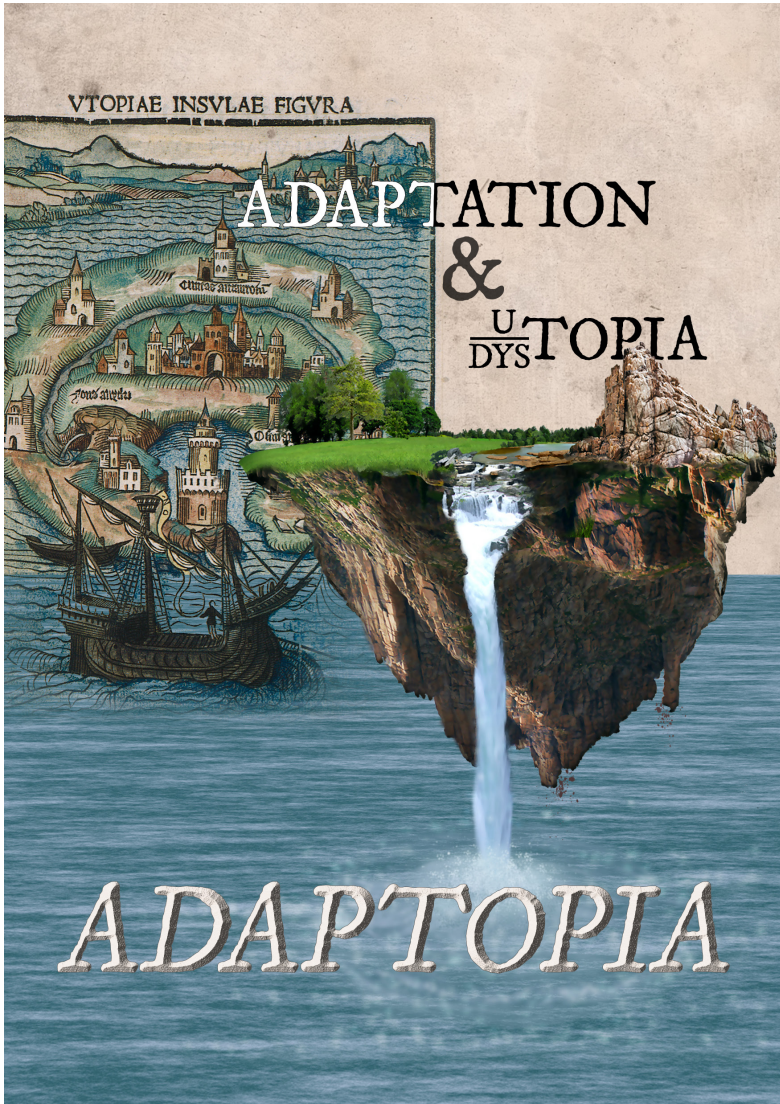


# *Noted*

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## Editor's Letter

EMILY SMITH

'Cottagecore' is, reliable sources inform me, a rather trendy aesthetic. I, myself, am not trendy enough to have witnessed this rising tide, but it is now certainly rushing in: as of the 27th March 2022, there are 13.9 million Google results for the term, 3.2 million posts on Instagram, and 9.3 billion views for #cottagecore on TikTok. The material of which Cottagecore is made, these sources suggest, seem to be mostly baking, needlework, and country landscapes. A good measure of the trend's usual content is, perhaps, the much-hyped expansion pack to the game *The Sims 4* entitled 'Cottage Living', which allows players to raise small critters (such as hens, llamas, and cows), collect mushrooms, make crumpets, and go on picnics – all within the setting of the village 'Henford-on-Bagley'. Personally, as someone who grew up in the depths of the countryside, I would call such activities 'daily life'. However, given that more than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas – according to the UN's statistics, this figure is now 80% in Switzerland and France, 85% in the US, and 91% in Great Britain – my own experience is definitely not representative.

Yet I don't have *particularly* fond memories of gardening and horse manure shovelling. If you could ask ten-year-old Emily, awoken at four in the morning to help chase yet another sheep back into its field, whether living in the countryside was idyllic, whether she enjoyed a two-hour commute each way to school, or whether the destruction wrecked on the garden by wild boar for the fifth time that summer was appreciated... Well, I hope that I can be forgiven for wondering how Cottagecore relates to reality.

It is clearly not country life which Cottagecore represents, but rather a utopian idyll. Such representation is far from new: rather, it is pastoral in a new key. The history of pastoral, reaching as far back as Theocritus and Virgil, is much too long to here elaborate. What must be highlighted, however, is Empson's famous definition of pastoral as the practice of 'putting the complex into the simple'. There is, in other words, far more behind the representation of rolling hills and baaing sheep than meets the eye. Cottagecore, in the same way, signifies more than homemade jam and bread: it is a form of masked social and political engagement.

The idea of 'utopia' – intimately intertwined with pastoral – is founded upon such doubleness, as Georgia Fulton's article upon Thomas More's *Utopia* illustrates. On the one hand, More's fictional land 'Utopia' provides a shocking degree of what we would now call social security: education, medical treatment, and a stable support network. The

women of Utopia, although still entrusted with the majority of caring duties, are granted far more freedom than their real sixteenth-century counterparts. A house is not only guaranteed for each citizen, but also comes with a pretty garden. Yet on the other hand, the society effaces individuality in favour of utter monotony – oh, and depends on enslavement.

Georgia's piece finishes by looking forward, exploring *Utopia's* complex legacy through its reception in the early modern period; the next piece, by Holly Ann Lavergne, instead looks back. More specifically, it examines how the frame passages Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* employ nostalgia to, ultimately, create a paradoxical 'conflict between happiness and its incessant proximity to sorrow' (15). As ever, surface idyll masks deeper conflict. Utopia, as Georgia notes, puns on 'no-place' and 'good place' (4): *dystopia*, with a far less ambiguous prefix, indicates a far more certain negativity. With the trend of the 2010s for dystopian fiction (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Maze Runner*, and ~~identical~~ similar fictional worlds being huge hits), we are all more than familiar with the genre – but dystopia can be more subtle than a protagonist with a special skill being thrust into an arena in which they use their wiles to outwit and overthrow the oppressive government under which they and their families suffer. Yet dystopian experiences can be far more individual and local, as Emily Brinson's discussion of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' allows us to explore. Once more, like in More's *Utopia*, it is the will of the individual which comes into conflict with outside forces – a battle enacted in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' which Emily skilfully examines.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its contradictions, we are drawn to the creation and consumption of utopias. Megan Zeitz's two contributions to this issue of *Noted* explore this dynamic in poetry – she examines the poetic 'resistance' of Michael Field which creates a 'queer aesthetics where[...] there is only art' (27), whilst her poem, 'Sapphotopia' itself creates such a utopian space. The tension between possibility and impossibility vibrates through both of these pieces – as, too, it echoes in Valérie Fivaz's 'Sleeping Beauty', her eyes raised to the sky...and away from the barbed wire which binds her.

Rounding off our issue in our accustomed fashion, Prof. Lukas Erne submits to a gentle grilling which allows us to peek into his literary (and theatrical) tastes, recent research, and chocolate addiction.

It has been a pleasure to work on this edition of *Noted* – which, unlike the idea of utopia itself, I promise will prove unambiguously good...

# *The Original Utopia*

GEORGIA FULTON

## ACADEMIA

Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is possibly the English Humanist's most famous text, and for good reason. The text (written originally in Latin) begins with the conversation of three characters who are based on historical figures (More, Giles, and Morton). These men engage in discussion while off-duty from their diplomatic mission in Antwerp. Their evening is enlivened by the presence of Raphael Hythloday, a traveller and philosopher who recounts his journeys in the New World. The men disagree with Hythloday that common property is superior to private property, and are astonished to hear that he would not consider being a counsellor to the King. Hythloday's own philosophy (of a radical republic) is laid out through his description of Utopia, a place where the inhabitants are governed by rationality and pacifism. The men do not agree that Utopia is superior to Europe, but they do acknowledge the interesting potential of such modes of governance, and the positives of adopting some of those practices in England, unlikely as the enactment of such practices may be.

There are certain features of *Utopia* that have been debated since its publication: is it a fictionalised exploration of More the author's own reforming impulses? Is the title, which literally means 'no-place', a joke to indicate that the conclusions of the text are not to be taken seriously? Homophonically, 'eu-topia' could also be read as 'good place', so what are we to make of that? Is More the character's own name ('Morus' in Latin) another joke, given that it literally means 'foolish'? And are Utopia's practices as idyllic as Hythloday makes them out to be? What about slavery, or the lack of personal freedom in their culture? 'Utopia', in modern parlance, is usually equated with the idea of paradise, or an ideal state. So what happens when this idea is deconstructed into practical suggestions for how to create the perfect place? As the theme of this issue suggests, adaptation is a crucial way to make sense of the text. Interpretative freedom is the fulcrum upon which this text hinges. You cannot read the text and directly equate More the character with More the author; nor can you either dismiss the text as nonsense, or assume that Utopia is seriously posited as an ideal to which we should aspire. Instead, let us look at the reception history of the text in the century or so following its publication, and see how varied readings of the text informed Renaissance literary culture.

Daniel Lochman examines the heritage of More's *Utopia* on literary theory in the Re-

naissance. Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* (1595), while published exactly eighty years after *Utopia*, engages directly with More's literary style as a deliberate strategy. Sidney distinguishes between ethical and political dimensions of knowledge, claiming that More had written in the correct way, but had nevertheless committed a fault. More, 'the man', was in the wrong, while More, 'the poet', was able to use *imitatio* (imitation) to teach and delight, as poetry should. A more recent contemporary of More's, William Tyndale, the Protestant Reformer, wrote in 1531 a critique of some of More's religious writing. Tyndale argued that More 'misapplied . . . serious doctrinal issues' by using a fictionalised setting, dialogue, and poetic deceit. In Tyndale's case, argues Lochman, it is clear that More the man and More the poet are both condemned as a liar and Catholic heretic.

This conflation of roles by Tyndale begs the question: how had the role of dialogue shifted by Sidney's time, so that it was seen less as a tool of fictional writing, and more as a feature – accepted by Elizabethan poetic theory – constituting the moral purpose of poetry? Sidney ultimately considered More's mimetic purity in *Utopia* to be compromised, and that the 'open-ended dialogic frame of *Utopia*' undermined its ability to move the reader. The most intriguing part of Lochman's study of Sidney's treatment of More is the open admiration displayed in his *Defense*. More the Catholic martyr, whose *Utopia* could only arguably be dismissed as fiction, was still worthy of notice and examination. The political dialogues in his text were made notable through a study of style.

Jumping ahead another half-century, how was *Utopia* perceived in Restoration England? Gregory Dodds examines two 'dominant rhetorical responses'. Politicising the text, it was used to attack Protestant nonconformists – the text offered an alternate reality which amounted to the heretical. Polemicising the text, Protestant anti-Catholic writing linked English Catholics with rebellion by looking at the novel as evidence of such an impulse. Following James II's accession in 1685, authors sought to find justification for his reign. Where the Whigs had previously used *Utopia* as a method to attack Catholicism and the potential for James' reign, supporters of the new king 'sought to position Thomas More as an anti-papal critic and reformer, finding evidence in *Utopia* for this understanding of the man.

Sir Peter Pett, for example, gave More's criticism of abbots and friars within the text as an example of his desire for a new model for the priesthood. Dodd contends that while references to *Utopia* were largely negative in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the text took on a political relevance and adaptability in polemical discourse. It 'could either remind people of a Catholic martyr or, conversely, of political experimentation and the danger from nonconformist Protestantism.' The text therefore took on a role outside of its contents: a 'destabilising force' which brought to the fore the underlying tensions of party politics at that time.

So: More's *Utopia* seems to be the model of adaptability, used for opposing political ends across the next century and a half by a variety of powerful people. The text's value in shaping a post-Reformation poetic theory is also curious. The literary experimentation visible in the text (from Lucianic satire to wordplay to the articulation of potential public policy) shows how malleable fiction in the Renaissance could be. Across the Early Modern period, the novel was used to shape literary theory, to whip up political fear, to martyrise the author, and to offer a vision of a potential republic. The adaptability of *Utopia* is therefore perhaps its greatest feature: it is a text for the ages.

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## The Ephemerality of Time

Narrative Tense and the Creation of a Nostalgic Tone in the Frame Passages of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*

HOLLY ANN LAVERGNE

*Editor's Note: This essay was originally submitted in Fall 2021 for the BA6 seminar "Literary Logic from Lewis Carroll to the Bot Poets."*

In Lewis Carroll's "An Easter Greeting," he describes the "deliciously dreamy feeling" he qualifies as "a pleasure very near to sadness" (Carroll 217). This "dreamy feeling" manifests as a nostalgic tone in the poems that begin both *Alice* books and end *Through the Looking-Glass*, as well as in the prose ending of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. I refer to these passages as *frame passages* because they serve as an "outer frame" (Madden 365) to both texts. The adjective "dreamy" refers to the pleasant magical quality when experience feels unreal, like the hazy "story-like quality" (*OED*) of dreams. I define "nostalgia" as a sentimental longing for or imagining of the past, characterized by simultaneous pleasure in remembering the past and sadness due to the inability to return to it. Dreams and nostalgia are connected by their mixing of positive and negative emotions, which seems paradoxical, but is actually the key way Carroll connects the frame passages' nostalgic tone to his exploration of time in the *Alice* books. Nostalgia is an emotion occurring in the present but focused on one's memory of the past. These connections between time – past, present, and future – are inextricably linked to narrative tense, a "grammatical category" which "locates a situation in time" (McArthur). Tense does not always equate to time; present tense, for example, can also be used to refer to past or future time. I analyze the four frame passages in order, so as to linearly evoke the similarities and differences between them. I will argue that the frame passages of both *Alice* books use variations in narrative tense to create a nostalgic tone in order to emphasize the ephemeral nature of time. Markers of tone, namely diction and punctuation, further convey subtle differences in each passage's tone, and in doing so, emphasize the changes in one's memory over time.

In the first frame passage, the poem "All in the golden afternoon" which precedes *Wonderland*, changes in narrative tense create a nostalgic tone by connecting present and past time, emphasizing time's ephemeral nature. The poem describes Carroll's July 4, 1862

boating expedition on the Thames with his friend Robinson Duckworth, as well as the Liddell sisters, Lorina, Alice, and Edith (Mittelmeier Soule 48). William Madden contends that there is a consciousness of linear time in the frame poems, but also a "subtle variation and interplay of verbal tenses" (366). I agree with him in that the interplay of past and present tenses helps generate this frame poem's nostalgic tone. The first four stanzas are written in the present tense: the friends "glide," their arms "are plied," and the sisters "pursue / The dream-child moving through a land / Of wonders wild and new" (emphasis added; Carroll 3). Madden calls this the "lyric present," as a "past event is rendered as though present" and "[s]imple physical gestures, in this case rowing, activate a timeless mental event" (366). In these stanzas, the present tense describes a past time, connecting these two temporal moments and creating a nostalgic tone by highlighting the speaker's pleasure in remembering the past. The fifth stanza, however, marks a shift: in the past tense, the speaker recounts how "the story drained / The wells of fancy dry" and how "faintly strove that weary one / To put the subject by" (emphasis added; Carroll 3). Yet these lines juxtapose with the last two lines of the stanza, "'The rest next time – 'It is next time!' / The happy voices cry," since both are in the present tense (emphasis added; 3). The dialogue uses the present tense, as the children would have used when speaking, but they are still described in the present even after they finish conversing. It seems contradictory to assert "[i]t is next time," since the adjective "next" refers to the future, while the verb "is" refers to the present; by combining these two temporal meanings, the speaker highlights the continuity of the feelings associated with memory. The sixth stanza is split in two equal parts by a dash; the first half uses the past tense to describe how the tale "grew" and how "[i]ts quaint events were hammered out" (emphasis added; 3), while the second half uses the historical present to express that "now the tale is done" and the friends "steer" home (4). This coexistence of past and present tenses within a single stanza mirrors the coexistence of past and present when experiencing the simultaneously pleasurable and sorrowful feeling of nostalgia. The verbs of the final stanza, "take" and "[l]ay," are in the imperative mood so the subject is omitted, and they do not have a marked tense. The subject can be assumed to be "Alice," whom the speaker addresses, but also a more general "you," as the speaker gives advice by asserting the importance of always keeping this "childish story" from the past in "Memory's mystic band" (4). Ending with the imperative mood generates a sense of timelessness, even though the poem describes the fleeting moments of a single Friday afternoon. In the starting frame poem of *Wonderland*, the progression from the present tense to the past tense to the historical present tense connects past and present time to create a nostalgic tone.

The lighthearted diction of “All in the golden afternoon” emphasizes the passage of ephemeral time and gives the poem’s nostalgic tone a lighthearted quality. Leah Mittelmeier Soule argues that “[t]hrough the same image is projected in each poem, all three reveal different reactions to the event and have different tones, which indicate Carroll’s . . . increasingly artificial recollection of the boating expedition, and his growing nostalgia for the event” (47). There are subtle differences in each frame passage’s tone. While all have “an undercurrent of a certain kind of nostalgia” (Morton 285), I argue that the difference between them arises from their diction and punctuation, which function as markers of tone. Mittelmeier Soule describes the first poem as a “simple recollection” (53) with a “light and playful” mood (50). The repetition of cheerful diction such as “leisurely,” “wanderings,” “dream-child,” “wonders,” “merry,” and “gentle” (Carroll 3-4), emphasizes the “pleasure” associated with the “deliciously dreamy feeling” of nostalgia (217). Descriptions of the changing weather and light conditions indicate the passage of time from “the golden afternoon” and its “dreamy weather” to “the setting sun” of the evening. Even though this “golden afternoon” may *seem* timeless as a result of the poem’s narrative tense, time does pass linearly, and the afternoon does change to evening. Lionel Morton maintains that the frame poems surround the *Alice* books with a “golden nostalgic haze” (288); this haziness resulting from the passages’ lighthearted diction is a key feature of their “dreamy feeling” (Carroll 217). By transitioning from the “golden” (Carroll 3) daylight to the fading light of the “setting sun” (4), the speaker reveals the “painfully fleeting” (Morton 287) nature of time, asserting that one must “[l]ay” (Carroll 4) stories gently inside memory to preserve them, lest they be forgotten.

The prose ending of *Wonderland* functions similarly to the frame poems, as variations in narrative tense create a nostalgic tone, connecting the past to the future and highlighting time’s fleeting nature. These prose descriptions are focalized through Alice’s sister; the first three paragraphs are in the past tense, while the last two combine the past tense with the conditional mood, first to contrast Alice’s dream to her sister’s “dull reality” (Carroll 96) and then to reminisce about a future which has not yet occurred. Auditory imagery connects Alice’s dream to her sister’s surrounding environment, blurring the lines between dream and reality. Past tense verbs such as “rustled,” “splashed,” “crashed,” together with nouns like “shriek,” “squeaking,” “choking,” and “sobs” (96), create a symphony of sounds which are placed in a series of correspondences of dream-sounds to real-sounds, expressed through the repetition of the modal verb “would.” Alice’s sister “knew” if she opened her eyes, “all would change to dull reality” (96). The repetition of the simple past in “she *knew*” (emphasis added; 96) expresses the certainty that if the condition of opening her eyes is fulfilled, the apodosis – the “consequent clause in a conditional sentence” (OED) – will take place. Madden highlights that reading the frame

poems provides the experience “of a transformation that erases the barrier between the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’” (366). The same can be said of *Wonderland*’s prose ending, as the barrier between the “real” and the “unreal” (366) becomes “mixed up” (Carroll 96) by alternating between the past tense to describe “Wonderland” and the conditional mood to describe her sister’s “dull reality” (96). Like the Liddell sisters’ state of half-belief in the first frame poem when they “half believe it true” (3), Alice’s sister “half believed herself in Wonderland” (96). This half-belief is much like the “golden nostalgic haze” (Morton 288) evoked by Morton. It creates a sense of mystery which is characteristic of dreams, but also of nostalgia, since memories often lack clarity, as they cannot be directly accessed but must be reconstructed in one’s mind. In the last paragraph, however, the conditional mood expresses future time. Alice’s sister reminisces about a future – an “after-time” (Carroll 97) – which has not yet taken place. She imagines how her sister “would . . . be” and “would feel” as a “grown woman” (97), and these reflections emphasize time’s fleeting nature by showing how Alice’s youth is a temporary state. Past and future are connected by time’s continuous advancement, making the present moment ever-changing, and thus, fleeting. *Wonderland*’s prose ending uses the past tense and the conditional mood to create a nostalgic tone, blurring the boundaries between past and future time and highlighting time’s ephemerality.

The diction of *Wonderland*’s prose ending continuously evokes the passage of time, while the repeated use of dashes creates a sense of simultaneity, emphasizing the ephemerality of time in a more melancholy way than the first poem. Throughout the passage, diction associated with time accentuates the narrator’s nostalgic tone, as they end the story using transitions like “[f]irst,” “[s]o,” and “[l]astly,” to express time’s passing and repeat expressions like “as,” “while,” and “once more” to show how past moments meld together in one’s memory (96). The punctuation of the third and fourth paragraphs of this five-paragraph ending sequence further adds to the sense of memory’s simultaneity. Dashes separate the events of Alice’s dream from the sounds of the “farm-yard” (96), creating two paragraphs which are each only one sentence long. These long sentence lengths mimic the unpunctuated structure of thought, making the passage’s tone even more nostalgic because it is so tightly focalized through Alice’s sister’s reflective thoughts. The novel’s final paragraph contains a series of contrasts between “little” and “grown,” “childhood” and “riper years,” and “after-time” and “long ago.” Gillian Beer calls bodily growth from childhood to adulthood “our fundamental and universal experience of somatic time” (42). By highlighting the difference in Alice’s current and future size, her sister evokes the sorrowful feeling that arises at the realization that “Alice is growing up whether she likes it or not, and whether Carroll likes it or not” (Morton 306). She repeatedly refers to “little Alice” and her “little sister,” always using this same adjective to describe her



sister's young age and small physical form. But this key part of Alice's childhood identity cannot endure indefinitely, which her sister indicates by stating that Alice will be a "grown woman" in the future. This passage strongly evokes Carroll's "pleasure very near to sadness" (Carroll 217) by using the same noun "pleasure" and contrasting children's "simple sorrows" with their "simple joys" (97). The "grown" Alice would "feel" (97) this "dreamy feeling" (217) by connecting her feeling of pleasure towards "other little children" with the "remembering" of her own childhood (97). Unlike the first poem, this passage begins with Alice's sister "watching the setting sun" (96) and ends with the memory of "happy summer days" (97). It reverses time's linearity, starting in the diegesis' present and concluding with the memory of a past which can never be brought back. This prose frame passage at the end of *Wonderland* concludes with a hint of melancholy associated with time's fleeting nature.

The starting frame poem of the *Looking-Glass* creates a nostalgic tone by alternating between the present, past, and future tenses, and expresses the irrecoverability of ephemeral moments which exist only in the speaker's memory. The speaker uses past tense verbs like "have not seen," "heard," "begun," "were glowing," and "served" to describe the boating expedition (101). The negation of "I have *not* seen thy sunny face, / *Nor* heard thy silver laughter" indicates that a change has taken place since the first retelling of this fateful summer day of 1862 (emphasis added; 101). The speaker describes

A tale *begun* in other days,  
When summer suns *were glowing* –  
A simple chime, that *served* to time  
The rhythm of our rowing – (emphasis added; 101).

The use of the past continuous "*were glowing*" in conjunction with the phrase "in other days" reveals the limited duration of the past event of the "summer suns" glowing which characterizes both *Wonderland* frame passages. The speaker separates the past, when the tale was first told, from the present, when he is about to tell another story. This separation implies that the boating expedition is an ephemeral moment in the past to which he cannot return. In the present tense, however, the speaker expresses general truths about memory and time, stating that the past's "echoes *live* in memory yet," that "[w]e *are* but older children, dear, / Who *fret* to find our bedtime near," and that "the shadow of a sigh / *May tremble* through the story" (emphasis added; 101). These general truths come from a wise older speaker, a sort of friendly uncle figure who sits by "the firelight's ruddy glow" to tell a "fairy-tale" (101). By using this avuncular voice, the speaker's prophecy-like assertions take on a wiser meaning. The speaker then uses the future tense to proph-

esize the pleasant nature of his "fairy-tale," stating that "thou *wilt not fail* / To listen to my fairy-tale," "[t]he magic words *shall hold* thee fast: / Thou *shalt not heed* the raving blast," and the "shadow of a sigh ... *shall not touch* / ... The pleasance of our fairy-tale" (emphasis added; 101). The pronoun "thou," along with its future tense forms "wilt" and "shalt," was already uncommon in everyday speech in Carroll's time, so its usage here is both poetic and makes the poem read like a prophecy. The intermingling of past, present, and future tenses connects the past boating expedition to the present moment of speaking to the future time when he will continue Alice's tale. The poem's nostalgic tone allows the speaker to lament the separation between past and future, which are connected chronologically in time, but are also disconnected since time cannot be reversed.

In "Child of the pure unclouded brow," the mix of positive and negative diction emphasizes anxieties about the passage of time, making its nostalgic tone more urgent. The speaker evokes the two frame passages of *Wonderland* by referring to the "summer suns" (101) of the "golden afternoon" (3) and by using the same phrase, "happy summer days" (97, 101) which concludes the first *Alice* book. Madden argues that this repeated phrase allows the speaker to "reinvok[e] the appropriate mood by referring to the earlier story" (368). The "mood" he refers to is the nostalgic tone which is present in all four frame passages. I agree with Madden that reusing the phrase "happy summer days" allows for a continuation of the prose frame passage's nostalgic tone – it is even put in quotation marks to indicate that it alludes to *Wonderland*'s ending. Madden also asserts that "the major change" in this poem in comparison to its "*Wonderland* counterpart" derives "from the speaker's more intense time consciousness" (368) which "makes the speaker's presence more directly felt and the poem's imperatives more urgent" (369). As I have argued, the variation in narrative tense and the presence of the voice of a friendly uncle figure contribute to this consciousness of time's passing. There are key changes in this poem's diction which make it feel "more urgent" (369) than the frame passages of *Wonderland*. As a result of the change in season, the speaker contrasts the chaotic outside weather of "the frost, the blinding snow, / The storm-wind's moody madness" with the comforting interior space housing "the firelight's ruddy glow, / And childhood's nest of gladness" (Carroll 101). The poem functions as an escape from the cold outdoors, rather than a lighthearted lingering in the summer sun. It begins with the assertion that "time be fleet" and ends with the conclusion that "though the shadow of a sigh / May tremble through the story ... It shall not touch ... The pleasance of our fairy-tale" (101). The noun "pleasance" is a reference to Alice Liddell, whose middle name was Pleasance, but also means a "source of pleasure" (*OED*) and bears a striking resemblance to the noun "pleasure." This frame poem sets up the coming narrative as a nostalgic "fairy-tale" which will be at once a source of pleasure but may also contain "the shadow of a sigh"

(Carroll 101) – the sorrowful part of nostalgia’s “pleasure very near to sadness” (217).

The ending frame poem of the *Looking-Glass*, “A boat beneath a sunny sky,” uses past and present narrative tenses, as well as punctuation and allusive diction, to create a nostalgic tone, emphasizing the negative and long-lasting effects of time’s ephemerality. The third stanza of the poem is significant in terms of tense, as it represents a turn, or a sudden change in mood:

Long *has* *paled* that sunny sky:  
Echoes *fade* and memories *die*:  
Autumn frosts *have slain* July. (emphasis added; 208)

In contrast to the first two lighthearted stanzas, written in the present-tense and evocative of the cheerful mood of *Wonderland*’s frame poem, this stanza contains negatively connotated verbs in both the past and present tenses. The recurring image of the “sunny sky” now “*has* *paled*,” and unlike in the previous poem, the change in season is no longer a simple reality of passing time, but the “Autumn frosts” have actually “*slain* July.” This verb’s connotation of both violence and malicious intention adds an eerie and more ominous aspect to the poem’s nostalgic tone. Moreover, the assertion that “[e]choes *fade* and memories *die*” is in the present tense, sandwiched between two lines containing past tense verbs. If this line had been written in the past tense as “[e]choes *fade[d]* and memories *die[d]*,” it would have applied specifically to the echoes and memories of that 1862 boating expedition. But in the present tense, the assertion has a more general application, and the speaker laments the fact that *all* echoes and memories of the past “*fade*” and “*die*” over time. In the poem’s last stanza, the speaker states that children, lying in a “Wonderland,” are

Ever drifting *down the stream* –  
Lingering in the golden gleam –  
*Life, what is it but a dream?* (emphasis added; 208).

The adjective “golden” returns to the first line of *Wonderland*’s “All in the golden afternoon” and the “merry crew” (3) of the boating expedition, thus reviving the nostalgia with which the first novel begins. The phrases “*down the stream*” and “[*l*]ife . . . is . . . *but a dream*” are direct quotations from the nursery rhyme “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” published in 1852 (Pentreath). The key element of this allusion, though, is how it has been altered from its original form. Instead of actively rowing “*down the stream*,” the progressive verb forms “drifting” and “lingering” connote a continuous, aimless motion

which makes this day feel like it takes place outside of time. The first two lines each end with a dash, and the last with a question mark. The dashes are reminiscent of those used in the prose ending of *Wonderland*, adding to the simultaneity of memory, in which children can “[e]ver” remain children and the sky will “[e]ver” stay sunny. The terminal question mark creates uncertainty regarding the nature of time – whether it is linear like in reality or contains “wayward noncausal sequences” (Beer 31) as in dreams. Therefore, this final frame poem creates a nostalgic tone in order to stress the negative and long-lasting consequences of time’s ephemerality.

Like photographs, these poems present the frustrating pleasure of remembering without being able to go back in time. Mittelmeier Soule compares the frame poems of the *Alice* books to “Victorian portrait photographs of children” (47) which represent “echoes of memories because they the [*sic*] exhibit nostalgic happiness of childhood; however, they also remind viewers of the brevity of childhood” (53). She argues that these poems’ depiction of the boating expedition goes from a “realistic image” (49) to an “overexposed” (53) image to an “out-of-focus recollection” (56). Beer also argues that the frame poems can be compared to photographs, but she actually makes an opposite argument. She contends that “[p]hotographs seize lived moments and *still* them; the *Alice* books in contrast release childhood from single time, allowing it to play anew” (42). Thus, Beer’s argument is that the *Alice* books function in opposition to the role of photographs by liberating childhood from time rather than immobilizing it in a “static image” (Mittelmeier Soule 49). I agree with Mittelmeier Soule, though, in that these poems immobilize “echoes of memories” by depicting both the “nostalgic happiness” and “brevity” of childhood (53). While the poems do generate a sense of timelessness, especially in their use of the present tense, they ultimately “*still*” (Beer 42) the speaker’s memory of the boating expedition, an ephemeral day in the past which is immortalized in time like a photograph. Other than the frame passages, the text of the *Alice* books rarely exhibits this nostalgic tone. Morton argues that the White Knight’s song in the *Looking-Glass* is “an exceptional intrusion” which “is given a retrospective frame, almost unique in Alice’s stories” because his song “evokes a nostalgia which reveals his shared anxiety about memory” (288). In this passage, Alice “took in” the scene “like a picture” (Carroll 186); since this moment becomes such a nostalgic one for Alice, it functions similarly to the frame poems – that is, by immobilizing memory like a photograph. Its use of dashes is very like that of *Wonderland*’s prose ending, and it references key images like “the setting sun” (186), repeatedly used in relation to the boating expedition. Memory becomes progressively distorted in the frame passages since it cannot be relived in the present – like the moments depicted in photographs.

Thus, in the frame passages of both *Alice* books, variations in narrative tense create a nostalgic tone to emphasize the ephemeral nature of time. Diction and punctuation convey subtle differences in the tone of each passage and reveal how one's memory changes over time. The first poem is lighthearted and creates a nostalgic tone by connecting the past to the present through changes in narrative tense. *Wonderland's* prose ending highlights time's fleeting nature by using the conditional mood to blur the boundaries between past and future time, while its dashes and temporal diction make the passage more melancholy than the previous one. The first frame poem of the *Looking-Glass* alternates between past, present, and future to express the past's irrecoverability and mixes positive and negative diction to evoke anxieties about the passage of time, while the final frame poem emphasizes the negative, long-lasting effects of time's ephemerality, immortalizing past moments like a photograph. This "dreamy feeling" of nostalgia that is "a pleasure very near to sadness" (217) underlies not only these passages, but also the narratives they frame, which are tinged by this conflict between happiness and its incessant proximity to sorrow.

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## '[E]xcited [F]ancies' (649): Figurative Language and the Distortion of Reality in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

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*Editor's Note: This essay was submitted in January 2021 for the BA7 seminar 'Literary Counter-Voices'.*

In *Criticism and Fiction*, William Dean Howells expresses his hope that authors and artists can depict a shared sense of reality that he asserts is 'known to us all' (2). Yet Howells's notion of a shared reality does not consider that social factors such as ability, gender, class, or race can dramatically alter a person's perception of reality. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's evolving use of figurative language in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' challenges Howells's limiting definition of reality by not only depicting the narrator's departure from a shared, objective reality, but also by constructing an alternate reality where the imaginary becomes literal. As stated, I will focus on Gilman's use of figurative language, which is defined as 'a departure from what users of the language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect' ('Analysis of Poetry', 6). Within the scope of figurative language, I will particularly focus on how Gilman's use of similes, anthropomorphism, and synaesthesia distorts and reconstructs reality. Similes are defined as '[a]n explicit comparison between two different things, actions, or feelings, using the words "as" or "like"' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*) and anthropomorphism is defined as the '[a]ttribution of human characteristics to things that are not human' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*). Gilman repeatedly uses similes in combination with anthropomorphizations at the beginning of the narrative to indicate the narrator's initial critical distance in relation to the wallpaper and her ability to differentiate between fiction and reality. This distinction between fiction and reality is highly valued by her husband - described as 'practical in the extreme' (647) - and by her brother, who are both physicians and both believe in the shared, able-bodied perception of reality that Howells evokes. The narrator's 'excited fancies' (649) do not conform to the shared, objective sense of reality her husband and brother share, so they prescribe the rest cure, which prohibits her from writing and con-

finer her to a room decorated with wallpaper she dislikes. As the narrator's mental state declines during her imposed inactivity, she loses her critical distance, which is paralleled by a decrease in the number of similes and an increase in her use of anthropomorphism and synesthesia. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines synaesthesia as a 'blending or confusion of different kinds of sense-impression, in which one type of sensation is referred to in terms more appropriate to another'. The use of anthropomorphism and synaesthesia shows how the narrator crosses from the rational, shared reality that her husband wishes for her and into a reality where the imagined is depicted as real. In the final phase of her mental breakdown, figurative language becomes entirely literal. The narrator uses literal language, which is defined in opposition to figurative language as '[v]erbal expressions which mean, or are at least intended to mean, 'what they say', and which are purely denotative, in contrast to figurative language' (*A Dictionary of Media and Communication*). Gilman's use of literal language shows that the narrator not only believes what she sees in her imagination to be real, but fully adopts her visions as an alternate reality by identifying with the woman she sees in the wallpaper.

In the opening descriptions of the wallpaper - namely diary entries one to four (on pages 647 to 652) - the narrator employs anthropomorphisms that are, crucially, combined with similes and therefore offer a sense of critical distance. The use of anthropomorphism alone suggests a distortion of reality, since it blurs the boundaries between human and object; however, the narrator's use of similes - indicated by the words 'as' and 'like' - clearly shows that the narrator understands the difference between reality and fiction in these opening diary entries. For example, when the narrator describes how '[t]his paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!' (649), the words 'as if' demonstrate that the narrator understands that the wallpaper does not literally possess the ability to know its influence. The clear referents in the narrator's similes also demonstrate that she understands her anthropomorphisms as similes that serve to draw comparisons rather than as factual descriptions of reality. When she states that 'the pattern lolls like a broken neck' (649), the referent to which she applies the simile is 'the pattern' and the use of 'like' indicates that she is making a comparison between 'the pattern' and the 'neck'. In short, the narrator's early anthropomorphisms of the wallpaper blur the boundaries between human and object, but their combination with similes clearly marks them as fictional according to the narrator.

The narrator's combined use of similes and anthropomorphisms not only demonstrates a critical distance, but also reveals a conscious rejection of the rest cure and of her husband and brother's shared, able-bodied and patriarchal reality. A defining component of the rest cure was the prohibition of work. The narrator states multiple times that she has to hide her writing from her sister-in-law and from her husband, who 'hates to have [her]

write a word' (649). The narrator describes John as a person who is 'practical in the extreme' and who 'scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures' (647). Therefore, it is logical that John dismisses the narrator's 'imaginative power and habit of story-making' (649) as 'excited fancies' (649), since these characteristics that the narrator possesses challenge the sense of reality that he shares with the narrator's brother, who also views her as simply 'hysterical' (648). The narrator feels that she has a different sense of reality from the rest of the world, which is demonstrated when she states that the rest cure has made her '[b]etter in body perhaps' (652) but, implicitly, not in her mind. Her husband refuses to believe that she has a different sense of reality and focuses instead on her physical recovery: '[y]ou are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better' (652). Essentially, the narrator's husband not only rejects her alternative view of reality, but denies its existence. The act of writing then becomes not simply a rejection of the rest cure, but of her husband's able-bodied and body-centred sense of reality. The early descriptions of the wallpaper are characterised by extremely vivid anthropomorphisms, which allow the narrator to exercise her 'imaginative power' (649) and construct a version of reality that is the very opposite of 'practical' (647). The narrator's anthropomorphisms of the wallpaper not only blur the boundaries between human and object, but often use very vivid and emotionally charged language such as 'destroy' (648) and 'vicious' (649) as the narrator writes about the expression in an object that would usually be classified as inanimate: 'I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before' (650). These early vivid anthropomorphisms offer an 'excited' (649) perspective on the wallpaper that rejects John's practical sense of reality in favour of a more subjective, figurative view of the world. What is crucial in these early descriptions is that, while the narrator is describing an alternate view of reality, she also maintains critical distance through combining anthropomorphisms with similes. The narrator can still differentiate between the fictional and the literal, and her deliberate employment of vivid figurative language to describe an inanimate object shows a conscious rejection of the notion that reality must be literal, practical, and shared.

While the narrator's use of figurative language begins by demonstrating critical distance and acts as a deliberate way for the narrator to explore an alternate view of reality, a gradual decline in the combination of anthropomorphisms and similes in favour of anthropomorphisms without similes signals her loss of reality. The evolution of figurative language used to describe the woman in the wallpaper maps this loss of reality. In the second diary entry, the woman appears to the narrator for the first time as a figure: 'I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about' (650). This description shows that the narrator does not yet see the figure as an independent, living woman, and although the description includes an anthropomorphization without

a simile, the use of the words 'seems to' maintains critical distance. The narrator clearly understands that this figure is part of her interpretation of the wallpaper, since she mentions that she sees this figure 'in the places' on the paper 'where it isn't faded' (650). When the narrator states that 'it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern' (652) in the fourth entry, the figure in the wallpaper has anthropomorphized into a woman, but the use of simile - indicated by the word 'like' - maintains a sense of reality. The depictions of the woman with critical distance and similes stand in sharp contrast to the narrator's later depictions, which lack similes and in turn lack critical distance. From diary entry six (653) onwards, the woman becomes real to the narrator. In entry five, she still questions if the woman is real and 'if the paper did move' (652), but by entry six she states that the woman 'is as plain as can be' and that she is 'quite sure it is a woman' (653). This shift in her perception marks a turning point in the text, after which the anthropomorphization of the paper becomes a real woman to the narrator. For example, the narrator states in her ninth entry that '[s]ometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one' (654). The narrator no longer questions if the woman exists, but questions the nature of the woman's existence, which in turn presupposes that she is real. She begins to see the woman as a real person who 'gets out in the daytime' (654), signalling a complete distortion of reality that does not just apply to her view of the wallpaper, but extends to the outside environment as she sees the 'creeping' woman 'in that long shaded lane... in those dark grape arbors... [and] on that long road' (654).

The narrator's new sense of a reality in which she accepts the anthropomorphization of the wallpaper as a real woman is further demonstrated by her evolving use of similes, which she begins to apply to the woman. While the narrator previously used the technique of similes in relation to the wallpaper, she begins to use them in relation to the woman instead, such as when the narrator states that the woman is 'creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind' (655) when she sees the woman exploring the grounds of the mansion during the daytime. Previously in the narrative, the speaker applied similes to entities that were concretely real to her, like the wallpaper and its pattern, to express what these real objects evoked within her imagination. The fact that the narrator later applies similes to the woman indicates that the woman is now as real to her as the wallpaper was at the beginning of the narrative. In other words, the figurative has become literal.

While there is an overall trend in the narrative to move from combined anthropomorphisms and similes towards stand-alone anthropomorphisms, the narrator's developing use of these types of figurative language is not entirely linear: anthropomorphisms also exist early in the narrative, but they deliberately rather than unconsciously distort real-

ity. The narrator writes how she sees eyes in the wallpaper that 'crawl' '[u]p and down' (650), she describes the 'sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin' (648) and states that the curves in the pattern 'suddenly commit suicide' (648). These examples are all anthropomorphisms, since they attribute human characteristics to the inanimate wallpaper, but they are without similes, as she does not make an explicit comparison or use the words 'as' or 'like'. This use of stand-alone anthropomorphisms blurs the real and the imagined by bringing the wallpaper to life; however, the context makes it clear that the narrator still has a grasp on reality. For example, after her description of the eyes that 'crawl' (650), the narrator acknowledges that the wallpaper is 'an inanimate thing' (650). Before the narrator describes the pattern as sinning and its curves as committing suicide (648), the narrator contextualises these anthropomorphisms by stating that 'I never saw a worse paper in my life' (648), which clearly indicates that she uses anthropomorphism within the context of her creative, written interpretation of the pattern. Therefore, these early anthropomorphisms differ from the later anthropomorphic depictions of the woman in the wallpaper because they are contextualised in objective reality and used deliberately by the narrator as part of her writing style, whereas the use of anthropomorphism later in the narrative is unconscious, since the narrator assumes that the woman in the wallpaper is part of reality rather than an imaginative construction.

The narrator's grasp of reality in the later diary entries is further challenged by Gilman's use of synaesthesia, which in turn highlights the narrator's interpretation of reality as different to a shared reality by blurring the boundaries between the senses. The narrator demonstrates a confusion of senses in her treatment of the wallpaper's colour, which signals her distorted perception of reality and undermines the notion of a shared, able-bodied reality. In entry eight, the narrator describes how the smell of the paper 'creeps all over the house' (654) and she attributes the source of this smell specifically to the colour of the paper, rather than to the paper itself: '[t]he only thing I can think of that it is like the color of the paper! A yellow smell' (654). The narrator's description of the wallpaper's colour as a 'yellow smell' (654) contrasts with her previous treatment of the colour yellow in entry one, where she describes it as 'repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow' (649). This earlier description does not confound the senses since it only focuses on the wallpaper's physical appearance. Through synaesthesia, Gilman evokes the existence of differing realities by depicting a mentally ill narrator who not only sees the world differently from the other characters but who also has a different sensory perception of it.

While Gilman's evolving use of anthropomorphisms, similes, and synaesthesia challeng-

es and distorts reality on a local level, an overall shift from figurative to literal language signals the construction of an alternate reality in which the imaginary becomes real to the narrator. The narrator loses her ability to use figurative language consciously in her capacity as a writer and becomes consumed by her interpretations of the wallpaper as they become her new reality. Entry ten marks a pivotal moment in the construction of this new reality: the woman 'gets out in the daytime' and starts 'creeping' (654) around outside the narrator's window. The woman's actions are not only described using literal rather than figurative language, but the fact that she has left the confines of the wallpaper and entered the outside world demonstrates that the narrator no longer views the woman simply as a shape within the wallpaper, but as an independent being. The final entry is narrated entirely using literal language as the narrator's ability to differentiate between herself and the imaginary woman breaks down and she adopts the identity of the woman as her own. The narrator describes how she peels the wallpaper to help the woman escape: 'I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled' (655). The use of literal language assumes that the woman is real and is participating in these actions with the narrator, while the fact that the narrator and the woman interchange the actions of shaking and pulling in a chiasmus foreshadows the eventual merging of their identities. When the narrator states that 'there are so many of those creeping women... I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?' (656), she fully adopts the identity of the woman. The use of literal language shows that the narrator not only believes the 'creeping women' to be real but believes that she too came out of the wallpaper. The narrator begins to write as if she were the woman, mentioning that she will 'have to get back behind the pattern' (656). The use of literal language here shows that the narrator believes that she can enter the wallpaper. The narrator not only views her imaginings as real but adopts them as a new reality that she fully embodies.

Figurative language distorts objective reality on multiple levels in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper'. The combination of anthropomorphisms and similes simultaneously blur the boundaries between human and object while offering critical distance, and therefore demonstrate the narrator's deliberate distortion of reality through creative writing. Synaesthesia and stand-alone anthropomorphisms evidence the unintentional distortion of the narrator's sense of reality through confusion between senses and between the real and imagined. A shift from figurative to literal language undermines objective reality completely by constructing an alternate sense of reality in which the imaginary becomes so real that the narrator adopts it as her identity. Fundamentally, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' challenges Howells's notion of a shared reality by demonstrating through figurative language how an individual's personal experience – in this case of mental illness and the rest cure – can dramatically alter their sense of reality and can even construct an entirely

new reality.

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## “Historic, side-long, implicating eyes”: Looking Back at Michael Field’s Aes- theticist Lyric Poems

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*Editor’s Note: This essay is excerpted from an MA3 assignment submitted to Professor Simon Swift in the context of his autumn 2019 seminar “Victorian Poetry.” Michael Field is the pen-name of the poets and lovers Katherine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913).*

### Co-creating the half-secret language of art and love: “A Girl” and “It was deep April, and the morn”

In *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, Marianne and Héloïse are depicted as not only the co-creators of Héloïse’s portrait, but also as the co-creators of a love language which only they—and the audience, who is privy to their narrative—can understand. As a prelude to their first love scene, Héloïse asks Marianne: “Vous pensez que tous les amants ont le sentiment d’inventer quelque chose?” (1:23:40-1:23:43); the answer is that what these two lovers invent is a secret language which intimately connects Sapphic love and art.<sup>1</sup> Near the end of the retrospective narrative of the film, on the eve of their parting, Héloïse tells Marianne that she wants an image of her to remember her by. Marianne asks Héloïse for a book so that she can draw a portrait of herself in it. She asks Héloïse to pick a page number and Héloïse chooses page 28 (1:43:40-1:44:17). Back in the frame narrative, years later, Marianne is at an art exhibition at the Salon du Louvre. She suddenly sees Héloïse again—as a portrait. Marianne’s eyes explore the painting and focus on one striking detail: Héloïse’s figure is holding a book in her hand and her index finger keeps it slightly open on page 28 (1:53:57). At that moment, we, along with Marianne, understand the secret language spoken by the portrait, because we have been privy to—and have participated in—the creation of this language by closely and attentively observing the characters’ narrative. I suggest that this dynamic of collaboration between art and love, between two female lovers who are also co-creators of art, between the language of

<sup>1</sup>“Do you think that all lovers feel that they are inventing something?”

the artwork and its readers/beholders, is enacted in Michael Field’s poems “A Girl” and “It was deep April, and the morn.”

As Ana Parejo Vadillo underlines, Michael Field’s poetics is intimately connected to Bradley and Cooper’s domestic space and to their real-life romantic relationship, as they were “married in art, lovers living and writing in fellowship” (2011, 1), living by the Paterian aestheticist principle of “an erotic coupling of decorative art and desire” (2011, 8). They themselves claimed that “life, between equals, requires an Art” (Parejo Vadillo, 2011, 10) and had an openly-secret romantic language which they had created for each other in their letters and in their joint journal *Works and Days* (Saville, 539): Bradley was “Michael,” Cooper was “Henry” or “Field,” and the artistic-romantic union of the two was, of course, “Michael Field.” As Marion Thain demonstrates, this half-secret language is encoded in their poetry in general, but especially in the poems of *Underneath the Bough*, whose aesthetics is overtly erotic and, less overtly, dual and collaborative. Thain describes this aesthetics as an *ars erotica*, a concept which will prove useful for my discussion:

In erotic art the knowledge gained through pleasure ‘must remain secret’ . . . the truths of sex are only potent if they remain hidden within a poetry of reserve . . . The women’s dual authorship is, without doubt, itself a kind of erotic secret, the true meaning of which can only be learned through the reader’s initiation, through close reading, into the poetry. (96)

Michael Field’s Sapphic erotic aesthetics in the poems of *Underneath the Bough* is indeed half-concealed, revealed in the spaces of the not-directly-visible, unexpectedly appearing within a context of seemingly familiar conventions of love poetry—on the condition that readers observe the poems closely and tactfully. The poetry of *Underneath the Bough*, moreover, queers the expectations of lyric poetry as theorized by John Stuart Mill: “[f]or Bradley and Cooper, then, the lyric is not ‘overheard’, in line with Mill’s famous definition, because it is often directly addressed from one woman to the other” (Thain, 114). Furthermore, I suggest that the poems also converse with their readers and—as did the eyes of the figures in the portraits—implicate them in their secret language. In Michael Field’s poetry, we do not eavesdrop on, nor do we look voyeuristically at, the erotic exchange; rather, we are invited to participate in it and to observe closely what is half-concealed: that the lyric ‘I’ is in fact double and allows for an egalitarian erotic-artistic dialogue between the poet and her muse, who are both “poet and muse” (Thain, 106).

This queering of the poet-muse dialectic is dramatized in the poem “A Girl” both in its

content and form. As was the case with the lyric portraits of *Sight and Song*, the poem begins with a seemingly familiar *topos* that attracts the eye: an erotic love sonnet that describes the aestheticized appearance of the female muse using commonplace naturalistic metaphors and similes. However, upon a closer look, aside from the fourteen lines, the poem deviates from the traditional sonnet forms with a peculiar rhyme scheme (AABBBBCBCDDEED) and a paradoxically regular-yet-variety meter: it is iambic all throughout—safe for the last line, which is an irregular trochaic dimeter with a hypermetrical foot—with one mono-meter (1), trimeters (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11), two pentameters (3, 8), one tetrameter (13) and one dimeter (12). Content-wise, the motif of the poet (whose love is unrequited) addressing a persuasion poem to his female muse is subverted: Michael Field's dual authorship and Sapphic romantic relationship shines through when the volta in line 10 and the conclusion of the poem reveal that the lyric 'I'—which readers are invited to assume may also be female—co-writes texts with “a girl,” whose soul is “knit” (10) with that of the speaker. Moreover, the speaker does not try to convince her muse to love her—their souls are already knit—nor does she urge her to write with her; on the contrary, she leaves “a page half-writ” (11), giving her muse and co-poet the choice to complete the “work begun” (12). What is even more striking is that the poem does not stage an overheard address from the 'I' to an absent, muted 'you,' but instead dramatizes the 'I'—which is almost effaced as to leave room for the poetic presence of the girl—overtly telling readers about her lover and co-writer. We are made privy to the speaker and the girl's intimate relationship, which entangles erotic love and artistic creation.

The eroticism of the poem is neither hidden nor obvious, but rather half-concealed; it is visible, but it remains somewhat secretive, just like the soul of the girl is “a deep-wave pearl / Dim, lucent of all lovely mysteries” (2-3). The visual strategy which was used explicitly in *Sight and Song* is repeated implicitly here: lines 4 to 10 subtly paint an idealized portrait of the girl's face, which is eroticized with commonplace metaphors and similes, such as “flowered” (4), “soft as seas” (5), “the lips apart / Like aspen-leaflets trembling in the breeze” (7-8) — a gesture which entices the eye and, like in “La Gioconda,” abruptly blocks the erotic image from sight in line 10, which directs the attention to the collaborative writing of the 'I' and the girl. As Angela Leighton points out, Michael Field's strategy of blocking the potency of sight, or directing it elsewhere, serves to efface the traditional subject-object—that is the poet-muse—dichotomy so that “something else, invisible and secret, can flash between” (11). What flashes between the visual lines of “A Girl,” its “lovely mysteries” (3), I would suggest, can hardly be seen but can be heard and felt. The common-place imagery of the sea—“deep-wave pearl” (2) and “seas” (5)—and the wind—“breeze” (8) and “tempestuous” (9)—to evoke eroticism comes to life when

paying attention to the meter, the sounds, and the rhymes of the poem: the fluctuating meters of the lines—with their repetitive iambic pattern but of varying durations—joint with the repeated /i:z/ rhyme of “mysteries” (3), “ease” (4), “seas” (5), “trees” (6), and “breeze” (8), mimic the sound and the feel of the flux of waves in the wind—as well as the sound of moaning and the sensation of sexual pleasure, hence vividly materializing the eroticism of the poem.

The poem ends with an intimate interweaving—the souls of the 'I' and her co-author and lover are “knit” (10)—of writing and eroticism when the speaker claims that “[t]he work begun / Will be to heaven's conception done, / If she come to it” (12-14). In these lines, “work” can mean both text and sex; “conception” can mean—with amusing irony for a poem co-written by two women in a homosexual relationship—*artistic creation* and *sexual reproduction*; and “[i]f she come to it” can be understood both as *if she decides to complete the text* and *if she has an orgasm*. The result of the artistic and erotic collaboration of the two writers and lovers is then an orgasmic production of beautiful and pleasurable poetry. This poem itself is a work of poetic *jouissance* co-produced by Bradley and Cooper, a *jouissance* that readers can also “come to” by reading the poem aloud to feel its wave-like rhythm, thereby breathing along with it, which allows them to corporeally experience the poet-lovers' desire along with them. It is through this intimate and active collaboration with the artwork that readers can perceive and sense its secret language of art and love, which is half-concealed at the heart of the poem, much like the word *art* is half-concealed in the “heart” (9) of the girl.

The intimate bond between love and art is consecrated in the poem “It was deep April, and the morn,” which may have been one of the first poems that Bradley and Cooper wrote together in 1878 (Saville, 539) and yet feels as if it could have been the last poem that they ever wrote together; it is, after all, the last poem of the second edition of *Underneath the Bough* (Thain, 122-123). This poem seems to epitomize Michael Field's aestheticism: it stages a poetic space, abstracted from any social scene, a paradoxically utopian mythological hell where the poetic avatars of Bradley and Cooper can forget about the world “pressing sore” (3), and where they indeed have the possibility to be “Poets and lovers evermore” (6). As in “A Girl,” the poem makes readers privy to a deeply intimate moment: a secret pact between what we can identify as two incestuous female lovers and aesthetes who seek to escape the pressure of the world's judging looks and to be secluded within an aesthetic space of their own making.

However, paradoxically, the world created in the poem is far from being solitary and melancholic: once more, its aesthetics is one of collaboration between poetry and love,



and the voice of the poem is not the traditional single lyric ‘I’ but instead an implicitly dual ‘we,’ created by the bond between “My Love and I” (4). Moreover, the space of the poem does not stand in complete isolation from the world; it is shared with its readers, who are invited to witness the narrative of the oath that the two lovers swore on the altar of love and poetry. Furthermore, as Marion Thain and Julia Saville both underline, “the poem works against . . . disenfranchisement by encoding its complaint within references to a literary history” (Thain, 93) and by forming an “alliance to a community of poets” (Saville, 539). Indeed, the poem invokes the most celebrated of the English poets, Shakespeare—himself a master of half-concealed homoeroticism in his sonnets—whose birthday is the occasion of the pledge and of the poem. The speaker also calls on Apollo, the Ancient Greek god of poetry. Thain also explains that the final line of the poem—“Indifferent to heaven and hell”—may be a reference to Baudelaire’s poem “Lesbos” (1857)—hence creating a tie with Sappho, Bradley and Cooper’s poetic idol and subject matter in their volume *Long Ago* (1889) (Thain, 93). The poem, then, connects the two poets and lovers to a glorious poetic tradition and to a community of queer poets, aesthetes, and lovers—a community which includes readers, as the poem is meant to be read by lovers of poetry. The subversive narrative power of the poem is that it transforms an expectedly tragic fate—descending into hell for being queer, that is, for being aesthetes and incestuous homoerotic lovers—into a mythological utopia, where “hell” (15) can rhyme with “dwell” (16). This is a poetic space where queer aesthetes and lovers of poetry—“those fast-locked souls . . . [w]ho never from Apollo fled” (11-12)—can form a timeless and placeless community of “Poets and lovers” (6) who subtly resist the social world and its “judgement” (10).

The line “The world was on us, pressing sore” (3) echoes Pater’s assertion in the conclusion to *The Renaissance* that “experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action” (86-87). The strategy of resistance to the pressure of reality through abstraction enacted in the poem is what Lee Edelman perceives as the political power of queerness: “the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it” (18). Such resistance is employed by Michael Field to relieve the female figures of their poems of the pressures of the subject-object and artist-muse dialectics, and to create instead a queer aesthetics wherein there is only art in a dialogue with lovers of poetry.

Marion Thain designates negativity and absence as hallmarks of 1890s Decadent poetry, and notes their conspicuous absence in the poetry of Michael Field (15): as she argues, Bradley and Cooper “write not from a mythology of loss, but from a construction of

eternal presence” (113). Although the dynamic I have located in Michael Field’s poems is often one of willing abstraction into the aesthetic and of half-concealment, I agree that their poetry deviates from the traits common in the works of their contemporaries. Indeed, the aesthetic world offered by “It was deep April”—to invoke Baudelaire’s likely implicit presence in the last line—is the world of the *Idéal* without the Spleen: the lovers of poetry spend “no hour among the dead” (13); they eternally “laugh and dream” (7), they “sing” (8) their devotion to poetry and to each other, “[h]eartening the timid souls” (9) of readers to encourage them to join the cult of poetry and love by breathing life into the poem as they read it.

### Conclusion

In the final sequence of *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, years after the end of their love story, Marianne sees Héloïse one last time across an opera concert room—but Héloïse does not see her. This time, she is not aware of being looked at and she does not look back. The concerto begins. The piece is the final movement of Vivaldi’s “L’estate” (1725), which Marianne had played for Héloïse on the harpsichord years before. After the introductory notes, the camera leaves Marianne’s face, along with her subjective narration, and the focus shifts to Héloïse. The camera zooms in and settles on her face until the very end of the film, so that viewers can closely observe her features. As the music plays and grows more and more intense, we can see Héloïse’s face become animated by a blend of sorrow and joy and we can see her breathing become deeper—and, because we understand the narrative significance of the music piece, we feel her intense emotions along with her (1:55:37-1:58:17). This the climactic last musical moment out of three in an otherwise music-less film, which entirely depends on the sounds of the waves crashing, the fire cracking, and the characters’ breathing to generate its rhythm. The music reanimates Héloïse’s face and breathes life into her as it vividly revives the corporeal memory of her romantic and artistic collaboration with Marianne, which is ever present and lively in artform.

As I argued in this essay, this reanimation is exactly what Bradley and Cooper, as Michael Field, subtly perform in their aestheticist lyric poems: through the synthesis of painting and music, of image and sound, of sight and song, they breathe life into the disrespectfully deadened, idealized, or eroticized female figures of paintings and poems. As I have shown, this poetic performance draws on their own romantic and artistic collaboration, and it requires the active collaboration of readers, who are invited to closely observe, not so much the imagistic content, but the material form of the poems to perceive the narrative that is half-concealed within them: a narrative of willful abstraction

and artistic agency, of egalitarian and tactful dialogism between artworks, models, artists, beholders, and readers which results in a shared aesthetic jouissance. In Michael Field's poetic portraits, readers/beholders are not voyeurs or eavesdroppers because the poems are aware of being read, observed, and listened to; they—like Mona Lisa's implicating eyes—invite readers to collaborate in the making of their half-secret language of art and pleasure. In Michael Field's poetry, readers do not find themselves in a state of solipsistic dreaming which dissolves the liveliness of the object of the gaze by trying to capture it, nor do they find themselves captives of the aesthetics of the artwork—countering the late-nineteenth century anxiety surrounding “the sense of perception as ‘catching’ or ‘taking captive’” (Crary, 3). Their poetic aesthetics is a *via media* which demands that the gazing subject efface themselves to enter in a collaborative dialogue with the artwork, as to reveal, not what the artwork is to them, as Pater suggests, but what the artwork's form contains—what I called a thought of form—and then let subjective imagination interpret its poetry.

Michael Field's quasi-manifesto, as expressed in the preface to *Sight and Song*, is a queer one, as I explained, among the dominant masculine strands of aestheticism of the later Victorian period, such as Ruskin's moralistic purification of sight and insistence on the truthfulness of representation, Pater's subjectively impressionistic perception of aesthetic objects, and Wilde's ironic irresolution of the issues of art's function and the relevance of the author, the critic, and the beholder in artistic representation. As Marion Thain asserts, Michael Field's poetry does not attempt to resolve the paradoxes of aestheticism, neither does it “collapse into dichotomy and irresolution” (204). According to her, the aesthetic paradox that Michael Field's poetry best navigates is that of attempting to represent a beautiful or pleasurable impression in artform, while acknowledging that impressions are, in essence, fleeting and that they are only lively in the moment of experience: “[t]his impossible desire to combine the diachronic with the synchronic is at the heart of Michael Field's aesthetic, and achieving that combination, or the illusion of its achievement, is Bradley and Cooper's greatest aesthetic triumph” (Thain, 16).

This triumph, I would like to suggest, is their poetic response to what Jonathan Crary describes as the late-nineteenth century paradigm of “perception [as] fundamentally characterized by experiences of fragmentation, shock, and dispersal” (1), which rendered “vision faulty, unreliable, and, it was sometimes argued, arbitrary” (12). It is precisely this paradigm of visual fragmentation and unreliable subjectivity that Pater addresses in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, when he asserts that “[t]o regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought” (86), a troubling epistemological regime which may have been a

motivation for 1890s aesthetes' and Decadents' “obsessive search for some ‘unity of being’ . . . a straining need for wholeness, for some ontological unity in what threatened to be a spiritually fragmented and impoverished world” (Snodgrass, 327). Michael Field's aesthetics in *Sight and Song* and *Underneath the Bough* offers a coping solution to the issue of fragmentation of fluctuation: a synthetic and collaborative approach which blends the fixed spatiality of painting and the temporal liveliness of music, sight and hearing, thought and desire, subject and object, poet and muse, and artwork and beholder, as to allow all the entities involved in the act of perception to obtain an “impression clearer, less passive, more intimate” (Field, 504). Bradley and Cooper's aestheticist poetry is a pact between them—the poets and lovers—between them and their readers, and between their readers and art. This is not the Faustian pact between life and art in the name of individualistic hedonism dramatized in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; this is a sustainable pact between love and art, an aesthetics of art for love's sake, which most fully realizes Pater's assertion in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*:

[W]e have an interval and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among “the children of this world,” in art and song . . . Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. (Pater, 88)

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## Six – *The Musical*: A Histo-remix

EMILY SMITH

A word to the wise: this piece will contain spoilers. Of course, in discussing a musical which is based upon such a notorious historical narrative, I really take no blame if you don't already know the ending.

One of the earliest history homework tasks which I can remember was to memorise a song entitled 'The Wives of Henry VIII' from the BBC television series *Horrible Histories*. Its content is, well, just what you'd expect from what it says on the tin. A faux-bearded Ben Willibond, dressed as the infamous King, reels off his wife in order, expanding slightly (albeit in a very-sanitised form) upon the rhyme 'Divorced, Beheaded, Died, Divorced, Beheaded, Survived'.<sup>1</sup>

The musical *Six* begins upon the very same lines – but this time each wife speaks her own word.

*Six – The Musical*, to give its full name, has the very same mission as *Horrible Histories* did in 2009: to teach history through song. Except, this time, it recounts 'A story that you think you've heard before' in a novel way – as they promise, 'History's about to get overthrown' ('Ex-Wives').<sup>2</sup> In this 'histo-remix', each wife is allowed the space of a song (or two) to recount their tale. First-up is Catherine of Aragon, who tells us of the reasons that there was 'No Way' she would agree to a divorce; Anne Boleyn admits that she's 'Sorry, not sorry'; Jane Seymour insists that she is 'unshakeable', with a 'love [...] set in stone' for the King. Moving onto the rhyme's second half, Anne of Cleves recounts a traumatic encounter with the portrait painter Holbein before informing us of the 'acres and acres' and 'palace that I happen to own' as a result of the alimony she received following her divorce; Catherine Howard, 'the ten amongst these threes', recounts her tumultuous love affairs and their tragic culmination; finally, Catherine Parr insists that 'I don't need your love' – addressing not King Henry, but rather Sir Thomas Seymour and the relationship with him that her royal engagement forced her to conclude.<sup>3</sup>

1 Incidentally, I would wager that this series is the best British TV series since *Blackadder*. For the unacquainted, search 'Queenian Rhapsody' on YouTube, and I wager that no further persuasion will be needed.

2 All lyrics available at <https://www.allmusicals.com/lyrics/six/> [last accessed 13 February 2022].

3 The spellings of the Catherine's (or Katherine's, or indeed Kateryn's) names varies: for the sake

I'll open with my honest verdict, or perhaps statement of bias: I thought that *Six* was excellent. Upbeat, uplifting, and informative – and inventive to boot. It's not the first artistic endeavour to centre the life of Tudor women (Phillipa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) springs to mind, as does the recent and remarkable *Hamnet* (2020) by Maggie Farrell).<sup>4</sup> Arguably, it's not even the first attempt to tell the stories of Henry VIII's six wives from their own perspective; a series entitled 'The Six Wives of Henry VIII' (BBC, 1989) takes a similar tack. However, the decision to have only females on-stage – a principle pursued right down to the drummer – shifts the on-stage dynamic significantly. Although all the songs are addressed to the absent Henry, and heads often tilted towards where he ostensibly "presides" over the show, he speaks not a word.

Voiceless and absent – although much discussed – the males in the world of *Six* are firmly *backgrounded*. Although the musical may not pass the reverse Bechdel test, it's at least a start. Likewise, the musical begins with the premise of a competition, and concludes by the women instead deciding to collaborate – a predictable, but nonetheless sweet, conclusion, with #womensupportingwomen written all over it.

Of course, from a historical perspective, *Six* has its problems. Perhaps its most notable gaffe is the treatment of Anne Boleyn. Late for her own starring role – whilst her fellow wives hype up her solo number, Anne procrastinates by scrolling through TikTok and snapping selfies as she stands on the outskirts of the stage – Anne Boleyn is depicted as an immature, selfish child who accidentally begins an affair with the King without any foresight as to its consequences. In fairness, Henry VIII did have other mistresses with very little consequence – including Anne's own sister, Mary Boleyn, who even produced the king a son (Weir, 133-156). Yet to represent Anne as naïve (or worse still, actively ignorant) misses the mark quite considerably.

Consider the testimony provided by Lancelot de Carles who knew of Anne from her childhood at the French court:

Elle savoit bien chanter et danser  
Et ses propos saignement agenser,

of simplicity, I have utilised the common Anglicisation 'Catherine' for all three wives bearing this name.

4 Likewise, much scholarship and public-facing historical work has focused upon the lives of the six wives; e.g. Amy License, *The Six Wives & Many Mistresses of Henry VIII: The Women's Stories* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014); Josephine Wilkinson, *Mary Boleyn* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009); see also the bibliography to this piece.

Sonner du lut et autres instrumens [...]
   
S'elle estroit belle et de taille elegante,
   
Estoit des yeulx encor[es] plus attirante,
   
Lesquels savoit bien conduyre a propos [...]
   
D'honesteté et grâces acomplye[s] [...]

'De la royne d'Angleterre' ['Poème sur la mort d'Anne Boleyn'], 1536 (in Ascoli, 155-70, 231-273)

Agreeing with this positive report, many historians have recognised Anne as 'highly accomplished, intelligent, and witty' (Weir, 153). Whilst evidence from their love affair places Anne 'off-stage' – only letters from the King survive – her 'dominant' position nonetheless remains clear, indicating that 'Henry [...] could neither command this woman nor her love' (Starkey, 278). Tellingly, David Starkey grants her tale over half of his 756-page book on the Six Wives – with Catherine of Aragon receiving less space in spite of her twenty-four years of marriage to Henry, as compared to Anne's three.

Most notorious is, of course, Anne's resistance to King Henry's advances, greatly contributing to – albeit not being the sole factor in – the establishment of a separate Church of England. This story is, of course, one which would be challenging to fit in a book, let alone this short piece: safe to say, then, that "Tried to elope / But the Pope said "Nope! [...] Henry got a promotion / Caused a commotion / Set in motion the C of E" ('Don't Lose Ur Head') just doesn't quite cover it. In particular, for a show so invested in foregrounding the roles of females in history, the extent to which Anne's autonomy is disregarded here is astounding. It is worth noting that Anne was 'only the second commoner to be elevated to the consort's throne in England' (Weir, 145) – achieving this feat under no easy circumstances. As recently as 2011, the marriage of a commoner to Prince William, second in the line of succession, caused a media fervour – and the then-Catherine Middleton is a privately-educated St Andrew's graduate of not-inconsiderable wealth. One can only imagine the uproar faced by Anne Boleyn, who had to contend with the English public's admiration of Catherine of Aragon and religious upheaval in addition to class snobbery.

Of course, Anne did not exist in a vacuum. Even if wishing to stick with a solely personal story, it is surprising that *Six* does not pay much heed to her aforementioned sister's affair with her husband, nor the son which he provided – or the hardly forgettable daughter which she did. Anne's solo song in *Six* does briefly allude to the social, and especially familial, pressures under which Anne was placed: 'my daddy said / "You should try and get ahead!"' acknowledges the court dynamic which enabled and encouraged Anne's 'advancement' (*Don't Lose Ur Head*). That said, all other autonomy is stripped from

Anne. Her education, religious principles, and stubborn resistance is displaced for 'L-O-L, Say "Oh well!"' – hardly a respectable substitute for one of British history's most controversial women.

Interestingly, the lone Jane's song has the opposite problem. Jane appears very much to have a choice in the matter of her marriage, insisting '*I took your hand*' ('Heart of Stone', emphasis mine). Indeed, the entire ballad insists on her 'heart of stone' and its 'unbreakable', 'unshakable' love. Whilst Jane may have been the love of Henry's life, based upon his decision to be buried alongside her (although, given that he had divorced Catherine of Aragon, and beheaded both Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, he really didn't have as much choice as one would imagine).<sup>5</sup> Yet, are we so sure that the reverse is true? Jane Seymour may be remembered for being submissive, but I can put it no better than David Starkey when he asks:

[W]as Jane really quite such a doormat as at first appears? Or was there strategy in her submissiveness? Did she choose the extravagant humility of her motto 'Bound to obey and serve' because it represented her view of her position? Or because it would tickle Henry's patriarchal vision? (Starkey, 587)

In the absence of evidence, we simply do not know. The treatment of Jane is indicative of a key issue which bears upon the trend for the recovery of female lives in contemporary historiography: what are the risks of attributing to these forgotten or voiceless women a voice which is not their own?

Another convenient omission is the disastrous nature with which Catherine Parr's touted love concluded. Although marrying Thomas Seymour after Henry VIII's death, it was no happy ever after: she died less than a year later due to childbirth complications (after, heartbreakingly, naming her daughter for her stepdaughter Mary). During her marriage, too, some rather disturbing episodes which were reported featuring her, Thomas, and the future Queen Elizabeth further muddy the waters (see Fraser, 494). A more positive point which *Six* omits is that, importantly, her funeral was – assertively – conducted entirely in English, marking a milestone for the rise of the vernacular (Weir, 561).

<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that Henry commissioned a portrait in his later life, whilst married to Catherine Parr, 'to symbolise the glory of the Tudor dynasty'; it featured 'Queen Jane Seymour painted life-sized and the dominating female figure', without reference to his present wife (Fraser, 467-68).

For such a consciously counterfactual historical narrative, accusations of misrepresentations are hardly important (although, admittedly, the turning point wherein the women declare that they are now re-writing their history comes after the women have each recounted their stories, which risks being slightly misleading). Yet, at the same time, there are moments which capture historical events, or at least scholarly reconstructions of them, with great nuance. For instance, Anne's song does do well in incorporating an element of public opinion into her appearance, via the ensemble's commentary upon her unfolding tale – a dimension often absent in court-centric narratives. Catherine Parr's final outburst, which pleads the audience to 'Remember that I was a writer / I wrote books and songs and meditations [...] I even got a woman to paint my picture' ('I Don't Need Your Love'), neatly fits into the vogue for the 'recovery' of female voices in modern historiography.<sup>6</sup>

In some regards, *Six* portrays the lives of the women in a rather dystopic fashion: the musical, after all, is founded on the premise of the six wives fighting to establish who was the worst treated of them all. This dystopic impulse is perhaps most apparent in Catherine Howard's chilling solo piece. Although beginning with her self-confident, seductive provocations addressed to Henry Manno and Francis Dereham – "playtime's over" – she quickly modulates from initiator to victim: when she recounts her marriage to Henry VIII, her fellow Wives chant the same line back to her whilst flanking her on every side. Such gravity, set against the levity of Anne of Cleves' claim to be 'Queen of the Castle' ('Get Down'), is all the more disturbing as such an anomaly. It's probably for the best that Catherine Howard was the fifth wife: her suffering is a cloud which hangs low over the sixth wife's song.

However, the conclusion of the musical turns this all around. In a perfectly predictable plot twist (it is, after all, a musical – think *The Sound of Music*, *Wicked*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*), all of the women re-imagine their lives. Catherine of Aragon exiles herself to a nunnery – albeit one akin to that of *Sister Act*. Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr all live out their dreams of a musical career; Anne of Cleves does the same, except in her hometown of Dusseldorf. Jane Seymour survives childbirth to give Henry more children, forming a band 'called the Royalling Stones' ('Six'). All six of them abandon their competition, and instead decide to collabo-

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the 'Recovery Hub for American Women Writers' project (further information available at <https://recoveryhub.siue.edu/>); the web resource 'Feminist Recovery Practices & Digital Pedagogies' produced by Ula Klein (<https://english.illinoisstate.edu/digitaldefoe/teaching/klein.html>). Mary Jacobus helpfully lays out the earlier criticism underpinning this more recent work in her essay 'Is There a Woman in This Text?', *New Literary History*, 14.1 (1982), 117-141.

rate. A neat conclusion, they explain that they have 'laid down an album' together ('Six'). This album is, of course, the soundtrack we've been hearing all along.

Consequently, everybody dances and goes home happy. Yet this narrative arc of restoration and rehabilitation, feel-good as it may be in the moment, has deeper effects than its surface shimmer. In the cold light of (the next) day, too-bright theatre lights finally faded for your vision, you can't help but be brought back down to earth.

What does the 'utopic' ending of *Six* actually achieve? As Georgia Fulton notes, the world of Thomas More's *Utopia* is far from a perfect idyll (as Georgia Fulton so beautifully summarises in pp. 4-6 of this issue of Noted). More's work was published in Latin in 1516 and in English in 1551. It is, then, roughly contemporary with the lives of *Six*'s women – with the oldest, Catherine of Aragon, born in 1485, and the last alive, Anne of Cleves, dying in 1557 – and certainly part of the intellectual milieu of the time. I dare not reflect on whether More would approve of *Six – The Musical*. However, I would dare suggest that a comparable tension runs through them both.

Daniel Carey suggests that '[n]arratives of utopia thrive by exposing home itself as the locus of conflict, and the alternative to home as a place of resolution and harmony, realizing an element of wish-fulfilment while censoring those held responsible for abridging it' (Carey, 226). The 'home' which *Six* works to expose is not so much the sixteenth century, but rather the assumptions about history in which we dwell today.

Although *Six* may not say so in as many words, the assumptions, constructions, and articulations of historical narratives which surround us have a real influence today. How we perceive the past actively shapes the possibilities which we possess for thinking about the present and the future. Like all animals, humans learn from experience – or less optimistically, from our mistakes. Of course, such a statement sounds trite when it comes from someone who is so firmly invested in historical research. Yet does any work, from the hard sciences to the plastic arts, *not* constitute itself through relations with that which came before it?

The final song demands that we recognise that these women are 'one of a kind / No category' ('Six'). But, of course, we cannot do so: we think with categories, with classes, and with schema. Even the encore concludes the show with a return to the Divorced, Beheaded, Died rhyme, placing the women back into their normative historical framework even as it ostensibly resists such reduction. Yet where *Six – The Musical* excels is in making its audience recognise the artificial, arbitrary, and inherited nature of these historical constructions which we have inherited, and when it dares us to think

otherwise.

As earlier suggested, the key danger in attempting to recover female voices in history is ascribing sentiments to a person which were not their own. This risk must not be understated: past conditions imposed silence upon women, and we should not impose our own voices over them either. Work to reclaim women's voices is vitally important, but it is equally vital that it be sensitive – and highlight, with honesty, what we cannot know as well as what we can recover. (Such gaps, made visible, are often very telling in themselves.)

I do doubt, however, that the neon lights, electric guitars, and besequined attire of the *Six* wives could be taken for verisimilitude.<sup>7</sup> We all know that the lives of Henry VIII's wives were miserable: divorced, beheaded, died, etc communicates such far more succinctly. *Six – The Musical* – in all its self-consciously anachronistic, blatantly feminist, and commandingly catchy glory – does not succeed in rewriting history. But although it may not reliably recuperate silenced voices from the past, *Six* truly succeeds where it confronts its audience with what they have learned in *his*story, and asks them why.

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<sup>7</sup> A crucial point which I have neither the space nor the expertise to address here is the determination of the creators of *Six*, Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow, that casting be colour-conscious. On this practice, see Tran (n.p.).

## *Sapphotopia*

MEGAN ZEITZ

I often dream of a far-away place,  
Which I wish were near – Oh, if only here –  
In a distant, uncertain, timeless time,  
Which I wish were soon, or, ideally, now –

On a secluded island, lost at sea,  
Dwelled a commune of women and beings  
Who were gender-free; a society  
Which thrived on love, freedom, and equity.

They toiled in joyful solidarity  
And worked for wages made of aid and wards;  
For the wellness of the community,  
They traded kindness, care, and well-wrought words.

They spent their days writing and telling tales;  
Stroking skin and lyre strings – divine air;  
Making honey and love in sunny vales;  
Weaving flower crowns and each other's hair.

Can you see them, too? The ones with violets  
In their lap; ladies on fire burning bright,  
Chanting odes, and swearing oaths; silhouettes  
Dancing, embracing, out of wicked sight.

– How I long to join their congenial clime,  
To live with them by their most wholesome vow.  
Perhaps somewhere – nowhere? – someday, sometime;  
Or never, no time – still, I hope, somehow.

## *Sleeping Beauty*

VALÉIE FIVAZ





# VARIA

## AELLA Quiz

*Not every student of the English department is the same. Therefore, the AELLA came up with its very own sorting ceremony... of sorts.*

*Circle the option which sounds most like you for each question...*

*Where would you rather live?*

♣ In a far away, ruined manor in the middle of the moors, with a couple of tormented ghosts in the cellar for roommates.

♣ In a hole in the ground (not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, nor a dry, bare, sandy hole, but a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort).

♣ In London, circa 1600: you can hear the persistent racket of the bustling streets down below as you scribble down yet another play on cheap parchment.

♥ On the road: you only need shelter when the weather is too harsh. You might find it in a passing tavern—for you are on a quest, and home is where glory awaits.

*What is your greatest weakness?*

♣ It would seem that you have a tendency to see ghosts and take on their multiple requests for revenge – and procrastinate on this very task.

♣ Your manners, your conceit, your pride, your selfish disdain of the feelings of others are sure to convince Elizabeth that you would be the last person in the world whom she could ever be prevailed on to marry.

♣ There was that one time the lady of the lake told you to become king of the Britons. You listened. You should never have listened. Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords are no basis for a system of government. You should probably start thinking things through.

♣ You went to save a princess from a dragon and got distracted by its hoard of treasures.

You slew the dragon, took its treasure and went back home. Only then did you realise: you forgot the princess. You're kind of a very forgetful knight in shining armour.

*How do you handle deadlines?*

♣ You put on your boots, go for a long walk in the wilderness and forget about everything. You find strength in the sublime and come back to your essay with a new understanding of your subject.

♣ The same way you handle a snarling, venomous beast! You tackle it head-on, sword at the ready, and smile proudly at the reaping of your efforts. Glory is yours.

♥ Friends find you in the nearest tavern, sweating over your essay. They sit down and put their brains at work. Together, you come out of this struggle stronger.

♣ You yell at your books, and they yell back at you. You pace dramatically around the room until the inspiration hits you in full force. You sit down. You yell some more. Somehow... it works.

*How do you like your coffee?*

♣ As dark and sour as the evil creatures you slay on a daily basis.

♣ There is a very specific ratio behind your coffee making routine: 10% coffee, 60% milk, and 30% of sugar. Is it really coffee?

♣ You only drink tea. Why anyone would drink anything else is beyond your understanding.

♥ You don't care – as long as you get your

needed shot of energy, you wouldn't mind it if it turned out to be a watery, coffee-tasting kind of beverage. It's only coffee, for Chaucer's sake.

*What's your ideal date?*

♥ Waiting endless days and nights at the top of a tower for your knight in shiny armour; they're traveling across the country on a *charrette d'infamie* to steal you away from your very rude captors. You really long for the inherent romanticism of this specific lack of agency.

👑 Saving the world a couple of times with your significant other sounds pretty good, to be perfectly honest. You both really enjoy being plagued with the star-crossed lovers trope, preventing you to snog to your heart's content until the bad guy has been slayed in the third act.

✂ Barely brushing hands in the middle of a busy ball room, heart racing as you try to escape the vigilant eye of your chaperones in order to exchange thinly-veiled insults (that turn out to be, unsurprisingly, confessions of eternal love).

👑 Going to the theatre and finding out that the story unfolding on stage is a very obvious metaphor for your very own love story. Who knew tales of murder and royal conspiracies could be so relatable?

*If you had to get a tattoo, what would it be?*

✂ The silhouette of a mountain; birds flying over a vertigo-inducing cliff; a stylized depiction of a landscape; a few words of meaningful poetry.

👑 A mighty, legendary sword with prophetic words in a forgotten script inscribed on the blade.

♥ An old, dusty castle; a grimoire with a battered, yet breath-taking cover; a beautifully illuminated page with complex calligraphy only

you can decipher.

👑 A stylised skull in a background of faded flowers; the ethereal shape of faery creatures; a beautiful, yet sinister crown.

*How would you describe your style?*

👑 A comfy, oversized jumper with obscure references written on it; a battered jean vest; cute beanies – You don't really care, as long as it's comfortable enough for an entire day in the library. You really have a soft spot for beanies, though.

♥ You hide your nerdiness behind impeccable style, yet some hints of it can be found in the details: a few meaningful pins on your bag, the bright colours of your oversized scarf, the grunginess of your leather boots...

✂ It's all about the aesthetic, really. Whatever you wear, it's as if you were made to be pinned on a Pinterest board. You look out of place, but in a meaningful, beautiful way: your clothes tell a story, and refer to a mood, a place or a specific point in time. You really enjoy flowers too.

👑 You are everything grunge, as if you'd jumped straight out of a TV show from the nineties. Most of your wardrobe is made of black clothes, you enjoy coats a lot, and you like to infuse your t-shirts with a few references to your favourite works of fiction. The nerd in you is out for everyone to see.

*What's your favourite study spot?*

✂ At home, where you are the most at peace, with a purring and annoying cat spread out over your books.

👑 In the library – you can find everything in the library. Also: it's quiet. It's easier to pretend you're a productive person there.

♥ In a coffee-shop; it makes for cute and inspiring Instagram posts, and you can get as

much coffee as you need to power through your essays.

👑 You could study anywhere, really. Beggars can't be choosers: you've learned your lesson on the road on your many adventures.

*Which classic line of poetry is your favourite?*

✂ “Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine, / Y clad in mightie armes and siluer shielde, / Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine, / The cruell markes of many' a bloody felde; / Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield.”

Now tally how many of each symbol you have circled. The one with the highest count indicates the house where you belong...

👑 Webolkien: The Webolkiens gather where the forest is at its deepest and listen to the eerie feeling of dark forces at work. They dream of legendary battles, dusty journeys across mythical lands and do not ever fear the unsanitary conditions of mediaeval fantasy world settings as they search for the unholy artefacts that will finally bring peace to the world. Webolkiens sometimes get so distracted by a good story they forget to drink, eat or even socialise with anyone for a very unhealthy amount of time. Their mind is sharp but their vivid dreaming sometimes makes them lose focus on their responsibilities. They long for a life where they have all the time in world to lose themselves in yet another heroic story.

✂ Chaucermore: Chaucermore is where the nerds, the misunderstood and the mischievous gather. They might seem a little weird to their brethren, mainly because of their incredibly weird and subtle sense of humour – but they like it that way; just like their patron Geoffrey Chaucer (seriously, what's with all the butt jokes in *The Canterbury Tales*!). They also pride themselves upon being able to read the weird mix between Norman French and Germanic that is Middle English. They like how, whenever they read it out loud, it sounds as if they are performing some kind of mystical ritual. Anyway, you'll have guessed by now, the people at Chaucermore are weirdos, but they are also incredibly resourceful, and they do not hesitate to help others (as long as they share a story in return).

👑 Skullakespeare: 'Tis the time to acknowledge your superiors in dramatics and diction. The Skullakespeares are loud and never afraid to show it! They gather in cafés, parks or wherever it is that people tolerate them, and yell at each other over the interpretation of yet another iambic pentameter. Verses, rhymes and soliloquies are their jam, but masterful farting jokes disguised as convoluted rhetorical truths is what their hearts truly beat for. Watch as they fight over who did it best - Shakespeare or Marlowe - and grab your popcorn, because the winner has yet to make themselves known.

♥ Ballausten: ...What is this?  
...Could it be....

... Love? Eternal love? Sisterly love? Unrequited love? Tragical love? Supernatural love? Problematic love? Controversial love? Ambiguous-yet-you-can't-deny-the-subtext love? Toxic love? Locking-your-wife-in-the-cellar love? Proud, yet prejudiced love? Who knows – maybe all at once. What is for sure is that the Ballaustens are always ready for a little bit of swooning over brooding protagonists and ingenue heroines. You'll find them standing at the edge of a cliff, taking in the full glory of the sublime, their bonnet in hand as their skirts and/or capes flow in the cold wind of the North Sea.

# A Gentle Grilling...

WITH PROF. LUKAS ERNE

*Prof. Lukas Erne is one of the professors here at the University of Geneva, where he teaches modules in the domain of Modern English Literature (which, slightly confusingly, is often called Early Modern English Literature in the Anglosphere). His extensive publication history – publishing no less than five books and editing many more besides – would take far too much space to here recount, as would his contributions to the study of English Literature in Switzerland. To indulge our readers with some recent hits, though: The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Textual Studies, published by Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, came out in 2021, and the second volume of Early Modern German Shakespeare (containing the plays ‘Titus Andronicus’ and ‘The Taming of the Shrew’: ‘Tito Andronico’ and ‘Kunst über alle Künste, ein böß Weib gut zu machen’) was published in January 2022. The latter is available Open Access online via Bloomsbury Collections, should it catch your eye!*

*When did you choose your academic speciality – and why?*

Good question. The decision unfolded over a number of years. I studied French, German, and English at the University of Lausanne. Still quite early in my studies, I decided to do a year abroad at the University of Exeter. That year was a transformative experience: for one year, I breathed the English language and English literature. I also loved English student life, which involves so much more than just studying: life on campus, study trips, sports, etc. Back in Lausanne, I thoroughly enjoyed life in the English Department, both academically and socially. I joined a student association and contributed to a student newspaper; I went on study trips and co-founded an English Department theatre company (still in existence today, ‘The Sun and Moon Company’); I played in two Shakespeare productions, a wild adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Along with this came the decision to specialize in early modern English literature, especially drama, and especially Shakespeare. After my studies in Lausanne, I was awarded a Berrow Scholarship, which allowed me to go to Oxford for three years and work there on my doctorate, which further strengthened my resolve. There was no way back.

*If you could make the world read any book, which one would it be, and why?*

This one is easy: the Bible. Why? I’m a practicing Christian, more exactly a Catholic, so I suppose that explains it. But even over and above the question of religious belief, the Bible contains so much that is central to the world we have inherited and that has made us who we are, and it has shaped our cultural practices, our history, our institutions, our intellectual traditions, and our literature in so many ways that it is definitely recommended reading – especially Genesis, the Psalms, and the New Testament.

*What’s your favourite French word or expression?*

Oh, there are so many which are fabulous. Words: *ras-le-bol*, *pantoufflard*, *nombrilisme*, *pissenlit*; expressions: *avoir le cafard*, *noyer le poisson*, *poser un lapin*, *chanter comme une casserole*. And the winner is... If I have to choose one, I’ll go for ‘*pantoufflard*’, perhaps because it goes quite well with the world of Covid, in which most of us have been rather more ‘*pantoufflard*’ than we used to be.

*What piece of advice, wisdom, or encouragement would you give to your first-year past self?*

It’s a privilege to be a student, so make good use of your time. Try to enjoy your studies – enjoyment is key to the learning process. And don’t think of that learning process as something narrow: your student years are a unique opportunity for personal growth. So be open to what you don’t know, but also learn to choose wisely. Gosh, that’s actually several pieces of advice, and they make me sound even older than I am.

*What is your most marked personal trait?*

Clearly my addiction to chocolate – just ask my colleagues in the department.  
*Editor’s note: This statement is confirmed.*

*Musical theatre: art form or earache?*

Definitely art form. I have taught *West Side Story*, the classic Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins 1961 film version, as an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, and I look forward to teaching the new Steven Spielberg version, too, when I get a chance. There is much worth studying in them. I loved musicals when I was a student, including *My Fair Lady*, *Hair*, and *The Rocky Horror Show*. Not an earache at all!

*As you know, the theme of this Noted edition is 'Adaptopia.' Looking at your field of expertise, what do you find most interesting about the relationship between Early Modern English plays and their contemporary or later adaptations?*

The early modern plays that get adapted most frequently are the best-known plays by Shakespeare, and what strikes me about them is their sheer adaptability. That may sound a bit confusing, so let me explain. It's very difficult to decide where the plays stand and what they advocate. They seem to leave a big interpretative black hole at their centre. And so adapters across the ages have been only too happy to step into that black hole and make the plays say what they think they should say. That's what I mean by adaptability.

Compare someone like Molière, who satirizes, well, many things: medicine, avarice, misanthropy, and so on. Compared to a Shakespeare play, it is often easy to tell where a Molière play stands, and so it is harder to adapt it. But Shakespeare's plays are perfect springboards for adaptations. So what I find most interesting about the relationship between Shakespeare's plays and their adaptations is how the adaptations step into those black holes and fill them in many, many different ways.

*You worked on Early Modern German translations of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and 'Romeo and Juliet'. Are these unambiguous translations, or more independent forms of adaptation?*

Yes, we have edited our English retranslations of these plays for Arden Shakespeare. We actually just published a second volume, which came out in February 2022, with English retranslations of early modern German versions of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. These plays are recognizably versions of Shakespeare's plays as we know them, but they are much more than mere translations – they are in some ways very inventive adaptations. They give us access to versions of Shakespeare's plays by early modern itinerant players, who started out in England and went to and stayed on the Continent, especially what we now call Germany, where they learnt the local language and were joined by German actors. The players and their spectators did not think of these plays as being by 'Shakespeare', this great, famous playwright – in fact most of them had no doubt never heard of Shakespeare. But they did realize that these are wonderful plays which could be translated for and adapted to new contexts. The results are not only immensely entertaining, but they are also often instructive, particularly when they give answers to questions about these plays which critics have often raised.

*Who is your favourite writer, within or outside Early Modern English literature?*

You might as well ask me to name my favourite child! I love them all – how could I choose between them? More seriously, I would find it hard to choose a single one. I do love Shakespeare – that's perhaps no great surprise – but I also love Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and James Joyce. No one makes me laugh as much as (early) Dickens does. I don't think I have met a keener observer of social interactions than Austen. There is a moral seriousness to the prose of Eliot that I find outstanding (though I recognize that this may make her sound rather boring to many students). And Joyce amazes me in terms of what he can do with language. Also, I think there is no greater poem in the English language than *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, which I have just had the joy and privilege to teach in a BA seminar. As you can tell, I'm wedded to the canon!

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Contributions, comments, and suggestions are very welcome, and can be sent to [noted-lettres@unige.ch](mailto:noted-lettres@unige.ch)

Thank you for reading *Noted!*

