Literature can uphold hegemonic values and the status quo. At its most radical and exciting, however, the creation of literature can challenge readers to work toward liberation. Sociologist Max Haiven and anthropologist Alex Khasnabish argue that "the ability to believe

that things can be better" and "the ability to imagine the world, social institutions and human (and non-human) relationships otherwise is vital to any radical project" (iii). We are limited by our imaginations. Not all people think true change is possible. In fact, most people probably don't. (This is, it should be noted, by design—the system perpetuates because it is made to seem inevitable.)

Artist Natalie Loveless writes about "art with an activist impulse," which "offers speculative frames through which to *defamiliarize* and *reorganize* the local" (101). But it's possible to dismiss these kinds of imaginings as too radical, or as mere fantasy, or as overly idealistic. This is, after all, the cultural attitude toward many of the policies that would widely benefit society, such as free healthcare, universal income, free childcare, free (or even low-cost) college education, guaranteed housing, etc. We are limited not only by what we personally think is possible, but by what those around us think is possible due to a complex network of sociocultural factors. A system does not only come into being by *what it does*, but also by *what it makes seem impossible.* A system that's built to last often achieves this longevity by making that system seem inevitable, like the only possible way that the world could be. Our current societal systems create obstacles like capitalistic overwork, high-cost healthcare, and steep student debt, all of which make it difficult to even survive the world as it is, nonetheless imagine the world as it might otherwise be. In turn, working toward the world as it might otherwise be seems like a foolish endeavor, entirely out of reach within our lifetime.

Fiction offers an opportunity to imagine the world as it could be. It is not bound by practicalities of time and resources the way the real world is; it is not beholden to majority votes or political accountability; it does not require the same kind of slow-moving everyday labor that real-world change requires. Fiction has the freedom to imagine, to propose ideas and societies and systems as potential futurities if we desire them and if we work toward them. We will not wake up tomorrow to an equitable world. But we could potentially open a book right now where an equitable world has been established, and we could use what we learn (consciously or subconsciously) from this imagined world to start real-world work toward liberation. In *Art on My Mind,* race and feminism scholar bell hooks quotes Gender and Women's Studies scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha as writing that

> 'Liberation opens up new relationships of power, which have to be controlled by practices of liberty. Displacement involves the invention of new forms of subjectivities, of pleasures, of intensities, of relations, which also implies the continuous renewal of a critical work that looks carefully and intensively at the very system of values to which one refers in fabricating the tools of resistance.' (XIV)

Naturally, literature alone cannot achieve real-world liberation, but what it can do is give us tools

to imagine what liberation might look like and how we might get there.

Acknowledging the Intersections

In Belcourt's *A Minor Chorus,* the narrator muses that

> the news coming out of North America as of late was, in a sense, an ongoing refutation of the novel, of anything that wasn't direct action, that didn't have to do with an immediate insurgency against those whose disregard for the livability of the oppressed amounted to a politics of socially engineered mass death. A novel, then, could be an indictment of the novelist, evidence of his inaction, his carelessness. (26)[3]

How, then, can fiction be positioned in terms of the fight toward liberation? This is where consideration of the labor of creating literature becomes an important context. Belcourt's novel did not spontaneously arise one day like Athena from the head of Zeus. Italo Calvino poses "Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable" (qtd. in Ristow 17). *A Minor Chorus* is an amalgam and a synthetization of what was surely not only months or years of literal composition, revision, and editing of the text itself, but also research and reading to infuse that text—both thematically and narrationally—with ideas from scholarship, culture, and creative writing texts.

But, as bell hooks warns, "Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing toward this end" (61). Literature is no more inherently "healing, liberatory, or revolutionary" than theory is. The real author must make a choice to craft their work in this way (and, in thinking about this more holistically, the writer must make many choices to achieve this ethos). A writer may ask themselves, just as a theorist or a casual reader might: How can literature represent strategies for building intersectional coalitions that work toward collective resistance? And how might literature inspire a generation of more equitable systems of power? Ultimately, how does the labor of writing contribute to community?[4] After all, Audre Lorde writes that "Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor

[3] It is important to note here that, often, it is art that is shared (alongside news articles and donation links) when oppression ramps up. For instance, when Russia invaded Ukraine, it was common for people to post poems from Iyla Kaminsky, or to post art. In the wake of the late 2023/early 2024 intensifying of genocide in Palestine, it has been popular to share poems on social media such as Noor Hindi's "Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying," alongside recommendations of fiction and nonfiction, as well as on-the-ground reporting and donation links. Even something that might be indirect action still holds weight in our cultures, whether it's because people feel at a loss for words themselves or because they believe in the power of literature to generate empathy, understanding, and connection.

[4] This contribution to community can occur in a range of ways; while the argument here will have a focus on the liberatory, literature can certainly uphold the status quo in myriad ways and to various degrees.

the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist." Coalitions allow for this maintenance of individual identity. A transgender political group joining with a group of Indigenous water protectors to combat police violence benefits both groups with a similar goal against a similar threat, but this union doesn't demand that either group assimilate or sacrifice their own identities (either as groups or as individuals within those groups). Assimilation is a pressure of oppression; assimilation is not a tool toward liberation, and often will only serve one particular (often more privileged) group over others.

There are two distinct yet related ways to analyze liberatory impulses in fiction, at least insofar as it will be discussed here. The first point of analysis is the ethos of the fiction: do the tone, positioning of craft elements, and thematic explorations seem to suggest the need for multifaceted, intersectional, and radical reimaginings of the world at systemic levels? The second point of analysis is that of the tools used in the text itself. These tools can demonstrate ways of existing in the world, which can theoretically be applied in real-world scenarios. The tools of liberation, in fiction as well as real-world activism, likely include some combination of: coalition politics; mutual aid funds; self-determined communities; free gender and sexual expression; sharing of resources; societal rearrangement that decenters hegemonic norms like heterosexuality, cisgender identity, etc.; and societal reimagining that dissolves hierarchies, especially hierarchies based on identity factors alone. Here, the focus will center on coalition building in fiction. This is political, but also emotional, in nature. In *Communion,* bell hooks quotes *The Eros of Everyday Life,* wherein Susan Griffin writes that

> It is not for strategic reasons alone that gathering together has been at the heart of every movement for social change… These meetings were in themselves the realizations of a desire that is at the core of human imaginings, the desire to locate ourselves in community, to make our survival a shared effort, to experience a palpable reverence in our connections with each other and the earth that sustains us. (qtd. in hooks *Communion* xx)

Belcourt's *A Minor Chorus* recognizes the need for being intersectionally-minded. The novel is a nexus of fiction, scholarly musings, and philosophical musings, and includes direct references to critical texts throughout. Creative writers Margot Singer and Nicole Walker write that "hybridization infuses wild energy into familiar forms. The hybrid is transgressive, polyvalent, queer. The hybrid challenges categories and assumptions, exposing the underlying conventions of representation that often seem so 'natural' we hardly notice them at all" (4). The multi-genre form that Belcourt uses highlights and complements the many social identities and associated concerns reflected in the novel. *A Minor Chorus* demonstrates wide-ranging intersectional considerations about different kinds of positionalities, oppressions, and lived

experiences. These considerations include ones about Indigeneity, sexuality, gender, class, location, settler-colonialism, the carceral system, and the academy, among others.

A Minor Chorus oscillates between the narrator's extreme loneliness and isolation on the one hand and search for/leaning on community on the other. For example, there is a sense of longing, and perhaps even a shade of grief, when the narrator is speaking with someone from back home. This character, Lena, says "I think everyone sympathizes with her struggle. We all think about her," and, in this moment, the narrator "was struck… by this 'we,' a pronoun as vast and emotional as history. Lena, on account of having been on the rez her whole life, could marshal this collective voice. She was one of many in a chorus that sang of flourishing and grief" (126). Much of the narrator's inner turmoil is linked to his desire for liberation, and the extreme awareness of injustices at multiple systemic levels, which seems to reflect the overall ethos of the novel. Though no coalitions are formed per se during the plot of the narrative, it is not difficult to see the narrator's desire for liberatory goals such as self-determined communities, free gender and sexual expression, and societal reimagining that dissolves hierarchies.

The narrator is queer and Cree, and so this intersection is foregrounded often. When Lena asks why he hasn't been home to northern Alberta in a while, the narrator admits that he "wouldn't be able to live openly as a queer person here, wouldn't be able to love and be loved in the way I wanted" (129). He feels like he has to make a choice between places and between aspects of his own intersectional identity. As someone with identities that put him at risk, it is difficult to fault the narrator for such concerns. There are, of course, the issues pertaining to where one can be their most authentic self, a kind of micro-level liberation. But there is also the risk of actual bodily and emotional harm—as a Cree person, as a queer person, and (perhaps especially) as a queer Cree person. Hate crimes happen against both groups. Even back home, where he should theoretically feel safer as a Cree person, the narrator encounters a racist white lady who threatens to call the cops when the narrator visits an old residential school's grounds. So it is not even a choice of where to go that is *safe,* but where to go that is saf*er*, because sometimes nowhere is completely safe for a person at risk for particular discriminations or hate crimes. The system works in the white woman's favor simply because of her race privilege (as well as colonialist/racist cultural narratives about saving white women from Indigenous men). This incident, in addition to facing the history and cultural context at play, enhances the understanding of the policing system—and, by extension, the prison industrial complex—as an arm of Indigenous oppression later in the novel.

When the narrator goes to visit his cousin, Jack, in prison, Jack says "*Being neglected, not being raised by my parents, I'm no psychologist but I think that's how this all began. That history, and the history of the country too. My fate was determined from the start. The drugs, the*

dealing, the alcohol, they let me be more than what I was… But I can be more than that. I can escape that cycle" (158). This acknowledges how many systems come together—racism, colonialism, poverty, and the prison industrial complex—in order to perpetuate certain forms of oppression. And it even echoes the previous incident at the defunct residential school with "the history of the country." One might extrapolate from this the need to join together groups fighting for anti-racism, Indigenous sovereignty, economic justice, and prison abolition (as a few examples). One or more coalitions between these groups could work toward common goals of liberation. Belcourt's narrator doesn't directly call for coalitions as such in the narrative, but a social-justice-minded reader is certainly capable of connecting those dots based on the narrator's musings.

Coalition Building in Literature

Alix E. Harrow's *The Once and Future Witches* has direct formations of coalitions, with much attention paid in the narrative to how they are formed and the difficulties that arise in their formation. While the women across various identity and social groups join in the fight, and while they want to be liberated from the tyranny of patriarchy, they are more technically staging revolution to cause reform. The ethos, then, errs more toward revolutionary. However, *The Once and Future Witches* provides a study in forming coalitions, which can be framed as a tool used toward liberation to some degree or another. Harrow's novel grapples with the idea that "categories such as gender, race, and sexuality, while operating according to distinct logics, are interdependent and interrelated" (850), as Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies scholar Vrushali Patil phrases it in 'From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We've Really Come."

The basis of this coalition is perhaps most obviously found in the women's suffragette movement. In this fantasy novel, the right to vote and women's rights are tied to the literal power of women as witches. Juniper, one of the three sister protagonists, is disabled and works with the suffragettes, who have conflict within themselves about the most appropriate tactics to use to get the women's vote. (Juniper, who uses a cane, thinks at one point about how "her daddy never used a cane, though he should have; he said they were for grannies and cripples, not proud veterans of Lincoln's war" (87). This is only one example of the ableist attitudes that intersect with her oppressed status as a woman.) Agnes, another sister protagonist, involves her fellow factory workers, which ties in workers' rights and class in the coalition. (Agnes is also pregnant and must make the decision of whether to have the baby or get an abortion in secret, and so reproductive rights come into play with her.)

Black women, primarily represented by Cleo, are skeptical of what the coalition can do

for them, even though they do ultimately join it. It doesn't even occur to the most intelligent of the three sister protagonists, Bella, that Black women have preserved spells and maintained power through the generations like white women have, or that the secret society of Black witches actually exists beyond folktales, or that enslaved Black people were conscribed to rebuild the city after it first burned. It stands to reason that the Daughters of Tituba would wonder what the all-white (or, at minimum, predominantly-white) Sisters of Avalon have to offer them, since even the smartest among the Sisters' ranks recognizes neither the power nor the oppressions that Black women face until she is told directly. Cleo and Bella, it should be noted, are also queer women; Bella in particular suffered state violence for her queerness.

This coalition—formed of the women's suffragette movement, factory workers, and Black women, with significant contributions from queer and disabled people—aims to bring magic back to empower women again as witches so that they can change the system to access civil rights. The villain instead wants to horde this magic/power for himself, as he benefits greatly from the patriarchal status quo. This antagonist is in some ways a stand-in for patriarchal power writ large. It is never, of course, so easy to be liberated as overcoming one man with power, but his character operates in the narrative as a representation of that which must be overcome.

Larry Mitchell's *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* can be read as something between a queer fable and an allegory for queer liberation. This 1977 text not only demonstrates its characters forming coalitions; it also examines the dangers of not forming coalitions alongside its glimpses of paradise (where true liberation has been attained). In the 2019 introduction, Morgan Bassichis writes that

> In the shadow of structural abandonment, political alienation, family rejection, chronic illness, state violence, and medical neglect, queer friendship saves us. Queer friendship—that thing that is sometimes called mutual aid, solidarity, disability justice, care, organizing, abolition, or maybe just love—is what raised me in San Francisco, and what forms the lifeblood of this book.

This text centralizes the importance of coalition-building. The "queer men" featured here assimilate into the heterosexist, oppressive society, some going as far as living closest lives. These assimilationists not only abandon the cause of queer liberation and their queer kin, but they also make the world more dangerous for everyone. The coalition, on the other hand, is directly named in its title: *The Faggots and Their Friends.* This coalition includes or tries to include nearly everyone but "the men," who are positioned as straight and cisgender.[5] Groups

[5] This coalition was once open to the men, as mentioned in the mythic history of this world, but they are now the oppressors that "The Faggots and Their Friends" must fight against.

that join the fight include the eponymous Faggots (i.e. gay men who prioritize community), Strong Women (who represent feminists), Women Who Love Women (i.e. Sapphics), The Women with Color (i.e. women of color), Faeries (who are gay men who escape society), (Drag) Queens, and others. When these groups work together and reject the roles assigned to them, it causes chaos and violence from the men, but it also causes change. This potential for change is exactly what the men fear.

The Faeries in particular, with their gardens and peaceful lives, seem to offer a glimpse of what life *could* be if society were not trying to eradicate difference and dissidence. The goal is to leave "the men's reality in order to destroy it by making a new one." In these liberated oases, "The great gardens of the fairies begin to expand, producing food in abundance. The fairies shower the plants with so much love that the plants, with gratefulness, produce all they can." This is specifically in response to the "need [for] access to food and to warm spaces, to hiding places, to excitement and to each other." This text was influenced by the real-life presence of Lavender Hill,[6] and so life affected the text produced; the text produced, in turn, can also affect real-world events, ideas, and choices. The line between literature and culture is not a solid, end-all/be-all boundary, but rather a permeable line wherein culture and literature have the potential to affect one another, even in ways that may not be immediately obvious.

Limitations: Practically Speaking

How does the precarity of creative labor—especially for marginalized writers who are so often responsible for emotional and invisible labor—encourage a deficit of revolutionary and liberatory storytelling? When time and resources have to be allocated to basic everyday survival, it makes it less likely that marginalized writers can take the risk of creative labor, and therefore makes it less likely that they can contribute their ideas to their communities and beyond. This is a feature of the system, not a bug. Time and resources dedicated to physical survival (in terms of housing and food) cannot be dedicated to spiritual, emotional, and physical survival (against the systems which oppress).

Further, narratives around the status quo are frequently intended to paint it as inevitable. Any questioning of the system can be dismissed by it being 'the way things are.' It is designed to be daunting so that change is either as slow as possible or, even more ideally, doesn't happen at all. Limiting collective imagination of freedom makes it less likely that people will work together

[6] *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* was first published in 1977, while "Lavender Hill was established in 1973 and remained intact for about a decade before beginning to splinter. The center of the group, according to Bunn, was the couple of Hirsh and Allan Warshawsky. After they broke up the commune began to come apart. The dissolution was also impelled when one of the members fell ill with AIDS in the early '80s. His death in 1988 was the final convulsion" (Chaisson par. 4).

toward those goals (even if they do find the time and resources to do so). This is furthered by divisions stoked between, for instance, different groups within the working class.

This comes to examining possibilities in creative writing and literature. Sociologists Francesca Polletta and Beth Gharrity Gardner write that "Stories' configurational and emotional dimensions are important here. Stories turn discrete events into an evolving whole. They link past, present, and future, and invest events with moral significance and an emotional charge" (537). Keeping this in mind, we might ask: How can we adjust tools (including literature) to push further toward liberation when possible? Can we ever truly achieve liberation if we're bound, in some way or another, by the ever-present histories that will never vanish or be erased? Even if liberation is a goal that can never fully be achieved, is it still worth pursuing to continue to push society toward more personally tenable and more systemically equitable conditions?

Fictional stakes are different, of course, from real-world stakes. It is possible to use fiction to see how different scenarios may play out, but everyday oppressions in economic, social, and educational realms will always carry more weight. Real-world stakes can perhaps be illuminated in fiction. However, it is important to hold in mind that people suffer under current systems, that every day and every minute that we do not engage our radical imaginations to make the world a more hospitable place has lived consequences, not just theoretical ethical ones. And clearly there is a true threat that liberatory literature poses, or else book bans wouldn't be a front-and-center target of the so-called 'culture wars.' Fiction may help us to envision ourselves as free, but at its most powerful? Literature holds the potential to help us envision *all* of us as free. Each individual has complex intersectional social identities, and oppressions are often linked in insidious ways. Power only grows in cases of coalition building and solidarity, where one might imagine not only their own life transformed, but the lives of others transformed as well. Literature, scholarship, and activism are not discrete realms occupied by different groups of people. When we begin to think of ourselves more holistically—as writers or readers, as scholars, but also as people who exist within cultures and communities more broadly—then we can let these spaces and these ways of enacting change become more interdependent, and from there the possibilities only proliferate.

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